

STARTER

Eggplant Dressed in Sauce

Badhinjan mahshi

Makes 4 servings; prep: 30 minutes;
cooking time: 70 minutes

Eggplant

8 cups water
3 Tbsp. salt
6 small Italian eggplants, peeled
(leaving stems intact)
¼ cup oil

Filling

¼ cup olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
2 tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground pepper
½ tsp. red pepper flakes
2 tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. ground fennel seeds
1 cup coarsely ground walnuts
1 Tbsp. dried mint
2 tsp. dried fenugreek leaves
1 ½ cups fresh chopped cilantro leaves
1 tsp. apple cider vinegar
2 Tbsp. pomegranate molasses

Broth

Combine 1 ½ cups fresh tomato puree
and 1 tsp. kosher salt

Garnish

2 Tbsp. fresh chopped cilantro
2 Tbsp. pomegranate arils

1. For the eggplants: Make a slit, lengthwise, in each eggplant without opening the ends. In a large saucepan, add 8 cups water and 3 Tbsp. salt and bring to a boil. Add the eggplants and bring back to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and continue to boil for 15 to 20 minutes, until the eggplants are tender. Drain, blot-dry, and set aside (this removes any bitterness in the eggplants).

2. For the filling: In a wide skillet, heat the oil over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Add the onions and garlic and sauté for 10 to 15 minutes, until golden brown. Add the remaining filling ingredients except the apple cider vinegar and pomegranate molasses, and sauté for 3 minutes. Add the vinegar and pomegranate molasses and sauté for 1 minute. Adjust seasoning to taste. Remove from heat, transfer to a bowl, and set aside.

3. Cooking the eggplants: In a wide sauté pan, heat ¼ cup oil over low heat. Sauté the eggplants for 35 to 40 minutes until golden brown on all sides and the eggplants are soft. Add more oil if necessary.

Arrange the eggplants side by side in the skillet. Use 2 small spoons to open up the slit in the eggplants and stuff each one with ¼ cup of the filling. Pour the tomato broth around the eggplants, cover, and cook over low heat for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the eggplants are tender. Remove from heat.

4. To serve: Garnish with some herbs and pomegranate arils and drizzle a little oil on top. Serve hot or at room temperature with your favorite bread or rice.

From a recipe by Ibn al-Mahdi, died 839 (published in Nawal Nasrallah, *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens: Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq's Tenth-Century Baghdadi Cookbook*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007, p. 226)

FIRST COURSE

Chicken and Chickpea Soup with Poached Eggs and Cheese

Ma'himmas

Makes 6 to 8 servings; prep: 15 minutes,
plus soaking chickpeas overnight;
cooking time: 2½ hours

Chickpeas

1 cup dried chickpeas, soaked for 24 hours
with ½ tsp. baking soda, drained and rinsed

Broth

2 Tbsp. oil
1 large onion, peeled and finely diced
2 garlic cloves, peeled and diced
2 tsp. kosher salt (if using aged, salty cheese,
reduce the amount of salt)
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
½ tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. cumin powder
⅛ tsp. ground saffron dissolved
in 1 Tbsp. rose water
2 Tbsp. tomato paste
8 cups water

Chicken

Cheesecloth
1 young 4-pound kosher chicken, washed
and patted dry
1 tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 tsp. turmeric
1 Tbsp. cumin seed
1 small yellow onion, peeled and quartered
1-inch fresh ginger, grated
3 bay leaves

Cheese and Eggs

1 cup aged sharp cheddar cheese, grated
4 eggs

Garnish

1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
Rose petals

1. For the broth: In a large heavy bottomed pot,
heat 2 Tbsp. oil and sauté the onion and garlic
over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes until
golden brown. Add the salt, pepper, turmeric,
cumin, chickpeas, and tomato paste and sauté for
2 minutes. Add the water and bring to a boil.
Reduce heat to low, cover, and allow to simmer.

2. For the chicken: Meanwhile, line a sheet pan
with a layer of cheesecloth and arrange the
chicken on it. In a small bowl, combine salt,
pepper, turmeric, and cumin and rub mixture on
the chicken, inside and outside. Stuff the chicken
with onion, ginger, and bay leaves. Bundle the
chicken in the cheesecloth and tie shut. Gently
immerse the bundled chicken in the simmering
broth. Cover and simmer over low heat for
2 hours.

