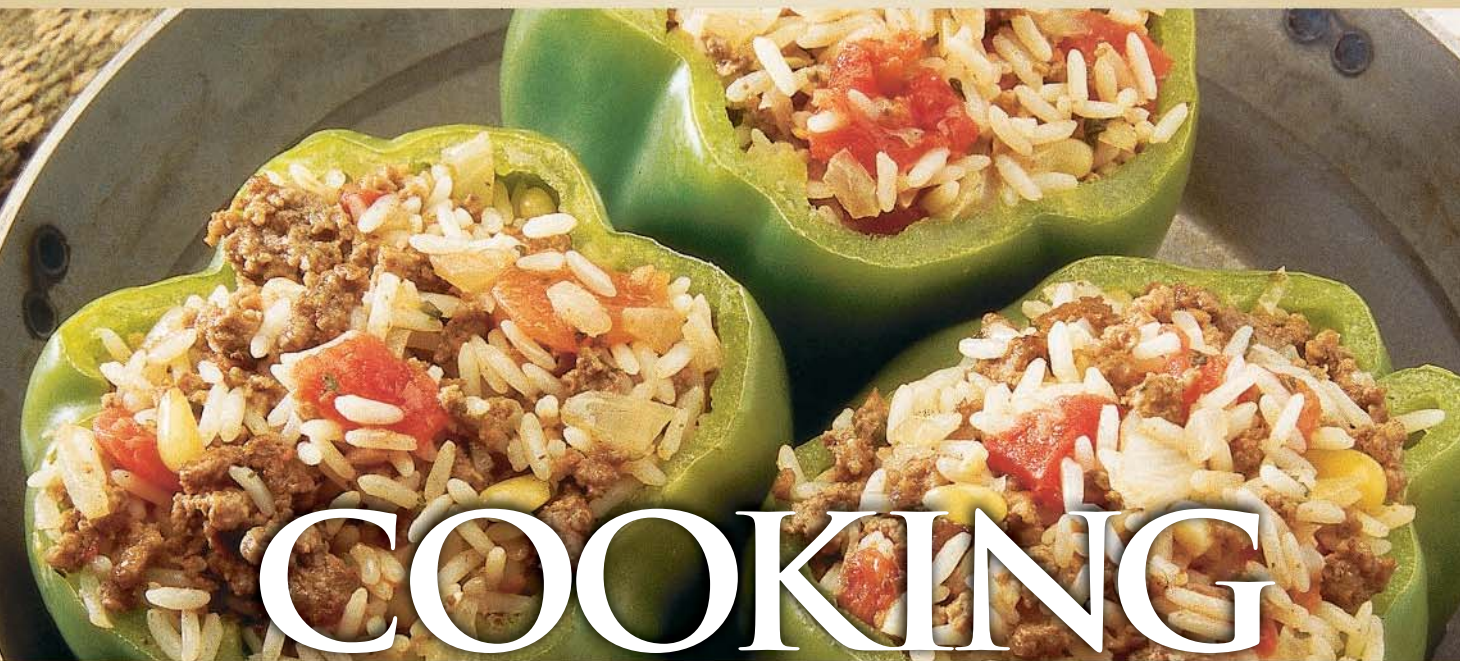


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vegetarian recipes

WAY



ALISON BEHNKE IN CONSULTATION
WITH VARTKES EHRAJIAN

COOKING

THE

MIDDLE EASTERN

WAY

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Contents



INTRODUCTION, 7

History, 8

The Land and Its Food, 10

Holidays and Festivals, 13

BEFORE YOU BEGIN, 19

The Careful Cook, 20

Cooking Utensils, 21

Cooking Terms, 21

Special Ingredients, 22

Healthy and Low-Fat Cooking Tips, 24

Metric Conversions Chart, 25



A MIDDLE EASTERN TABLE, 27

A Middle Eastern Menu, 28

APPETIZERS AND SIDE DISHERS, 31

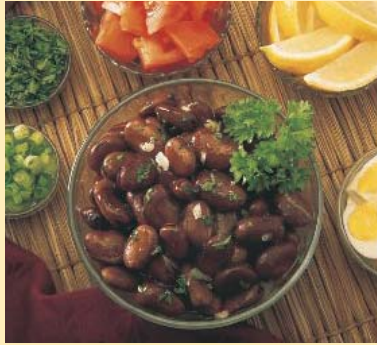
Chickpea and Tahini Dip, 32

Armenian Salad, 34

Cracked Wheat Pilaf, 35

Peasant Salad, 36

Baked Lamb and Bulgur, 38



MAIN DISHES, 41

Seasoned Fava Beans, 42

Chickpea Patties, 44

Spicy Fish Stew, 47

Lentils in Tomato Sauce, 48

Upside-Down Lamb and Eggplant, 50

Stuffed Vegetables, 52

DESSERTS, 55

Persian Nut Pastry, 56

Sweet Dates, 58

Semolina Cake, 59



HOLIDAY AND FESTIVAL FOOD, 61

Red Lentil Soup, 62

Potato Latkes, 63

Lamb in Yogurt Sauce, 64

Chicken in Walnut and
Pomegranate Sauce, 66

Sesame Cookies, 69

INDEX, 70





Introduction

The words “Middle East” can conjure up visions of hot sand, bright blue skies full of sun, and the distant outline of camel caravans trekking across a horizon hazy with heat. To many people, the Middle East is a distant, unfamiliar, and somewhat mysterious region with a history of violence and turmoil.

The region does indeed boast a long, intricate, sometimes violent history balanced with a vibrant modern culture. To many a hungry traveler, reader, or local, the Middle East is, above all else, the home of some of the world’s most delicious cooking. From hearty Egyptian bean dishes to the rich lamb entrees of Jordan and Lebanon and the simple pilafs of Armenia, this region’s cuisine offers something to please every palate. So take a trip into a far-off kitchen to discover how to cook the Middle Eastern way.

Lamb in yogurt sauce is the national dish of Jordan and is made for special occasions. (Recipe on pages 64–65.)



History

The Middle East has always been a somewhat loosely defined region. It is centered roughly on the land east of the Mediterranean Sea. Some descriptions of the area include most of North Africa, while others extend the region as far east as Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the nations most commonly considered part of the Middle East are Egypt (in North Africa) and Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Jordan,

Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Armenia, and Turkey (straddling southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia).

These countries represent a wide range of cultures, people, and geography. Traditions, manners, and landscapes vary from nation to nation. Yet they also share great similarities and form what is often called the “cradle of civilization.” This name comes from the fact that some of the world’s first societies emerged in the Middle East. As early as about 5000 B.C., settlements had appeared in the area that became modern Iraq. By about 3000 B.C., early civilizations were thriving in the area.

Similar cultures arose throughout the region, focused on three great rivers—the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Nile. The Tigris and Euphrates begin in the mountains of Turkey and flow through Syria and Iraq. The Nile flows through Egypt. For many centuries, criss-crossing trade routes tied the region together. Merchants carried new goods—and new ideas—between North Africa, eastern Asia, and all the lands in between. The region also became the birthplace of three world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The forces of conquest and empire also bound the area together. Between about 200 and 20 B.C., much of the region fell to the Roman Empire, a vast power founded in Rome. Later, in the A.D. 600s, the armies of the Islamic Empire began conquering the region. Founded by Muhammad, an Arab merchant who became the prophet of Islam, the empire was a great realm that rapidly rose and flourished in what later became Saudi Arabia. As it absorbed other lands and cultures, the empire adopted new ways. Islamic art, architecture, science, and literature grew to be among the richest in the world. The area was occasionally shaken by conflict. This conflict included the Crusades, a series of wars between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries waged by European Christians hoping to claim the region and to spread Christianity. All the same, the empire thrived for centuries. The Ottoman Empire—centered in modern-day Turkey—emerged in the 1300s as one of the strongest forces within the Islamic realm. Despite

This mosque (Islamic place of worship) in Baghdad, Iraq, is designed in the tradition of Islamic art and architecture.



growing European colonization of the region, the Ottomans controlled much of the Middle East until World War I (1914–1918).

