

Georgian Spinach Pkhali

It was news to me that Georgian food is quite popular in Ukraine. I certainly didn't want to miss an opportunity to try it. Sondro, the husband of my host Lena, is Georgian. So when she guided me to their neighborhood restaurant, I knew it would be good. Now to be clear, many of the most famous Georgian specialties involve bread, cheese and meat, but there is a surprising number of traditional foods that happen to be vegan. Lucky me! Actually, because over 40 percent of the land in Georgia is dedicated to agriculture, produce such as tomatoes, eggplants, walnuts, spinach and nuts are abundant and frequently featured in traditional foods. For seasoning, aromatic herbs such as tarragon, parsley, cilantro and fenugreek bring the dishes to life and give the distinct Georgian flavor.

As a spinach fan, I was totally intrigued by this spinach and walnut appetizer, which can also be prepared with carrots or beets. It will no doubt become a favorite once I am back in my Texas kitchen. And I will have some wonderful memories of eating it first in a sidewalk cafe in Kyiv.

Ingredients

- 1.5 lb fresh spinach
- 8 oz walnuts
- 1 bunch cilantro, leaves removed and finely chopped (reserving some for serving)
- Up to 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 green onion, minced
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 4 tablespoons walnut oil
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander (or whole seeds toasted and ground with the walnuts)
- 1 teaspoon ground fenugreek
- Salt and pepper to taste

- Pomegranate seeds

Directions

1. In a pot of gently boiling salted water, blanch spinach to soften. Remove with a slotted spoon or tongs and immerse in ice water immediately. This step stops the cooking and maintains the bright green color.
2. Drain spinach well, squeezing out all excess water with your hands. Chop.
3. Grind walnuts to a coarse powder.
4. Combine nuts, spinach and remaining ingredients in a large bowl, mixing well with your hands.
5. Season mixture with salt and pepper to taste.
6. Refrigerate overnight or for six hours to combine flavors.
7. Shape into balls, topping each with a few pomegranate seeds and a sprinkling of cilantro leaves.

Enjoy! And keep an eye out for more Georgian recipes as I continue to explore this cuisine.