

‘Quick’ *Mousakhkhan* Pastries

Quantity: 30 people (one small pastry each, served as a starter with dips and condiments)

Ingredients:

- 1 kilo skinned and boneless chicken
- 1 cup Palestinian olive oil
- 8 onions, finely chopped
- 4 teaspoons *summaa* *
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon Palestinian mixed spices *
- Juice of 1 small lemon or lime
- White vinegar for washing chicken
- ½ cup fried pine nuts
- 2 large *shraak* or *marqouq* flat and thin bread sheets *

Method:

- Wash chicken in cold water and rinse well
- Pour some white vinegar, rub well and allow to stand for 5 minutes
- Rinse with cold water and allow to rest for 5 minutes to get rid of excess water
- Cut chicken into long, thin slices and marinade with lemon juice, olive oil, salt, black pepper and mixed spices
- Allow to rest and start chopping and cooking the onions meanwhile
- Fry finely chopped onions with olive oil, then add *summaa*
- Slowly cook onions on a small fire and add a little water to allow them to cook thoroughly (whilst not caramelising them)
- Add fried/roasted pine nuts to the onion mix and cook for a few more minutes. Save some pine nuts for garnishing the dish just before serving
- Place chicken in a pre-heated saucepan, cover the lid and cook in its own marinade while shaking the saucepan every now and then
- Add 1 cup of boiling water to the chicken and cook until water dries off and chicken is ready
- Spread *shraak* bread and cut into tall pieces, making sure the width allows for cigar-like wrapping
- On every slice of *shraak*, spread some onion mix followed by chicken and an additional sprinkle of *summaa*
- Roll in cigar-shape or pastry
- Place in a lightly oiled baking tray and brush surface with olive oil
- Bake in medium-heat oven (around gas mark 4.5) for 5 minutes
- Allow to cool
- Serve cold on a large plate and garnish with a pinch of *summaa* and some fried/roasted pine nuts. Ideal with yoghurt and pumpkin dips on the side.

Notes:

1. Mixed thigh and breast chicken pieces are optimal, as thigh pieces will add to flavour and fibre. If difficult to source, stick to chicken breasts.
2. Use preferably *halal* chicken, if possible. If not, organic will do.
3. For a healthier option, use Palestinian olive oil only for spreading on the baking tray and for brushing on pastries. You can use healthier vegetable cooking oil and with half the amount as an alternative when cooking the onions.
4. *Summaaq* (also known as *sumac* or *sumaq*) is made from the ground berries of a decorative bush that grows in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean. Make sure it is fresh and purple in colour. Some supermarkets stock brick-coloured and not-so-fresh *summaaq*. Avoid this, as the resulting purple colouring of the fried onions is the trademark of this dish. Fresh *summaaq* also tastes better because of its fruity and astringent quality that enhances the overall taste.
5. Ingredients of Palestinian mixed spices vary, but most people use a mixture of allspice, cinnamon, dried garlic, cardamom and cloves. Proportions may vary according to preference of taste.
6. For a healthier option, roast pine nuts on a frying pan under the grill (whilst shaking regularly) instead of frying.
7. You can add homemade *bouquet garni* to the chicken saucepan for enhanced flavouring. This normally contains mastic gum granules, cardamom pods, cloves, coriander seeds, black pepper, cumin seeds, dried chillies, a bay leaf and a cinnamon stick, all wrapped in a muslin cloth (could be brought in ready on the day, provided they are delivered during preparation time). *
8. Make sure *shraak* bread is of good quality. We need to work out the best way to provide this on the day. I could bring some with me, but they might not be fresh and would be difficult to fill and wrap. Can the sous-chef suggest anything similar? *
9. *Mousakhkhan* is the traditional Palestinian dish; it is eaten in all areas of pre-1948 Palestine with some regional variations. In Nazareth and the Galilee it is called *muhammar*. Both names are pronounced *im-sakhkhan* and *im-hammar* in Palestinian dialect. Both names mean the 'heated' or 'baked' or 'grilled' dish.
10. The above recipe may seem laborious at first, but it is still much easier than preparing the dish as a main course, with all the ingredients and whole chickens baked in the oven. If all preparatory stages are done before the demonstration hour, all that needs to be done in front of the audience is assembly, quick baking, allowing to cool and serving. In short, the chef will need to prepare a considerable amount before the demonstration. Please advise if this is possible.
11. This 'easier' recipe also allows *mousakhkhan* to be served as a cold starter with cooling accompanying dips. This is crucial in hot summer months. Serving an icy cold drink, like rose punch for example is the ideal sweet accompaniment.