Since then, the modern Middle East has struggled with war, poverty, and religious and social unrest. However, it remains a diverse and dynamic area that draws upon a rich past.

The Land and Its Food

Just as the many intertwining threads of history have helped define the Middle East, geography, too, affects the daily life of area populations. The rocky Anti-Lebanon Mountains run through Syria and Lebanon, while the dramatic Zagros Mountains cut across western

Iran. Living, traveling, or farming can be difficult in these rough, inaccessible regions. But along the flatter coastal plains that border the Mediterranean Sea, rain is more plentiful, landscapes are greener, and populations are denser.

Naturally, weather is one of the most important factors in how local residents live—and eat. While the region is not the uninterrupted desert that many people imagine, a good portion of it is very hot and dry. The Syrian Desert, shared by Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, meets the vast series of deserts stretching across Saudi Arabia and into Yemen and Oman. In other areas, important rivers such as the Tigris and the Euphrates help support thriving agricultural regions. Lebanon and Israel, for example, are famous for their sweet lemons and oranges. Egypt uses much of its farmland for high-quality cotton but also produces huge harvests of grains and staples including rice, wheat, beans, and corn. Not too far from the water, Jordanian farmers tend to crops of delicious melons, tomatoes, and olives. Deeper inland, where rain is scarcer, Iran and Iraq raise more resilient crops such as barley, nuts, and dates. And farther north, in Armenia and Turkey, local harvests include fruits such as apricots, figs, peaches, and grapes. Middle Eastern cooks are skilled at making the best use of their finest local produce.

Not surprisingly, the similarities and differences in locally grown crops across the Middle East have deeply influenced regional cuisine. Beans, rice, dates, and nuts show up again and again in typical dishes. The most commonly used meat is lamb, but chicken is also popular. Fresh fish and seafood are abundant in Israel, Lebanon, and other nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Beef, on the other hand, is rarely eaten, and the dominantly Muslim population does not eat pork for religious reasons.

Many of the region's most popular dishes are shared across national boundaries. Stuffed vegetables, or *mahshi*, for example, are served in nearly every Middle Eastern country. They are usually filled with a mixture of rice, lamb, and spices. However, individual areas may have their own specialties, and different cooks also add unique

Sacks of dried figs, dried apricots, rice and various beans and nuts stand ready for sale in Turkey.



twists to recipes, resulting in many creative ways to prepare the same basic dishes. Other common favorites are rice and cracked wheat pilafs, dressed with different ingredients according to local tastes. Soups of all kinds are also eaten throughout the region. Street vendors across most of the Middle East offer portable meals such as falafel (chickpea patties) and kebabs (grilled meat or vegetables on skewers). Kibbeh (a mixture of ground lamb, spices, and wheat kernels called bulgur), *baba ghannouj* (eggplant dip), and hummus (a strongly flavored chickpea dip) are also widely eaten, often accompanied by fresh pita, a round flat bread. Many Middle Easterners satisfy a sweet tooth with a bar of *halva* (a dense sweet made of honey and ground sesame seeds) or a piece of *baklava* (also spelled *baklawa* or *baghlava*), a honey-soaked dessert of thin, flaky, phyllo dough layered with nuts.

Other dishes are truly local, such as rich *khoresht fesenjan*, an Iranian delicacy of chicken served with a sauce of walnuts and pomegranate. This dish is rarely found outside Iran. Even so, its flavors are similar to those of other Middle Eastern foods, flavored as it is with favorite regional spices such as cinnamon and cardamom. *Koshari*, a filling dish of lentils, rice, and pasta in a rich tomato sauce, is another regional specialty, hailing from Egypt. *Yemeni salta* is a spicy dish of lamb or chicken stewed with beans and lentils and served over rice. Aleppo, Syria, is famous for its exceptional cuisine, and in the smaller Syrian town of Hama, local cooks prepare *halawat al-jibna*, dough stuffed with a creamy cheese filling and doused with sweet syrup. Together, these dishes create a connected but diverse and always surprising cuisine that delights diners near and far.

Holidays and Festivals

Although members of all religions call the Middle East home, by far the most common faith in the region is Islam. Its followers, called Muslims, celebrate major holidays including Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. The largest of these events is the holy month of Ramadan. During each day of Ramadan, most Muslims fast, eating nothing from sunup to sundown. While the month is one of reflection and worship, it is also a time of festivity in many countries of the Middle East. When the sun sets and the day's fast is broken, friends and family often gather to enjoy companionship and conversation along with the long-awaited evening meal. Traditionally, the first food to pass a Muslim's lips at the end of each day of Ramadan is a date, the same way that Prophet Muhammad was believed to have broken his fasts. This snack is frequently followed by a revitalizing soup such as *shourbet adas*, a hearty blend of red lentils, spices, and sometimes lamb. Other popular Ramadan dishes throughout the region include a host of sweets, such as *barazek* (sesame cookies) and *khonaf*, an Egyptian dessert made from a cereal

grain that resembles shredded wheat. The dish is usually stuffed with a nut filling or a creamy, sweet cheese filling.

The great festival Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan with three joyous days of feasting and merrymaking. Many Muslims celebrate by paying visits to family and friends, giving gifts, wearing brand-new clothes, and, of course, eating a great deal. Middle Eastern cooks prepare their finest dishes for the holiday, and regional specialties are the pride of local restaurants and households. In Jordan the *mansaf*—a dish of lamb cooked in a yogurt sauce and served over rice and pita bread—is a favorite choice for Eid al-Fitr.

Eid al-Adha is another important Islamic holiday. It is doubly festive, honoring both the return of Muslims from the annual hajj (a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia) and celebrating a story in the Quran (Islam's holy book). A long-honored Eid al-Adha tradition in many Middle Eastern nations is the roasting of a lamb. The meat is often shared with friends and family, as well as with strangers who might not be able to afford a feast of their own. In Saudi Arabia, where Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are the only two official holidays, residents enjoy meals of grilled chicken, *ful medames* (seasoned fava beans), and *shawarma* (spiced, spit-roasted lamb served in pita bread).

Israel is unique in the Middle East. The majority of Israel's population is Jewish. Important holidays in this nation include Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, and Passover. Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, falls on the first day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah is a joyful time that includes many special foods. To symbolize the cycle of the year and the hope for happiness in the coming year, Jews eat round foods, such as apples and a round bread called *challah*, and sweet foods, such as honey. Another traditional Rosh Hashanah food is pomegranates, which, with their many juice-filled seeds, symbolize plenty and wealth.

Hanukkah is another major occasion in Israel, celebrating an important story in Jewish tradition. After the Jews reclaimed the



Orthodox Jews gather at a lake in Israel to recite prayers on the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

temple in Jerusalem from invaders, they had only enough oil to light the temple's menorah (lamp) for one night. However, the oil lasted for eight nights, and as a result, Hanukkah lasts for eight days. To commemorate the miracle of the oil, fried foods are popular treats for this holiday. *Latkes*, a type of fried potato pancake, are a traditional Hanukkah dish, along with sugary fried doughnuts called *sufganiot*.

A significant Christian population is also scattered throughout the Middle East. One of the largest concentrations of Christians is in Armenia. There, in the 300s B.C., this ancient population became the first nation to officially adopt Christianity. Armenian Christians celebrate religious holidays including Easter and Christmas. Lent, the forty days before Easter, is a time of prayer and fasting, during which most people do not eat any meat or dairy products. A host of delicious vegetarian dishes emerged from this custom, many of them based on grains, such as cracked wheat and rice, and usually including stewed or sautéed vegetables. Lent ends with Easter, the holiest day of the Christian year. Easter Sunday is a time of worship but also of feasting and fun. Children and adults alike decorate eggs with colorful designs, and families and friends gather around tables for a great meal that usually focuses on a main course of lamb. Christmas is also an important occasion, again marked by church services,



The Souk al-Hamidiya in Damascus, Syria, has an exciting, busy atmosphere.

social visiting, and eating. A traditional Armenian dessert is *anoushabour*, a festive holiday pudding with raisins and nuts.

