

Updating a Community Cookbook Part 2

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As you may have seen in the [April issue of our newsletter](#), I am in the midst of updating a community cookbook created by my mother, Coula Kootsikis, and her good friends and co-editors Bobbie Soupos and Amelia Ladas. They edited the first edition of *Grecian Festival – By the Sea* by collecting recipes from members of the Long Beach Greek Orthodox community. It has been a lot of fun cooking the recipes, talking to friends about them, and checking them for accuracy. I remember enjoying wonderful dinners outside on our patio with my grandma, great-aunt, parents, sisters, Uncle Nick and his family, and our extended family of Greek friends eating many of the foods found in the community cookbook.

Many years ago, I asked my mother if she could put the recipes she was collating for her church cookbook to be sold as a fundraiser at the yearly Greek Festival. She agreed by putting other people's names on her recipes, but I knew which ones were hers. Fundraising is most often the reason for developing a community cookbook, dating back to 1864 in the United States when Maria J. Moss published and sold *A Poetical Cookbook* to raise money to help subsidize medical costs for the Union soldiers.

Almost all households have a community cookbook passed down by family members, as I do with *Grecian Festival*. When I first began using it many years ago, I tried making my mother's "famous" butter tea cookies (kourambiethes; see the April article for the recipe and the full story), but realized after talking to my mother that they were off because the recipe was actually for two dozen cookies, not the four dozen stated on the page.

That's when I knew I would like to edit this local treasure of family recipes graciously donated by the church ladies: no more mistakes, typos, or notes that were lost in translation.

A team of church members and a few friends and relatives are pulling together to check out each recipe for accuracy and duplications. A blog site, Longbeachcookbook.blogspot.com, has been developed to share and organize tested recipes along with videos and pictures. I invite you to check out the site and make comments. My immediate team includes Sophia and Ashlyn, 13-year-old neighbors and sous chefs extraordinaire, and a neighborhood of gracious taste-testers. Thank you to Lia Kakkaris, Philoptochos president, and Dr. Andrea Hall, who helped format the cookbook and found out that her church community enjoyed her Greek cookies so much that she was asked to make more for the bishop's visit. And a special thank you to my husband, Paul, for all his help and support.

I would like share with you one of my mother's favorite appetizer recipes: dolmathes (stuffed grape leaves). We always made them for special holidays and gatherings. My mother's recipe was extra tasty because she always used a higher fat content (27%) to lean ground beef (73%) mixture; the higher fat content gives the dolmathes more flavor. If you limit making them for special gatherings, there is less concern about ingesting too much fat. My mother's recipe calls for onion soup mix, which makes the dolmathes very flavorful. You can, of course, use fresh herbs, but my mother, being a trained home economics teacher from the 1950s, looked for more expedient methods to reduce her time in the kitchen. Personally, I think she would rather spend her time shopping instead of chopping. I can say that dolmathes made with fresh grape leaves from my garden were extremely good, but it's very time-consuming to pick the grape leaves, wash them, and then blanch them before stuffing them with the meat mixture. One last tip from my husband: "When you think you added enough oregano, add a handful more."



I am very grateful for these recipes because of the joyous memories they keep alive. Miss and love you, Mom and Dad!

Maria Kootsikis and her husband, Paul Montalbano, are retired clinical pharmacists living the wonderful retired life in Bluff Heights. You might see them walking their beloved Cheeto.



Stuffed Grape Leaves with Meat and Rice (Dolmathes me Kréas kai Rýzi)

Prep time: 1 hour **Cook time:** 1 hour **Makes:** 30 pieces

Ingredients

3 pounds ground beef, 73% lean/27% fat content
1 cup white rice, cooked
2 packages dried onion soup mix
4 tablespoons fresh mint, finely chopped
½ cup water
1 (16 oz.) jar grape leaves
1 lemon, juiced

Directions

Thoroughly mix the ground beef, rice, onion soup mix, water, and mint. Cut stems off grape leaves. Place glossy side down with vein side showing. Place 1 tablespoon of the mixture at the wide end of the leaf and roll, folding the outer edges in toward the point of the leaf. Cover the bottom of an 8-quart pan with the stuffed grape leaves seam-side down, laying additional grape leaves on top of each other. Add enough water to almost cover the grape leaves and place a plate on top to prevent them from unraveling. Cover the boiling pan and simmer for one hour. Remove and place the stuffed grape leaves on a platter. Sprinkle with lemon juice before serving. Grape leaves can sometimes be tough; if so, microwave for 3 minutes.

Note: My preference is to use the Orlando brand of grape leaves from Fresno, CA. If you need assistance rolling the grape leaves, feel free to contact me at MKootsikis@gmail.com and take a look at Longbeachcookbook.blogspot.com, which explains the steps for rolling.