**Italian Stuffed Cabbage [Mondeghini al sugo]**  
Adapted from [Rachel Eats](http://racheleats.wordpress.com/2013/01/27/part-and-parcel/), who adapted it from from Giorgio Locatelli’s recipe in [Made in Italy](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Made-Italy-Stories-Giorgio-Locatelli/dp/1841157023) and Jane Grigson’s [Vegetable Book](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Jane-Grigsons-Vegetable-Book-Grigson/dp/0140273239).

This dish is a mid-winter delight, budget-minded, not terribly complicated to make, hearty and delicious — wilted cabbage leaves, a tender meatball and a simple, bright sauce. It went instantly into our rotation of favorite cold-weather dishes.

The recipe’s original measurements were in metrics; I have done my best to translate them, but not accurately as I made some tweaks (slightly higher proportion of sausage to bread, etc.) to taste.

For the bread, you can use white bread (as originally called for) or whatever you have around. I had a day-old hunk of whole wheat sourdough miche that was absolutely delicious in here, and I was happy to rescue it. If necessary, the bread can be soaked in water instead of milk. Chicken sausage could probably replace the pork nicely. And if you’re like me, and totally forgot to get fresh herbs, and skip them, nothing terrible happens since the sausage should already be well-seasoned. Cabbage rolls are typically formed like an egg roll — folded in sides, rolled up filling — but I was so taken by the packets we had in Vancouver, wrapped almost like a wine bottle and pinned at the top for cooking only, that I wanted to emulate that here. Any shape will work.

Makes approximately 12 cabbage rolls; a serving can range from 2 (petitely) to 3 per person. I took Rachel’s lead and served it with mashed potatoes; [these](http://smittenkitchen.com/blog/2008/12/braised-beef-short-ribs/) are decadent.

1 large savoy cabbage  
7-ounce (200-gram) hunk of bread (see above), crusts cut away, torn into small scraps (you’ll have about 3 loose cups of scraps)  
2/3 cup (approximately 150 ml) whole milk  
14 ounces (400 grams) or approximately 4 plain pork sausages (I used sweet — i.e. non-spicy — Italian), casings removed  
1 small sprig of sage, finely chopped  
1 small sprig of rosemary, finely chopped  
2 tablespoons grated parmesan  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
1 28-ounce can peeled plum tomatoes  
2 tablespoons (30 ml) olive oil  
1 clove garlic, peeled and minced

Prepare cabbage: Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Discard any messy or broken outer cabbage leaves and carefully peel 12 nice, large leaves. (I think the cabbage can tell if you’re in a rush, and will tear more easily. Work carefully. That said, a torn leaf will hardly ruin the dish.) Blanch leaves for about 30 seconds to 1 minute (you can do a few at at time), until wilted, and spread out on towels so that they dry and cool.

Make filling: Place bread scraps in bottom of large bowl and pour milk over. Let sit for a few minutes, then mash it gently with a spoon until something close to a paste forms. Mix with sausage meat, herbs, parmesan and a pinch or two of salt and black pepper; I find this easiest with a fork or bare hands.

Make the cabbage rolls: Lay your first cabbage leaf on the counter. If it doesn’t want to lay flat, pare away some of the thickest stalk (with a paring knife or vegetable peeler) to make it easier. Form some of the filling mixture into a golf ball-sized round. Wrap cabbage leaf around it (see Note about shape up top) and pin at the top with a toothpick. Repeat with remaining leaves and mixture.

Make the sauce: To prepare your tomatoes, either break them up with your hands (for bigger chunks), run them through a food mill or roughly chop them right in their can with scissors (what I did here). In a heavy saute pan with a lid or a medium (5 to 6-quart) Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and saute for about 30 seconds (just until golden, not a moment longer) then add the tomatoes, bringing the sauce to a gently boil. Season with salt if needed. Add cabbage packages, arranging them carefully in the pan so they all fit, cover the pot and gently simmer them for 25 minutes. Remove the toothpicks and carefully turn the rolls over, cooking them for another 25. Remove the lid and simmer for another 10 minutes to cook off some of the wetness. They’re all cooked now, but if you can rest them for another 15 minutes before eating them, the flavors settle and they become even better.