Syria is also home to a relatively large number of Christians. Throughout the year, colorful *souks* (outdoor markets) fill the streets of Damascus, the capital, and other cities. At Christmastime the merchants of these souks offer decorations and special holiday sweets to passing shoppers. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are celebrated with bonfires and songs. Christmas celebrations are also held in Israel. Although the nation's population is mostly Jewish, the region has great historical importance to Christianity. On Christmas Eve, Christians from around the region and around the world come to watch a dramatic procession through the streets of Bethlehem, the city where Jesus is believed to have been born.

Secular, or nonreligious, celebrations also play a role in the region's life. In Iran, for example, the New Year, called No Ruz, is one of the greatest national festivities. For the luckiest festivalgoers, the celebration includes baghlava. This Iranian version of the common dessert baklava is heavy on the spice cardamom and uses two different kinds of nuts. New Year's Day is also a big event in Turkey, where families gather to exchange gifts and share large holiday meals. In addition, some harvest festivals continue to be celebrated in a region that was once heavily dependent on farming. But regardless of the cause for celebration, a festive atmosphere, lively conversations, and great food are sure to be part of any special occasion in the Middle East.





Before You Begin

Middle Eastern cooking makes use of some ingredients that you may not know. Sometimes special cookware is used, too, although the recipes in this book can easily be prepared with ordinary utensils and pans.

The most important thing you need to know before you start is how to be a careful cook. On the following page, you'll find a few rules that will make your cooking experience safe, fun, and easy. Next, take a look at the “dictionary” of utensils, terms, and special ingredients. You may also want to read the list of tips on preparing healthy, low-fat meals.

When you've picked out a recipe to try, read through it from beginning to end. Now you are ready to shop for ingredients and to organize the cookware you will need. Once you have assembled everything, you're ready to begin cooking.

*Upside-down lamb and eggplant is a common dish in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.
(Recipe on pages 50–51.)*

The Careful Cook

Whenever you cook, there are certain safety rules you must always keep in mind. Even experienced cooks follow these rules when they are in the kitchen.

- Always wash your hands before handling food. Thoroughly wash all raw vegetables and fruits to remove dirt, chemicals, and insecticides. Wash uncooked poultry, fish, and meat under cold water.
- Use a cutting board when cutting up vegetables and fruits. Don't cut them up in your hand! And be sure to cut in a direction *away* from you and your fingers.
- Long hair or loose clothing can easily catch fire if brought near the burners of a stove. If you have long hair, tie it back before you start cooking.
- Turn all pot handles toward the back of the stove so that you will not catch your sleeves or jewelry on them. This is especially important when younger brothers and sisters are around. They could easily knock off a pot and get burned.
- Always use a pot holder to steady hot pots or to take pans out of the oven. Don't use a wet cloth on a hot pan because the steam it produces could burn you.
- Lift the lid of a steaming pot with the opening away from you so that you will not get burned.
- If you get burned, hold the burn under cold running water. Do not put grease or butter on it. Cold water helps to take the heat out, but grease or butter will only keep it in.
- If grease or cooking oil catches fire, throw baking soda or salt at the bottom of the flame to put it out. (Water will not put out a grease fire.) Call for help, and try to turn all the stove burners to "off."

Cooking Utensils

colander—A bowl with holes in the bottom and sides. It is used for draining liquid from a solid food.

food processor—An electric appliance with a blade that revolves inside a container to chop, mix, or blend food

garlic press—A plastic or metal tool used to crush a garlic clove into small pieces

grater—A utensil with sharp-edged holes, used to grate or shred food into small pieces

pastry brush—A small brush used for coating food or cooking equipment with melted butter or other liquids

slotted spoon—A spoon with small openings in the bowl. It is often used to remove solid food from a liquid.

spatula—A flat, thin utensil used to lift, toss, turn, or scoop up food

stockpot—A large, deep pot, often used for making soup

Cooking Terms

boil—To heat a liquid over high heat until bubbles form and rise rapidly to the surface

broil—To cook food directly under a heat source so that the side facing the heat cooks rapidly

brown—To cook food quickly over high heat so that the surface turns an even brown

cream—To beat one or more ingredients to a smooth consistency

garnish—To decorate a dish with small pieces of food, such as parsley springs

grate—To cut food into tiny pieces by rubbing it against a grater.

hard-boil—To boil an egg in its shell until both the yolk and the white are firm

knead—To work dough by pressing it with the palms, pushing it outward, and then pressing it over on itself

mince—To chop food into very small pieces

preheat—To allow an oven to warm up to a certain temperature before putting food in it

sauté—To fry quickly over high heat in oil or fat, stirring or turning the food to prevent burning

seed—To remove seeds from a food

simmer—To cook over low heat in liquid kept just below its boiling point. Bubbles may occasionally rise to the surface.

Special Ingredients

allspice—The berry of a West Indian tree, used whole or ground. The flavor of allspice resembles a combination of cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves.

bouillon cubes—Flavored cubes that can be used to make beef, chicken, fish, or vegetable stock

bulgur—Kernels of wheat that have been steamed, dried, and crushed. Bulgur is a staple food in the Middle East. Cracked wheat may be used as a substitute for bulgur.

cardamom—A spice of the ginger family, used in whole seeds or ground, that has a rich aroma and gives food a sweet, cool taste

cayenne pepper—Dried red chilies (hot peppers) ground to a powder

chickpeas—A type of legume with a nutlike flavor. Chickpeas, also called garbanzo beans, are available dried or canned.

coriander—An herb used dried and ground as a flavoring. Fresh coriander is known as cilantro.

cracked wheat—Wheat kernels that have been broken into smaller pieces. Cracked wheat can be replaced with bulgur.

cumin—The seeds of an herb in the parsley family, used ground or whole in cooking to give food a slightly hot flavor

dates—Small brown fruits of the tropical palm tree with sweet, tender flesh. They are often dried for eating and cooking.

garlic—A bulb that can be broken up into several sections called cloves. Before you chop a clove of garlic, remove the papery covering that surrounds it.

hummus—A thick dip made of ground chickpeas, spices, and a sesame seed paste called tahini

lentils—The flat, edible seeds of the lentil plant

olive oil—An oil made from pressed olives that is used in cooking and for dressing salads

phyllo—Paper-thin dough used in many Middle Eastern recipes

pine nut—The edible seed of certain pine trees

pita bread—Flat, round loaves of bread common throughout the Middle East. When baked, a puffed pocket of air forms in the center of the bread.

rose water—A liquid flavoring made from rose petals

semolina flour—Flour made from the gritty, grainlike portions of hard wheat

sumac—A spice made from the ground berries of a bush native to the Middle East. Sumac has a sharp, fruity taste and is available at most grocery stores and Middle Eastern markets.

tahini—A paste made from ground sesame seeds

tarragon—A fragrant, slightly sweet herb, used fresh or dried

turmeric—A ground spice made from the root of the turmeric plant. It turns food a brilliant yellow color and has a slightly bitter flavor.

Healthy and Low-Fat Cooking Tips

Many modern cooks are concerned about preparing healthy, low-fat meals. Fortunately, there are simple ways to reduce the fat content of most dishes. Here are a few general tips for adapting the recipes in this book. Throughout the book, you'll also find specific suggestions for individual recipes—and don't worry, they'll still taste delicious!

Many Middle Eastern recipes call for olive oil, an ingredient that adds delicious flavor but is high in fat. But the type of fat in olive oil (called monounsaturated fat) is healthier for your heart than the fats in most other oils, butter, and margarine. It is a good idea to prepare the recipe as written the first time, but once you are familiar with the original, you may want to experiment with the amount of oil you use. Sprinkling a little salt on vegetables brings out their natural juices, so less oil is needed. In some recipes, where oil is used to coat cookware, you can substitute a low-fat or nonfat cooking spray. It's a good idea to use a small, nonstick frying pan if you to use less oil. When recipes call for deep-frying in oil, you may want to experiment with baking the dish to reduce fat.

In recipes that call for butter, a common substitution is margarine. Before making this substitution, consider the recipe. If it is a dessert, it's often best to use butter.