Remove the chicken from the broth, place
it in a shallow bowl, and untie the cheesecloth.
Debone the chicken and return the meat to the
pot. Discard the cheesecloth and bones. Add more
salt, pepper, cumin powder, saffron-rose water,
and half the grated cheese. Give the pot a gentle
stir. Cover and simmer over low heat for another
30 minutes.

3. For the eggs: Just before serving, drop the
cracked-open eggs, one at the time, into the
simmering soup. Allow to simmer, uncovered,
for 3 to 4 minutes, until the eggs are poached.
Adjust seasoning to taste.

4. To serve: Pour the soup into serving bowls.
Sprinkle cilantro and rose petals on top and serve
with bread or rice, pickles, and a platter of herbs.

From a recipe by al-Ma'mūn, died 833 (published in
Nawal Nasrallah, *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens: Ibn Sayyār
al-Warrāq's Tenth-Century Baghdadi Cookbook*, Leiden and
Boston: Brill, 2007, p. 287)

SECOND COURSE

Rice and Lamb with Chickpeas and Barberries Zereshk palaw ba gusht

Serves 6; prep: 40 minutes + 30 minutes
soaking time; cooking time: 2 hours

Chickpeas

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup dried chickpeas, soaked for 24 hours
with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda, drained and rinsed

Lamb Braise

2 Tbsp. oil
1-pound boneless leg of lamb, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. pieces
1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. freshly ground pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. ground cardamom
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 Tbsp. tomato paste
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground saffron threads dissolved
in 1 Tbsp. orange-blossom water (optional)
zest of 2 oranges
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups water

Rice

Water
2 Tbsp. salt
2 cups basmati rice, soaked for 30 minutes,
drained
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil or butter

Barberries, Raisins, and Almonds

Water
Oil
1 Tbsp. lime juice
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups dried barberries, picked over, soaked
in cold water for 15 minutes, drained, and rinsed
thoroughly
1 cup raisins
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced almonds

Garnish

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced pistachios
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried rose petals

1. For the lamb braise: Heat the oil in a medium-size cast-iron pot over medium-high heat. Add the lamb, onion, and garlic and sauté for 10 to 15 minutes until golden brown and all the juices have been absorbed. Add the chickpeas, salt, pepper, turmeric, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, tomato paste, saffron-orange-blossom water, and orange zest and sauté for 2 minutes.

Add 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups water and give the pot a stir. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, cover, and cook for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours, until the lamb and chickpeas are tender. Keep warm, covered, until ready to serve.

2. To cook the rice: In a large nonstick pot, bring 6 cups water and salt to a boil. Add the rice and boil for 6 to 8 minutes, until all the rice rises to the surface. Drain and rinse with 2 cups tap water. In the same pot, pour $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water and return the rice to the pot. Pour another $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water over the rice. Wrap the lid with a dish towel and cover tightly. Cook for 45 minutes over medium-low heat.

3. For the barberries: Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water and 1 Tbsp. oil over medium heat and sauté the barberries for 4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

4. For the raisins: Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, 1 Tbsp. oil, and 1 Tbsp. lime juice over medium heat, sautéing the raisins for 1 minute. Transfer to another bowl and set aside.

5. For the almonds: Wipe out the skillet and heat 1 tsp. oil in it, sautéing the almonds for 1 minute, until lightly golden. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

6. To serve: On a large serving platter, gently place alternating layers of rice, lamb, and chickpea braise to form a pyramid. Garnish with barberries, raisins, almonds, pistachios, and rose petals.

From a recipe by Nurollah, written c. 1594 (published in M.R. Ghanoonparvar, *Dining at the Safavid Court [Maddat ol-Hayat]*, pp. 29 and 82)

THIRD COURSE

Carrot Halva

Halva-yi zardak

Makes 6 servings; prep: 35 minutes;
cooking time: 1 hour

Carrots

2 pounds carrots, peeled and chopped
into 1-inch pieces

6 cups whole plain milk

¼ tsp. ground saffron dissolved

in ¼ cup rose water

1 ½ cups sugar

½ cup butter, ghee, or oil

1 Tbsp. ground cardamom

Garnish

2 Tbsp. slivered pistachios

2 Tbsp. slivered almonds

2 Tbsp. raisins, rinsed and patted dry

1. To cook the halva: Puree the carrots in a food processor. Heat a medium-size cast-iron pot; add the pureed carrots and sauté over medium-high heat for 5 minutes, until all the moisture has evaporated.

Add the milk and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium. Cook for about 50 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the carrots have absorbed *almost* all of the milk. Add the saffron-rose water and stir well.