Original recipe source: Afyouni, I. F. *The Home Cooked Dish*, al-Wataniyya Press, Amman, Jordan, 2002

Pumpkin *Moutabbal* Dip

Quantity: 5-10 people (using bread pieces and/or *mousakhkhan* pastries to dip)

Ingredients:

- 1 kilo pumpkin
- ½ cup lemon or lime juice
- 4 cloves of garlic
- ½ tablespoon sea salt
- ½ cup *tahini* sesame paste
- ½ bunch continental parsley
- Palestinian olive oil for garnish
- Pinch of cumin (if desired)

Method:

- Peel, de-seed and cut pumpkin into small pieces
- Cook in boiling water for 40 minutes
- Drain well until cold. Press with hand to remove excess water
- Blend in food processor, add *tahini* paste and mix well
- Crush garlic with salt and add lemon/lime juice
- Add garlic crush to pumpkin mix and stir well
- Place in dip bowl and garnish with some chopped parsley, some olive oil and a pinch of cumin
- Serve with Arabic flat bread and homemade *harissa*. *

Notes:

1. You can replace pumpkin with butternut squash, making sure you drain well in both cases.
2. *Moutabbal* is pronounced *im-tabbal* in Palestinian dialect. It means the 'spiced' or 'well-flavoured' dip.
3. Whilst we are on the subject of dips with *tahini*, the word *hummous* is the Arabic name of the chickpea pulse and not the dip itself. The correct name for a chickpea dip would therefore be 'chickpea *moutabbal*' or '*hummous moutabbal*' to be more exact.

Original recipe source: Kamal S. & Yassine S.O. Palestinian Cooking, Dar El Ilm Lilmalayin, Beirut, Lebanon, 2004

Helou el-Qizha (Flapjacks full of goodness)

Quantity: 15 people

Ingredients:

- 1 ounce ground Kalawanji (Nigella) seeds, known in Arabic as ‘seeds of blessing’
- 1 kilo flour
- 2½ cups Palestinian olive oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 1½ cups roasted sesame seeds
- 1 cup pine nuts (as desired)
- 1 cup water

Method:

- Put flour in deep saucepan and place on medium heat
- Stir until flour turns pink
- Mix sugar and Palestinian olive oil in a separate bowl and stir until sugar dissolves fully
- Put flour in a mixing bowl after it has cooled down
- Create a hole in the middle of flour and slowly pour the sugar and olive oil mix
- Add straightaway ground Kalawanji seeds and cup of water
- Mix flour and rest of ingredients thoroughly, and knead using fingertips to remove lumps (this may take a while)
- Continue kneading the pastry until it has a solid consistency
- Cover mixing bowl with a damp cloth and leave for one hour
- Add sesame seeds to the pastry, and knead well
- Pre-heat oven at gas mark 5
- Brush baking tray (35cm x 40cm) with a little oil and spread pastry evenly
- Garnish with pine nuts according to taste
- Bake in oven for 20 – 30 minutes (times vary depending on oven)
- Divide into equal squares whilst hot
- Allow to cool before serving.

Original recipe source: Kamal S. & Yassine S.O. Palestinian Cooking, Dar El Ilm Lilmalayin, Beirut, Lebanon, 2004