Meat is another common source of fat. Some cooks like to replace ground beef or lamb with ground turkey. However, this does change the flavor. Buying extra-lean meats and trimming as much fat as possible is also an easy way to reduce fat. You may choose to omit meat altogether from some recipes. In some dishes, replacing meat with hearty vegetables or with meat substitutes can keep your dishes filling and satisfying.

There are many ways to prepare meals that are good for you and still taste great. As you become a more experienced cook, try experimenting with recipes and substitutions.

METRIC CONVERSIONS

Cooks in the United States measure both liquid and solid ingredients using standard containers based on the 8-ounce cup and the tablespoon. These measurements are based on volume, while the metric system of measurement is based on both weight (for solids) and volume (for liquids). To convert from U.S. fluid tablespoons, ounces, quarts, and so forth to metric liters is a straightforward conversion, using the chart below. However, since solids have different weights—one cup of rice does not weigh the same as one cup of grated cheese, for example—many cooks who use the metric system have kitchen scales to weigh different ingredients. The chart below will give you a good starting point for basic conversions to the metric system.

MASS (weight)

1 ounce (oz.)	=	28.0 grams (g)
8 ounces	=	227.0 grams
1 pound (lb.)		
or 16 ounces	=	0.45 kilograms (kg)
2.2 pounds	=	1.0 kilogram

LIQUID VOLUME

1 teaspoon (tsp.)	=	5.0 milliliters (ml)
1 tablespoon (tbsp.)	=	15.0 milliliters
1 fluid ounce (oz.)	=	30.0 milliliters
1 cup (c.)	=	240 milliliters
1 pint (pt.)	=	480 milliliters
1 quart (qt.)	=	0.95 liters (l)
1 gallon (gal.)	=	3.80 liters

PAN SIZES

8-inch cake pan	=	20 x 4-centimeter cake pan
9-inch cake pan	=	23 x 3.5-centimeter cake pan
11 x 7-inch baking pan	=	28 x 18-centimeter baking pan
13 x 9-inch baking pan	=	32.5 x 23-centimeter baking pan
9 x 5-inch loaf pan	=	23 x 13-centimeter loaf pan
2-quart casserole	=	2-liter casserole

LENGTH

¼ inch (in.)	=	0.6 centimeters (cm)
½ inch	=	1.25 centimeters
1 inch	=	2.5 centimeters

TEMPERATURE

212°F	=	100°C (boiling point of water)
225°F	=	110°C
250°F	=	120°C
275°F	=	135°C
300°F	=	150°C
325°F	=	160°C
350°F	=	180°C
375°F	=	190°C
400°F	=	200°C

(To convert temperature in Fahrenheit to Celsius, subtract 32 and multiply by .56)





A Middle Eastern Table

In a region as large and diverse as the Middle East, there is no one way to enjoy a meal or to prepare a table for dining. In the past, the custom in most countries was to eat a small breakfast, a large afternoon or midday meal, and a late, lighter dinner. But modern daily eating schedules and habits vary. However, one notable trait shared by cooks and hosts throughout the area is their great hospitality. A Middle Eastern table is always large enough for an extra guest or two, and all are treated with warmth and generosity. Every visitor is offered a hot cup of spiced or sweetened coffee or tea, along with as much food as he or she can eat. And just as the host's offer is a gesture of politeness, it would be almost unthinkable for the guest to refuse.

Beyond the home and the family table, the street is a great place for eating and socializing in the Middle East. Most cities and towns have their share of local vendors serving sweet and savory delights to hungry passersby. These snacks offer the perfect chance to share a quick bite with an old friend or to make new acquaintances through a common love of good food and good company.

An Iraqi family gathers for a predawn meal during Ramadan. They will fast for the rest of the day and eat another meal after sunset.

A Middle Eastern Menu

Below are suggested menus for a vegetarian lunch and a meat-based dinner, along with shopping lists of the ingredients you'll need to prepare these meals. These are just a few possible combinations of dishes and flavors. As you gain more experience with Middle Eastern cooking, you may enjoy designing your own menus and meal plans.

LUNCH

Chickpea and tahini dip (hummus) with pita bread

Chickpea patties (falafel)

Sesame cookies

SHOPPING LIST:

Produce

2 lemons
1 small bunch fresh parsley
2 small onions
2 small tomatoes
garlic

Dairy/Egg/Meat

4 oz. plain yogurt
1 c. (2 sticks) butter

Canned/Bottled/Boxed

15-oz. can chickpeas
1 jar tahini
1 small bottle lemon juice
1 small jar honey
1 small bottle olive oil

Miscellaneous

1 package pita bread
1½ c. dried chickpeas
1 c. sesame seeds
2 tbsp. pistachios
flour
sugar
baking soda
baking powder
cumin
coriander
paprika
cayenne pepper
salt
black pepper

DINNER

Cracked wheat pilaf

Chicken in walnut and pomegranate sauce

Sweet dates

SHOPPING LIST:

Produce

3 medium onions
1 lemon
1 lb. pitted dates

Dairy/Egg/Meat

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (1 to 1½ lb.)
1 c. (2 sticks) butter

Canned/Bottled/Boxed

1 16-oz. can chicken or beef broth
1 small jar pomegranate molasses or syrup, or unsweetened cranberry juice concentrate
1 small bottle olive oil

Miscellaneous

1 c. cracked wheat
2 c. walnuts
all-purpose flour
sugar
powdered sugar
cinnamon
cardamom
turmeric
nutmeg
salt
black pepper





Appetizers and Side Dishes

No Middle Eastern meal is quite complete without an enormous spread of appetizers. This preliminary feast, called *meze*, can include small dishes such as olives, hummus and other dips, spiced kofta (grilled meatballs) or marinated kebabs, salads, roasted vegetables, spreads, cheeses, and plenty of fresh, warm bread. Lebanon is especially famous for its meze, and on special occasions, a typical Lebanese table might hold as many as thirty or more different dishes to choose from.

In addition to the appetizers, a variety of side dishes accompany Middle Eastern meals. Soups are extremely popular and may be served before or with the main course. Simple but hearty grain dishes, such as cracked wheat pilaf, provide a nice balance to spicier entrées and can also be adapted to serve as main courses themselves. As a whole, these versatile and varied dishes provide the region's cooks with great flexibility in preparing the day's meals.

Baked lamb and bulgur (lower left) and Armenian salad (top right) are just two of many dishes that can be prepared for a Middle Eastern meze. (Recipes on pages 38–39 and on page 34.)

Chickpea and Tahini Dip/ *Hummus bi Tahini (All Middle East)*

Hummus is one of the most famous and most popular of all Middle Eastern meze, and it is eaten at all times of day as a snack or even a meal in itself. Local cooks often serve it with attractive garnishes, such as pomegranate seeds or chopped green onions.

- 1 15-oz. can chickpeas
- 2 to 3 tbsp. tahini*
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed with a garlic press or the back of a spoon
- juice of 1 large lemon (about 3 tbsp.), or more to taste
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. cumin
- 1 to 2 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tsp. paprika, cayenne pepper, or cumin
- 2 tsp. olive oil

1. Reserve the liquid from the canned chickpeas. Combine chickpeas, tahini, crushed garlic, lemon juice, salt, and cumin in a blender or food processor. Add 2 to 3 tbsp. of the reserved chickpea liquid and process at medium or “puree” speed until mixture is a smooth paste. Add more chickpea liquid or water if necessary to get a moist, spreadable dip.
2. Place hummus in a wide, shallow serving dish. Garnish with parsley and sprinkle with paprika, cayenne, or cumin. Drizzle olive oil over all and serve with pita bread.**

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Serves 4

*Tahini is available in Middle Eastern, Greek, and Asian groceries or in the international or gourmet section of many supermarkets. This ingredient has a very strong flavor, so add according to your tastes.

**For a creamier hummus, stir in ¼ c. plain yogurt or 1 tbsp. olive oil before serving. For an added crunch, top with ¼ c. lightly sautéed pine nuts or walnut pieces.