Add the sugar, stirring frequently for 5 minutes until all the sugar has been absorbed.

Add the butter and cardamom, stirring constantly for 2 to 5 minutes, until all the butter has been absorbed and you have a thick, rich paste. Remove from heat.

2. To serve: Transfer to a serving dish and garnish according to your fancy. Allow to cool. Cover and chill in the fridge.

FOURTH COURSE

Minced Chicken Pie

Tawuk bureghi

Makes 4 5-inch pies; prep: 35 minutes;
cooking time: 30 to 35 minutes

Chicken Filling

2 Tbsp. olive oil
2 Tbsp. butter or ghee
2 large onions, peeled and finely chopped
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast,
cut into ¼-inch pieces
1 pound boneless skinless chicken thighs,
cut into ¼-inch pieces
2 ½ tsp. kosher salt
2 tsp. freshly ground pepper

Egg Wash

¼ cup butter, melted
½ cup whole milk
1 egg yolk

Pastry Leaves

Butter
4 5-inch ovenproof nonstick molds
1 package (14 oz.) Yufka pastry leaves
Parchment paper

1. For the filling: In a sauté pan, heat the oil and butter over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. Add the onions and sauté for 5 minutes, or until translucent. Add the chicken (breast and thigh meat), salt, and pepper and sauté for 5 minutes. Cover and cook over medium heat for 15 minutes, or until the chicken is tender, and most of the juices have been absorbed. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

2. For the egg wash: In a small saucepan, melt the butter and allow to cool. Add the milk and egg yolk and lightly whisk until smooth.

3. For the dough: Preheat oven to 400° F. (200° C.). Butter all over the insides of the 4 5-inch molds.

Lay the first sheet of dough leaf in the mold (allowing ends to hang well over the edge) and brush it generously with the egg wash. Repeat this for 5 more leaves, laying one over the other.

4. For filling the molds, and cooking: Transfer ¼ of the chicken filling to the center of the dough leaves in the mold and form it into a dome shape. Fold each layer of the dough leaves across and over the top of the dome of the filling and brush each layer with the egg wash. Use your hands to form a round, smooth dough-leaf-covered dome. Brush the top of the dome with the egg wash.

Line a sheet pan with parchment paper and place the 4 molds side by side on the sheet pan. Bake in the center of preheated oven for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the crust is crisp and golden.

5. To serve: Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 1 minute. Use a silicone palette knife to circle the mold, separating the pie from the mold. Then use an offset spatula to remove the pie from the mold. Serve with a salad.

From a recipe by Turabi Efendi (published in Efendi,
*The Turkish Cookery Book: A Collection of Receipts from
the Best Turkish Authorities*, London: Wm. H. Allen & Co.,
1865, p. 26)

FIFTH COURSE

Sweet Omelet

Khagina

Serves 4; prep: 15 minutes;
cooking time: 20 minutes

Syrup/Glaze

¼ cup sugar

¼ cup water

Zest of 1 orange

½ tsp. ground cardamom

¼ tsp. ground cinnamon

⅛ tsp. saffron dissolved in 2 Tbsp. rose water

Batter

5 eggs

⅓ cup plain yogurt

½ tsp. kosher salt

¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper

1 tsp. baking powder

⅓ cup unbleached all-purpose flour

Oil for Cooking

¼ cup oil, butter, or ghee

Garnish

1 Tbsp. coarsely ground raw pistachios

1 Tbsp. coarsely ground walnuts

1 tsp. coarsely ground dried rose petals

1. For the syrup/glaze: In a small saucepan, combine all the ingredients for the glaze and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

2. For the batter: In a mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, yogurt, salt, pepper, and baking powder until smooth. Gradually add the flour, folding in until you have a thick batter (do not overmix). Allow to rest for 5 minutes.

3. For cooking the pancakes: Heat the oil in an 8-in.-diameter frittata pan over low heat until hot; pour in the batter, cover, and cook for 10 minutes until the base is lightly browned. Flip pancake, keep covered, and cook for another 8 minutes until the pancake is cooked through.

4. To serve: Transfer the pancake to a serving platter, drizzle syrup on top, and sprinkle with pistachios, walnuts, and rose petals. Serve with bread and fresh basil.

From a recipe by Mirza Ali Akbar Khan Kashani, 1881 (published in *Ashpazbashi, Mirza 'Ali Akbar Khan. Sufra-i At'ima*, translation by Shadi Shafiei, Tehran: Intisharat-i bunyad-i farhang-i Iran, 1974, p. 56)