



FOOD & DRINK | SLOW FOOD FAST

The Key to the Most Succulent Zucchini

In this recipe from Brooklyn chef Nasim Alikhani, a quick two-step cooking process renders the main ingredient remarkably meaty for a meatless dish. A stuffing of feta, onion, almond and basil is creamy, crunchy, fresh and absolutely delicious



SURE FIRE A two-step cooking process of pan-frying plus a quick stint under the broiler renders the zucchini succulent and meaty. PHOTO: TED + CHELSEA CAVANAUGH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, FOOD STYLING BY SARAH KARNASIEWICZ, PROP STYLING BY CARLA GONZALEZ-HART

By Kitty Greenwald

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THE CHEF: NASIM ALIKHANI



ILLUSTRATION: JOE MCKENDRY

Her Restaurant: Sofreh, in Brooklyn, N.Y.

What She's Known For: Honoring the

FAST DOESN'T always mean simple. For instance, this quick-cooking broiled zucchini, the second Slow Food Fast recipe from chef Nasim Alikhani, delivers a sensational study in contrasts with a stuffing of turmeric-spiced onions, sour grapes, slivered almonds, crumbled feta and fresh basil.

Long before Ms. Alikhani opened Sofreh, in Brooklyn, she was the sort of home cook who would drive three hours for an ingredient. For this recipe, which calls for pan-frying plus a few minutes under the broiler, she insists on medium-size zucchini, fresh and heavy for their size, which hold their shape through cooking, turning sweet and meaty as the feta on top browns.

Sour grapes are the only potentially hard-to-find element. You can order them online from Kalustyan's (foodsfnations.com), and their

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culinary traditions she grew up with in Iran. Tending to every detail in her restaurant to ensure a gracious welcome.

pickled snap will reward the effort. But if you can't wait for delivery and your local Middle Eastern market doesn't carry them, you can skip the grapes and simply add more lemon juice for that crucial sour note.

"Our food, Persian food, has multiple layers," said the chef. "Whether it's cooked quick or slow, it has lots of dimension. And it's never boring."

TOTAL TIME: 30 minutes **SERVES:** 4

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for drizzling

1 large onion, diced

4 teaspoons turmeric

2 teaspoons cumin powder

1 teaspoon chile flakes

½ cup sour grapes, roughly chopped (optional)

½ cup lemon juice

½ cup water

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

4 medium zucchini, halved lengthwise

1 cup crumbled feta

½ cup toasted sliced almonds

¼ cup torn Thai basil leaves

1. Set broiler to high. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a medium sauté pan over medium-low heat. Add onions and sauté until translucent and soft, about 4 minutes. Add turmeric and sauté until fragrant, 1-2 minutes more. Add cumin, chile flakes and sour grapes, if using, and sauté until fragrant, 1-2 minutes more. Pour in lemon juice and water. Cover and let mixture simmer until thickened, about 5 minutes. Uncover and cook until mixture looks jammy, about 3 minutes more. Add splashes of water if onions begin to scorch or look dry.

2. In a large skillet, heat ½ cup olive oil over medium heat. Salt and pepper zucchini on both sides. Working in batches to avoid crowding pan, lay zucchini into hot oil, cut-sides down, and fry until golden brown, 2-4 minutes. Flip and fry until reverse sides are golden, about 2 minutes more. Set zucchini aside on a sheet pan.

3. Spread onion mixture over fried zucchini halves and top with feta. Broil zucchini until cheese browns in spots, about 2 minutes. Garnish with toasted almonds, a drizzle of olive oil and basil.

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