Armenian Salad/*Heygagan Salata (Armenia)*

This zesty salad has a fresh flavor and a satisfying crunch. The dressing is so delicious that many cooks provide diners with spoons as well as forks, so as not to waste any!

Salad:

- 2 medium tomatoes, chopped
- 1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped*
- 3 green onions, finely chopped
- ½ green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- ½ red bell pepper, seeded and chopped

1. Combine tomatoes, cucumber, onions, and green and red bell peppers in a large bowl.
2. In a second bowl, combine all dressing ingredients and mix well with a fork or whisk.
3. Pour dressing over chopped vegetables. Use hands to mix well, and serve.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Serves 4

Dressing:

- 1 tsp. ground sumac
- 2 tsp. dried mint
- 1 tbsp. dried tarragon
- ⅓ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp. white vinegar
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- ½ c. olive oil
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

**To seed a cucumber, cut it in half the long way. Use a spoon to scoop out the soft seeds in the middle of each half.*

Cracked Wheat Pilaf/ Tzavari Yeghintz (Armenia, Turkey)

This simple, hearty side dish is common in Armenia, Turkey, and other nations in the northern part of the Middle East. Although this recipe is for the most basic pilaf, the dish can easily be dressed up with tomatoes, lentils, chickpeas, chunks of meat, or anything else that sounds good to you.

- 3 tbsp. olive oil or butter
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 c. cracked wheat
- 2 c. (16 oz.) canned chicken or beef broth*
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper to taste

1. Place olive oil or butter in a saucepan or deep skillet over medium heat. Add onions and sauté 3 to 5 minutes, or until soft but not brown.
2. Add cracked wheat to pan and sauté 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Add broth, salt, and pepper. Raise heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium low and cover. Simmer 15 to 20 minutes, or until all the broth has been absorbed and cracked wheat is tender.
3. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, 5 to 10 minutes longer. Serve hot.

Preparation time: 5 minutes
Cooking time: 25 to 35 minutes
(plus 5 to 10 minutes standing time)
Serves 4

*To make a completely vegetarian pilaf, simply substitute vegetable broth for the chicken or beef broth. Armenian cooks make this substitution during the meatless fast of Lent before Easter.

Peasant Salad/Fattoush (Lebanon)

A favorite in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East, fattoush is quick, simple, and fresh. Although some recipes call for the pita bread to be fried, this version uses broiled pita instead for a lighter dish.

Dressing:

- 1 clove garlic
- ¼ tsp. salt
- juice of 2 lemons (about 6 tbsp.)
- ⅓ c. olive oil

Salad:

- 2 pieces of stale pita bread
- 1 tbsp. water
- 1 cucumber, peeled and chopped
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 1 green pepper, seeded and chopped
- 3 green onions, finely chopped
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- ½ c. chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ c. chopped fresh mint
- 1 c. finely chopped fresh spinach, washed well under cold water
- ½ head Romaine lettuce, finely chopped

1. To make dressing, crush garlic clove with a garlic press or the back of a spoon. In a small bowl, combine garlic and salt and stir to form a paste. Add lemon juice and olive oil, mix well, and set aside.
2. Turn broiler on to medium heat. Place pitas on a cookie sheet and place under the broiler. Toast each side for 3 to 5 minutes, or until crisp and lightly browned. (If you don't have a broiler, cut pitas in half and toast in a regular toaster.) Break pitas into bite-sized pieces and sprinkle with 1 tbsp. water.
3. In a large bowl, toss remaining ingredients with pita. Sprinkle with dressing, toss again, and serve immediately.*

Preparation time: 15 to 20 minutes
Serves 4 to 6

*For a simple twist on fattoush, add 2 tbsp. crumbled feta cheese to the salad before tossing.



Baked Lamb and Bulgur/ *Kibbeh (All Middle East)*

Kibbeh is an almost required dish on meze tables in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Armenia, and beyond. Regional cooks have dozens of variations on the basic recipe that follows.

1 c. bulgur*
3 c. cold water
½ lb. lean ground lamb or beef
1 small onion, finely chopped
½ tsp. cayenne pepper
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
¼ tsp. cinnamon
⅛ tsp. allspice
⅛ tsp. ground ginger
¼ tsp. ground coriander
¼ tsp. ground cumin
ice water
¼ c. pine nuts or walnut halves
2 tbsp. olive oil

1. Place bulgur and water in a large bowl and set aside for at least 30 minutes.
2. Transfer bulgur to a colander and rinse under cold running water. Squeeze well to remove excess water and set aside.
3. In large mixing bowl, combine lamb, onions, and spices. Knead mixture until it forms a smooth paste.
4. Put a few ice cubes in a small glass of water. Knead bulgur into meat, adding small amounts of ice water when needed to keep mixture smooth.
5. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
6. Preheat oven to 400°F and thoroughly grease a 9×13-in. baking pan.
7. Stir pine nuts into chilled lamb mixture, reserving a few nuts for garnish. Spread mixture evenly in baking pan.

8. Use a sharp knife to make four lengthwise cuts, evenly spaced, without cutting all the way through meat. Next make diagonal cuts the same width to make diamond-shaped portions. (Again, do not cut all the way through the meat.)
9. Sprinkle remaining pine nuts over kibbeh and lightly drizzle olive oil over all.
10. Bake kibbeh on the oven's bottom rack for 30 minutes. Then move pan to top rack and bake another 10 minutes. Serve hot or cold with a green salad.

Preparation time: 30 to 40 minutes
(plus 30 minutes soaking time and overnight chilling time)

Baking time: 40 minutes

Serves 4

*Look for bulgur in the bulk foods section of your supermarket or grocery store. If they don't carry it, check at health food stores or at specialty Middle Eastern markets. You may also substitute cracked wheat for bulgur. Follow the same preparation steps.





Main Dishes

The true diversity of Middle Eastern cooking is probably best illustrated by its main dishes. Some are as simple as shakshouka (eggs and tomatoes) or the ever-present ful, a dish of seasoned beans. Others, such as the layered maqluba of meat, tomatoes, and rice, require more careful preparation and are perfect for special occasions or entertaining. In addition, many of the region's dishes are vegetarian, offering tasty and healthy alternatives to meat entrées.

This range of options gives Middle Eastern cooks great flexibility. That flexibility is a trait that stretches back to the days when many of the region's people were nomadic and moved from place to place rather than having permanent homes. Depending upon what ingredients are on hand, what looks best at the market, or how much time he or she has, a local cook can prepare whatever fits the day's schedule and supplies best—and still serve a delicious meal.

Falafel, or chickpea patties, are a common meal in countries throughout the Middle East. (Recipe on pages 44–45.)

Seasoned Fava Beans/Ful Medames (Egypt)

Often called the national dish of Egypt, ful medames and its variations are also widely popular in other Middle Eastern nations. This versatile dish can be prepared very simply and then seasoned to each individual diner's taste.

- 1 18-oz. can fava beans, drained
- 6 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed with a garlic press or the back of a spoon
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- ½ c. fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 hard-boiled eggs, chopped or cut into wedges
- 2 lemons, cut into wedges
- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 green onions, chopped

1. Place beans in a large saucepan and heat over medium heat. Stir in 2 tbsp. of the olive oil plus lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper, and ¼ c. of the parsley. Cook until heated through and steaming slightly, about 6 to 8 minutes.
2. Serve beans in individual bowls. Place hard-boiled eggs, lemon wedges, tomatoes, green onions, and the remaining olive oil and parsley in small bowls on the table, allowing diners to garnish and season as they like.*

Preparation and cooking time: 20 to 30 minutes
Serves 4

*Other popular toppings and sides for ful are chopped cucumbers, cayenne pepper, cumin, and pickled vegetables.



Chickpea Patties/ Falafel (All the Middle East)

Sandwiches of these tasty fried patties are classic Middle Eastern street food, seemingly available on every corner. Although some versions use fava beans in addition to chickpeas, most recipes use only chickpeas. Falafel can be made with canned chickpeas or with a packaged mix, but fresh falafel has the best texture and flavor.

