Prep Time: 40 minutes | Cook Time: 1 hour 15 minutes | Total Time: 1 hour 55 minutes
Servings: 6 (makes about 12 rolls) | Difficulty: Medium

Table of Contents

- Ingredients
  - For the Cabbage & Rolls
  - For the Tomato Sauce
  - For Serving
- Instructions
  - Step 1: Prepare the Cabbage (10 minutes active + 10 minutes resting)
  - Step 2: Make the Filling (10 minutes)
  - Step 3: Roll the Cabbage Rolls (15 minutes)
  - Step 4: Build the Sauce (10 minutes)
  - Step 5: Assemble and Simmer (5 minutes + 60 minutes cooking)
  - Step 6: Rest and Serve (10 minutes)
- Tips for Tender Cabbage Rolls
- Nutrition (per serving, 2 rolls, without sour cream)

Ingredients

For the Cabbage & Rolls

- 1 large green cabbage (about 2–2.5 lbs / 1–1.2 kg)

- 1 lb (450 g) ground beef (or a beef-pork blend)

- ¾ cup (150 g) uncooked long-grain white rice
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup (50 g) grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- ½ tsp smoked paprika

For the Tomato Sauce

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small onion, finely diced

- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (28 oz / 800 g) crushed tomatoes
- 1 can (14 oz / 400 g) tomato sauce
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp sugar (to balance acidity)
- 1 tsp dried basil
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp red pepper flakes (optional)
- ½ cup (120 ml) water or beef broth

For Serving

- Fresh parsley, chopped
- Sour cream or plain yogurt (optional)

Instructions

Step 1: Prepare the Cabbage (10 minutes active + 10 minutes resting)

Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Carefully cut out the core of the cabbage with a sharp knife. Lower the whole head into the boiling water. After 3–4 minutes, the outer leaves will soften—peel them off with tongs and transfer to a colander to drain. Repeat, returning the cabbage to the water for 1–2 minutes each time, until you have 12–14 large, pliable leaves. Intensity: Medium heat, gentle boil. Let the leaves cool until easy to handle, then trim the thick central rib with a shallow V-shaped cut so the leaves roll easily.

Step 2: Make the Filling (10 minutes)

In a large bowl, combine the ground beef, uncooked rice, diced onion, garlic, egg, Parmesan, salt, pepper, oregano, and smoked paprika. Mix gently with your hands until just combined—overmixing makes the filling dense. Intensity: Low effort, no heat.

Step 3: Roll the Cabbage Rolls (15 minutes)

Lay a cabbage leaf flat, rib-side up, with the stem end toward you. Place about 3 tablespoons of filling near the stem end. Fold the stem end over the filling, tuck in the sides, and roll firmly toward the leaf tip. Repeat with remaining leaves and filling. Secure with a toothpick if needed. Intensity: Low, steady pace.

Step 4: Build the Sauce (10 minutes)

Heat olive oil in a large Dutch oven or deep skillet over medium heat. Sauté the onion for 4–5 minutes until translucent, then add garlic and cook 30 seconds until fragrant. Stir in the tomato paste and cook 1 minute. Add crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, sugar, basil, salt, red pepper flakes, and water. Simmer gently for 5 minutes. Intensity: Medium heat, light simmer.

Step 5: Assemble and Simmer (5 minutes + 60 minutes cooking)

Spread a thin layer of sauce on the bottom of the pot. Arrange the rolls seam-side down in a single layer (or two snug layers). Pour the remaining sauce over the top, ensuring the rolls are mostly covered. Bring to a gentle simmer over medium heat, then reduce to low, cover, and cook for 60 minutes, until the rice is tender and the beef is cooked through. Intensity: Low heat, gentle simmer—do not boil hard or the leaves may tear. Check occasionally; add a splash of water if the sauce thickens too much.

Step 6: Rest and Serve (10 minutes)

Remove from heat and let rest, covered, for 10 minutes—this allows the filling to set and the flavors to meld. Garnish with fresh parsley and serve with a dollop of sour cream if desired. Intensity: None—just wait.

Tips for Tender Cabbage Rolls

- Don’t overboil the leaves—they should be pliable, not mushy. Slightly undercooked is better than overcooked.
- Freeze the cabbage for 24 hours (then thaw) to make leaves easier to separate without boiling.
- Use leftover leaves to line the pot, preventing sticking and adding flavor.
- Make ahead: Assemble the rolls a day in advance and refrigerate; add 10–15 minutes to the simmer time.

- Freezer-friendly: Freeze cooked rolls in sauce for up to 3 months. Thaw overnight and reheat gently.

Nutrition (per serving, 2 rolls, without sour cream)

Approximate values; varies with exact ingredients.

- Calories: 385 kcal
- Protein: 24 g
- Carbohydrates: 28 g
- Fat: 19 g
- Saturated Fat: 6 g
- Fiber: 5 g
- Sugar: 9 g
- Sodium: 780 mg