

Chard and Fennel Pie (“The New Vegetarian Epicure” Anna Thomas)

In our house we call this Victory Pie, because the first time I made it we took it to an exciting election night potluck. It's a big, generous pie, delicious and undoubtedly good for you. And even though it's dark green, for some reason that I can't explain my kids usually eat it.

Note: You will need a 13 or 14-inch round gratin dish to make this pie. If you only have 9 or 10-inch pie dishes, divide both dough and filling in half, and make two pies.

Dough: 1 ½ tsp dry yeast (1/2 envelope)

1 tsp sugar

¼ cup warm water

3 cups white flour

1 tsp salt

1 egg

2/3 cup low-fat milk

1 Tbsp olive oil

Filling: 3 lbs Swiss chard (about 2 big bunches)

1 ½ large yellow onions (about 2 cups chopped)

1 ½ cups sliced green onions

3 cloves garlic

1 medium fennel bulb

2 Tbsp olive oil

1 Tbsp cider vinegar

2 Tbsp chopped fennel greens

½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

pinch of salt

freshly ground black pepper to taste

4 eggs

½ cup milk

10 oz feta cheese, crumbled

3 Tbsp uncooked white rice

First make the dough: Dissolve the yeast and sugar in the warm water and leave it a few minutes, until it starts to bubble and foam. Meanwhile, put about 2 ¾ cups of the flour into a large bowl and stir in the salt. Beat together the egg, milk, and olive oil, stir in the yeast mixture, and then mix the liquid into the flour. Stir it with a big wooden spoon until it forms a dough.

When the stirring gets tough, spread the remaining flour on an ample board and turn the dough out on it. Knead it gently, turning often at first to keep it coated with flour, until it is smooth and becoming elastic. Form the dough into a ball and put it into a lightly oiled bowl. Cover the bowl with a towel and set it aside to rise in a warm, sheltered place for 45 minutes to an hour; it

should double in size.

To make the filling: First thoroughly clean the chard, cut off and discard the thick parts of the stems, and chop it coarsely. Peel and chop the onions, and trim and slice the green onions. Mince the garlic cloves, and trim and chop the white part of the fennel bulb.

Heat the olive oil in a large, non-stick sauté pan and cook the onions, green onions, and garlic in it over a medium flame for a few minutes, then add the chopped fennel and keep cooking until the vegetables are soft and beginning to color.

Add the chard by handfuls, tossing it with the hot vegetables to wilt it down, until it's all in the pan. Add the cider vinegar, the fennel greens and parsley, a dash of salt, and some pepper, and keep cooking until the chard is much reduced and all the excess liquid is gone.

Remove the pan from the heat and allow the mixture to cool slightly. Separate one of the eggs, reserving the yolk in a small bowl, then add the other 3 eggs to the remaining white and beat them with the milk. Stir the egg mixture into the cooled vegetables along with the crumbled feta cheese and the uncooked rice. Mix everything together well, taste it, and adjust the salt and pepper if needed.

To assemble and bake: Punch down the risen dough and divide it into two parts, one a bit larger. On a lightly floured board, roll the larger part out into a circle with a diameter 2 inches bigger about than your gratin dish or casserole. Yeast dough is harder to roll out than pastry, because it keeps springing back together. I find it helps to lift it up and stretch it gently over the backs of my hands, just like pizza dough (it's the same thing, really), then lay it down and roll again, adjusting the shape.

Oil a 13 or 14-inch round gratin dish lightly and lay the circle of dough into it, bringing it evenly up the sides and letting the extra inch hang over the edges. Spread the prepared filling inside the dough.

Roll out the smaller piece of dough into a circle just large enough to cover the dish and lay it over the filling. Fold the overhanging edge of bottom crust over the edge of the top crust and pinch them together, making a design if you like.

Beat the reserved egg yolk lightly with a tablespoon of water and brush the glaze over the pie. Poke a few holes in the top crust with a fork and bake the pie at 350 degrees for 45 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown. Cool the pie slightly before cutting it in wedges and serving.

Serves 8-10