1½ c. dried chickpeas
2 tsp. baking soda
2 small onions, chopped
3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
2 tsp. ground cumin
2 tsp. ground coriander
½ c. fresh parsley, chopped
1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. black pepper
⅛ tsp. cayenne pepper (optional)
½ c. plain yogurt
2 tbsp. tahini
1 tsp. lemon juice
olive or vegetable oil for frying*
3 large pita pieces, cut in half
2 small tomatoes, chopped

1. Place chickpeas in a large bowl or baking dish with 1 tsp. of the baking soda and cover with water. Refrigerate and leave to soak for 24 hours.
2. Drain chickpeas in a colander. Rub them lightly between your hands to remove skins. Rinse well.
3. Combine chickpeas, half the chopped onions, 2 cloves of garlic, and all of the cumin, coriander, parsley, salt, pepper, and cayenne (if using) in a food processor or blender. Process until the mixture becomes a thick, smooth paste.
4. Transfer mixture to a large bowl and add remaining tsp. of baking soda. Cover and let sit, unrefrigerated, for 30 minutes.
5. To make tahini sauce, combine yogurt, tahini, lemon juice, and 1 clove garlic. Stir with a whisk until well blended. Cover and chill.

6. Use your hands to form chickpea mixture into patties about 2 inches in diameter and $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick.
7. Pour about 2 inches of oil into a saucepan or deep frying pan. Heat over medium heat, until oil bubbles slightly when you dip a corner of a falafel patty into it. Carefully use a slotted spoon to place as many patties in the pan as fit comfortably. Fry 2 minutes on each side, or until golden brown. Remove from oil and place on paper towels to drain.
8. To serve, fill the pocket of each pita half with 2 or 3 patties, some chopped onion and tomato, and a bit of tahini sauce.

Preparation time: 30 minutes
(plus overnight soaking and 30 minutes sitting time)
Cooking time: 30 to 45 minutes
Serves 4 to 6

**To reduce fat, you can broil falafel instead of frying. Place patties on a cookie sheet and broil for 20 minutes, turning them over once about halfway through. Remove from broiler and lightly brush both sides of each patty with olive oil. Return to the broiler and cook 2 minutes on each side, or until golden and crispy. If you do choose to use oil, remember that cooking with hot oil is simple and safe as long as you're careful. Always have an adult help you. Be sure to use long-handled utensils whenever possible. Stand back from the stove as far as you can and try to place falafel patties into oil slowly to avoid splattering.*



Spicy Fish Stew / *Yahknit el Samak el Harrah* (Syria, Lebanon, Israel)

This simple but flavorful stew is common in the Middle Eastern nations that border the Mediterranean Sea. Any firm white fish, such as cod, haddock, or halibut, will work for this dish.

4 tbsp. olive oil
1 to 1½ lb. skinned fish fillets (fresh
or frozen and thawed)
1 large onion, chopped
6 cloves garlic, minced
10 c. water or fish stock made from
bouillon cubes
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper*
¼ tsp. cumin
¼ c. cilantro, chopped
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
juice of 1 large lemon

1. Heat oil in a deep stockpot over medium heat. Add fish fillets and sauté 5 minutes, turning fish once or twice. Add onions and garlic and sauté 3 to 5 minutes more, or until onions are soft but not brown.
2. Reduce heat to low and allow to cool slightly. Carefully add water or fish stock to pot. Stir in cayenne, cumin, cilantro, salt, and black pepper. Return heat to medium and bring mixture to a simmer. Cover and cook 30 minutes or until fish is tender and flaky.
3. Add lemon juice and more salt and pepper if necessary. Remove pot from heat and allow to sit 20 minutes or until cool. Refrigerate another 40 minutes and serve cold.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 45 minutes
(plus 1 hour chilling time)
Serves 4 to 6

*If you are not used to eating spicy foods, you may want to start with ⅛ tsp. cayenne and gradually increase the spice to your taste.

Lentils in Tomato Sauce / Koshari (Egypt)

This filling, spicy dish is an Egyptian classic.

- 1½ c. dry brown lentils
- 4 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 5 c. water
- 1½ c. uncooked basmati or other long-grain rice
- 1½ c. uncooked elbow macaroni or other small pasta
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 14-oz. can diced or crushed tomatoes
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- ⅛ tsp. cayenne pepper (or to taste)
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

1. Place lentils in a deep dish with enough water to cover by at least 2 inches. Soak overnight. Drain in a colander and rinse well.
2. Place half of the oil in a stockpot over medium heat. Add half of the onions, and sauté 3 to 5 minutes.
3. Add lentils and water to pot. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer 30 minutes.
4. Add rice and simmer 20 minutes. Add macaroni and simmer 10 minutes. Add ¼-cup more water at a time if water is absorbed before ingredients are tender.
5. While macaroni is cooking, place remaining oil in a deep skillet. Heat over medium heat. Add garlic and the remaining onions. Sauté 3 to 5 minutes. Add tomatoes, coriander, cumin, cayenne, salt, and pepper. Stir well and simmer 15 minutes.
6. To serve, place the lentil mixture in a large serving dish. Top with tomato sauce and serve.*

*Some Egyptian cooks like to top their koshari with extra fried onions. If you'd like to try this variation, cut 1 small onion into thin slivers. Heat 3 tbsp. olive oil over medium heat and sauté onions 10 to 12 minutes, or until dark brown and crispy. Scatter fried onions over tomato sauce.

Preparation time: 10 minutes
(plus overnight soaking time)
Cooking time: 1 hour 15 minutes
Serves 4 to 6



Upside-Down Lamb and Eggplant/ *Maqluba (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan)*

The way this dish is served, flipped over onto a serving platter, gives it its name—maqluba means “upside-down” in Arabic—the main language of the Middle East. Although most versions of the recipe call for the eggplant to be fried, broiling it reduces the fat, and it still tastes great.

2 large eggplants
salt for sprinkling, plus ½ tsp.
1 c. rice
3 c. water
3 to 4 tbsp. olive oil for brushing
2 tbsp. olive oil
¼ c. pine nuts
¼ c. slivered or halved almonds
(optional)
1 lb. lean lamb, cut into bite-sized
cubes*
1 large onion, chopped (optional)
½ tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. allspice
¼ tsp. coriander
¼ tsp. cumin
¼ tsp. black pepper

1. Slice eggplants the long way into ½-inch-thick oblongs. Remove skin, sprinkle eggplant with salt, and place in a colander. Let sit 30 minutes.
2. Boil the water. Place rice in a medium mixing bowl. Pour half of boiling water over rice and let sit.
3. Turn broiler on to medium heat. Rinse eggplant well and pat dry. Brush olive oil lightly on both sides of each slice and place in a single layer on a baking sheet. Place in broiler and cook 2 to 4 minutes on each side. Remove from broiler.
4. Heat 2 tbsp. olive oil in a deep skillet over medium heat. Add pine nuts and almonds (if using). Cook, stirring often, 3 to 5 minutes. Add lamb and sauté 5 to 6 minutes, or until browned on all sides. Add onions (if using), and all spices. Mix thoroughly and sauté 5 to 6 minutes.
5. Lightly oil a stockpot, preferably one with two handles. Place half of the lamb mixture in a layer on the

bottom of the pot. Cover lamb with half the eggplant slices. Drain rice and spoon it evenly over eggplant. Add remaining meat and top with remaining eggplant.

6. Pour remaining 1½ cups hot water into stockpot. Place over medium low heat and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook 30 minutes, or until liquid has been absorbed and rice is tender. Remove from heat and let sit 5 minutes.
7. To serve, place a large platter over the opening of the pot. Have an adult help you lift the pot and turn it upside-down on top of the platter. Let sit 5 minutes before carefully removing the pot to reveal the maqluba, which will be molded in a cake form. Serve immediately.

Preparation time: 30 to 45 minutes
(plus 40 minutes sitting time)
Cooking time: 1 hour
Serves 4 to 6

**This dish can also be made with ground lamb or beef or cubed chicken. You can also make a vegetarian maqluba. Reduce the amount of water to 2 c. and, in place of meat, sauté 15 oz. canned chopped tomatoes with onions and nuts in Step 4.*

Stuffed Vegetables/Mahshi (All Middle East)

Like so many Middle Eastern dishes, stuffed vegetables are popular across the region, but recipes vary from cook to cook and country to country. For variations, try substituting cooked lentils or beans, or tofu for the meat.

- 2 eggplants or 4 zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers, or onions*
- ¾ c. uncooked rice
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- ½ lb. lean ground lamb or beef
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ⅓ c. pine nuts (optional)
- 8-oz. can crushed tomatoes
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. allspice
- ¼ c. fresh parsley, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

1. Prepare vegetables for stuffing.
2. Rinse rice well in a colander under running water. Place in a bowl, cover with warm water, and soak.
3. Heat olive oil in a large, deep skillet over medium-high heat. Add meat. Using a spatula or spoon to break up any lumps, cook 5 minutes, or until meat begins to brown. Add onion, garlic, and pine nuts (if using) to pan and sauté 3 to 5 minutes more.
4. Add tomatoes, cinnamon, allspice, parsley, salt, and pepper. Mix well, cover pan, and simmer 10 minutes.
5. Drain rice and add to pan. Cook, stirring occasionally, 15 to 20 minutes longer.
6. Fill vegetables of your choice. Place stuffed veggies in a baking dish with ½ c. water and cover with aluminum foil. Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes.

*To stuff any of these vegetables, either cut in half the long way (for eggplant and zucchini) or cut off one end or the top for tomatoes and peppers. Scoop out the vegetable's center, including any seeds, and fill with the meat stuffing. If you like, you can mix some of the removed veggie with the filling.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 1 hour 20 minutes
Serves 4







Desserts

Many countries of the Middle East enjoy abundant harvests of fruits such as dates, pomegranates, peaches, figs, and grapes. A daily meal usually ends with a simple yet delicious plate of fresh fruits.

However, the average Middle Eastern diner has a great sweet tooth, and local bakers and cooks also prepare an array of elaborate desserts, especially around holidays. Typical ingredients are honey, dates, and nuts. Baklava and a host of other delectable pastries are made with phyllo dough and drenched in a thick, sugary syrup, and the flavors of cinnamon and cardamom are prominent in many sweets. Rose water is another popular addition, and its intense taste gives Middle Eastern desserts a highly distinctive flavor.

Sweet dates, drenched in a buttery sauce and sprinkled with powdered sugar, make a perfect finish to a Middle Eastern meal. (Recipe on page 58.)

Persian Nut Pastry/Baghlava (Iran)

Baghlava is one of the most common Middle Eastern desserts, and it is found on menus from Turkey to Egypt. However, recipes do vary slightly from country to country. This one is a traditional Persian (Iranian) version of the sweet. Other recipes replace the cardamom with cinnamon and use one layer of nuts—usually walnuts or pistachios—in place of the two different layers called for here.

Pastry:

- 1 c. ground almonds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ c. sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cardamom
- 1 c. ground pistachios, plus $1\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. finely chopped pistachios for garnish
- 4 tbsp. ($\frac{1}{2}$ stick) butter, melted
- 6 large sheets phyllo dough, thawed*

Syrup:

- $\frac{3}{4}$ c. sugar
- 6 tbsp. water
- 2 tbsp. rose water

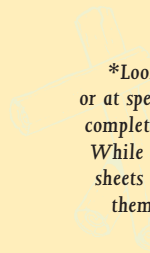
1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. In a medium mixing bowl, combine almonds with 6 tbsp. of the sugar and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. of the cardamom. In a second bowl, combine pistachios with remaining sugar and cardamom. Set aside.
3. Brush an 11×7-inch baking dish with melted butter. Place one layer of phyllo dough in dish and use a pastry brush to brush dough with butter. Add another layer, also brushing this one with butter.
4. Spread the almond mixture in an even layer over pastry. Add another sheet of phyllo and brush it with butter. Add the pistachios in a layer over the dough. Add the last two sheets of phyllo, buttering each one before you place it on top of the pistachio mixture.
5. Use a fork to prick small holes in the baghlava's surface. Place in oven and bake 20 to 30 minutes, or until golden brown.

6. While baghlava is baking, prepare syrup. Place sugar and water in a saucepan over high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce heat slightly and boil gently for 15 minutes. Remove promptly from heat and stir in rose water.
7. Remove baghlava from oven. Use a sharp knife to cut it into small diamond-shaped pieces. Pour syrup over all and sprinkle with pistachios.

Preparation time: 35 to 45 minutes

Cooking time: 35 minutes

Makes about 40 pieces



*Look for frozen phyllo at your grocery store or at specialty markets. Before using phyllo, thaw it completely by following directions on the package. While working with the dough, keep the stack of sheets covered with a damp cloth. This will keep them moist and flexible and make them less likely to tear or crack.

Sweet Dates/Rangina (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait)

This simple dish is easy to make and delightful to eat.

1 lb. fresh, pitted dates

½ c. (1 stick) butter

¾ c. all-purpose flour

1 tsp. ground cardamom or 2 tsp.
cinnamon

¼ c. powdered sugar for sprinkling

1. Divide dates among 6 individual dessert bowls.
2. Place butter in a small saucepan and melt over medium heat. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly with a whisk, 2 to 3 minutes, or until flour is golden brown but not burnt. Add cardamom or cinnamon, stir, and remove from heat. Let sit 2 to 3 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Pour butter mixture over dates, dividing it equally among dishes. Allow to sit 15 minutes, or until cool. Dust lightly with powdered sugar and serve.

Preparation and cooking time: 10 minutes
(plus 15 minutes cooling time)
Serves 6

Semolina Cake/Basboosa (Egypt)

This sweet, dense cake is an Egyptian specialty. It is popular at Ramadan but is also enjoyed year-round. If you have trouble finding semolina flour, you can substitute Cream of Wheat®.

Cake:

- butter for greasing a pan, plus ½ c.
(1 stick) unsalted butter, melted
- flour for dusting
- ½ c. sugar
- ¼ c. semolina flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ c. almonds, slivered, plus 1 to 2
tbsp. halved almonds
- ⅔ c. plain nonfat yogurt

Syrup:

- 1 c. water
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 c. sugar
- 2 tsp. rose water (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Use butter to grease a 9×9-inch baking pan. Dust pan with flour.
2. In a large mixing bowl, cream sugar and butter. Add semolina, baking powder, and slivered almonds. Mix well. Add yogurt and mix.
3. Spread cake batter in prepared pan. Using a sharp knife, carefully cut batter into squares or diamonds. Press half of an almond into the top of each piece.
4. Bake 30 to 40 minutes, or until cake is golden brown.
5. Combine water, lemon juice, sugar, and rose water (if using) in a saucepan and boil over medium heat for 5 minutes, or until sugar is completely dissolved. Remove from heat to cool.
6. Remove cake from oven. Pour syrup slowly over the hot cake. Allow to cool before serving.*

**Cooks in Egypt and throughout the region prepare different versions of basboosa. Some cooks add ½ c. coconut or 1 tsp. vanilla extract to the batter, while others add 1 tsp. ground cardamom to the syrup. You may also want to substitute walnuts, pistachios, or hazelnuts for the almonds.*

Preparation time: 35 to 45 minutes

Baking time: 30 to 40 minutes

Serves 12





Holiday and Festival Food

Every Middle Eastern meal is an occasion in itself, with a focus on fresh ingredients and friendly company. However, holidays and other special events always bring out the best in regional cooks and their culinary creations. Specialties, such as the Jordanian mansaf and other local favorites, are carefully prepared. Cooks are proud to serve their very finest dishes to family and friends.

Tradition plays a large role in customary holiday dishes such as the classic shourbet adas. Soups are especially popular during Ramadan and other Islamic celebrations, as the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have eaten soup at the end of fasting. Jewish holiday foods are equally bound to tradition, and the potato latkes enjoyed at Hanukkah have religious symbolism. A holiday meal in the Middle East is not only nourishing and delicious, but also deeply meaningful.

Potato latkes are commonly made during the Jewish holiday Hanukkah. (Recipe on page 63.)

Red Lentil Soup/ Shourbet Adas (throughout the Middle East)

This flavorful soup is a long-standing Ramadan tradition, often used to break the day's fast in countries throughout the Middle East. Some cooks like to add cubed lamb, but this vegetarian version is just as common.

- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 c. red lentils, rinsed well and drained
- 6 c. water
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 2 tbsp. fresh parsley, chopped

1. Place olive oil in a large stockpot and heat over medium heat. Add onions and sauté 3 to 5 minutes, or until soft but not brown.
2. Add lentils and water and stir well. Raise heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, cover, and simmer for 45 minutes to 1 hour, or until lentils are tender.
3. Remove soup from heat and let it cool slightly. Pour soup into a blender and process until smooth. (If all of the soup does not fit in the blender, you can process it in two or more batches.) Return processed soup to stockpot. Add cinnamon, salt, and pepper, stir well, and heat through. Serve hot and garnish with fresh parsley.

**This simple shourbet has dozens of variations. Feel free to add whatever you have handy, such as cooked rice, chickpeas, sliced carrots, pieces of toasted bread, or whatever else sounds good to you. For a smooth soup, add these additional ingredients before blending in Step 3. For a chunkier soup, add after blending.*

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 1 to 1¼ hours

Serves 4

Potato Latkes (Israel)

These crispy little pancakes are an old favorite for Hanukkah meals. They can be served as an appetizer, side dish, or even main course.

4 baking potatoes, scrubbed
thoroughly and peeled
1 small onion, peeled
1 egg, beaten
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
2½ tbsp. flour
vegetable oil for frying
applesauce, powdered sugar, or
sour cream and chopped parsley
for topping (optional)

1. Shred potatoes with a grater. Use your hands to squeeze as much liquid out of potatoes as possible and place them in a large mixing bowl.
2. Grate onion into the same bowl. Add egg, salt, pepper, and flour to bowl and mix well.
3. Pour oil about ¼-inch deep in a wide skillet. Heat over medium heat.
4. For each pancake, drop 2 or 3 tbsp. of potato mixture into hot oil. Use a spatula to flatten each one slightly. Fry latkes 4 to 5 minutes on each side, or until golden brown. Carefully remove latkes from oil and drain on paper towels.* Repeat with remaining potato mixture.
5. Serve warm. If desired, top with applesauce, powdered sugar, or sour cream and chopped parsley.

*For cooking safely with hot oil, see tip on page 45. To keep latkes warm while you make the rest, spread them out on a baking sheet and place in a 200°F oven. If you have a second layer of latkes, place paper towels between the layers.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 30 to 45 minutes
Serves 4 to 6 (makes 20 to 30 latkes)

Lamb in Yogurt Sauce / Mansaf (Jordan)

Mansaf is considered the national dish of Jordan, and it is often served for festive occasions of all sorts, including weddings and important holidays such as Eid al-Fitr. In Jordan the yogurt sauce is usually made with dried goat-milk yogurt or whey that has been cooked with water, but plain yogurt will work as well.

- 1 lb. lean lamb, cut into bite-sized chunks*
- 1 onion, chopped
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 1½ c. medium or long-grain rice
- ¼ c. (½ stick) butter
- 3 c. hot water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 c. plain yogurt
- 4 to 6 pieces pita or other flat bread

1. Place lamb in a large saucepan or stockpot with chopped onions and enough water to cover. Bring to a simmer, add salt and pepper, and cover. Simmer 1 hour, or until meat is cooked all the way through.
2. When lamb has cooked about 40 minutes, prepare rice. Rinse rice in water until water runs almost clear. In a saucepan or a wide, deep skillet, heat butter over medium heat until melted. Add rice, stirring well to coat grains with butter, and raise heat to high. Cook 3 to 4 minutes. Add hot water and salt and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, cover, and cook 15 to 20 minutes, or until all water has been absorbed. Turn off heat and leave rice covered to steam.
3. Remove lamb from heat and carefully scoop out and reserve about 1 c. of cooking water.
4. Place yogurt in a blender and blend on a low setting to make the yogurt runnier. If necessary, add a little bit of the reserved cooking water until

the yogurt has the consistency of a creamy sauce.

5. Place yogurt in a second saucepan or pot and bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Try to always stir in the same direction. Reduce heat and simmer 10 to 15 minutes longer, stirring occasionally.
6. Carefully drain lamb and onions. Add yogurt sauce to stockpot with lamb and stir well. Cook 10 to 15 minutes more, or until sauce is thick.
7. Cover a large serving platter with flat bread in a single layer and pour a small amount of yogurt sauce over the bread. Pile the rice on top of the bread, pour lamb and yogurt over rice, and serve hot.

**Jordanian mansaf is almost always made with lamb. However, you can substitute beef or chicken if you prefer. Chicken will only need to cook for about 30 to 40 minutes. Or, make a vegetarian mansaf with potatoes (boil 20 to 30 minutes) or tofu (bring to a boil and simmer 10 minutes, or sauté lightly for 5 to 10 minutes).*

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 1½ to 2 hours

Serves 4 to 6

Chicken in Walnut and Pomegranate Sauce/ *Khoresht Fesenjan (Iran)*

This rich entrée is often served by Iranian cooks for holidays and other special occasions. Fesenjan can also be made with turkey or other poultry.

- 3 to 4 tbsp. butter
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
(1 to 1½ lb.)
- 2 medium onions, minced
- 2 c. walnuts, chopped finely or
ground coarsely in a food
processor
- ½ c. pomegranate molasses or
syrup *
- 1½ c. water
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground cardamom
- ½ tsp. turmeric
- ¼ tsp. nutmeg (optional)
- 2 to 4 tsp. sugar
- juice of 1 lemon
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

1. Melt butter in a deep skillet over medium heat. Add chicken breasts and sauté 3 to 4 minutes on each side.
2. Add onions to pan with chicken and sauté 3 to 5 minutes longer.
3. Remove chicken from pan and set aside. Add walnuts, pomegranate molasses, water, cinnamon, cardamom, turmeric, and nutmeg (if using) to pan. Stir well and lower heat to medium. Cover and simmer 30 minutes, or until sauce begins to thicken.
4. Gradually add sugar and lemon juice to sauce. Add salt and pepper.
5. Return chicken to pan. Cover and cook 20 minutes more, or until sauce is very thick and chicken is tender and cooked all the way through. Serve hot with white rice.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 45 minutes to 1 hour
Serves 4 to 6

**Look for pomegranate molasses in Middle Eastern or Mediterranean groceries or in the ethnic food section of your grocery store. If you can't find it, you may substitute the same amount of unsweetened cranberry juice concentrate.*





Sesame Cookies/Barazek (All Middle East)

These irresistible little cookies are Ramadan favorites throughout the Middle East—but they are also gobbled up throughout the year.

- 1 c. sesame seeds
- 2 tbsp. honey
- $\frac{3}{4}$ c. sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ c. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ c. flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking powder
- dash salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ c. water or milk
- 2 tbsp. pistachios, chopped

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly grease two baking sheets.
2. Place sesame seeds in a skillet over medium heat and cook, stirring often, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer seeds to a medium mixing bowl and combine with honey.* Mix well, adding a tbsp. or so of water if the mixture is too dry and sticky to stir easily, and set aside.
3. In a large mixing bowl, cream sugar and butter together. Add flour, baking powder, and salt. Using your hands, blend well, adding enough water or milk to make a soft, smooth dough.
4. Form dough into walnut-sized balls. Dip one side of a ball into pistachios. Place on a greased baking sheet, pistachio-side down. Use the flat bottom of a water glass dipped in flour to flatten the ball. Sprinkle with sesame seed mixture, pressing with glass so seeds stick firmly. Repeat with remaining dough and sesame seeds.
5. Bake 15 to 20 minutes.

*For a slightly different flavor, add 1 tsp. cinnamon to sesame seeds and honey.

Preparation time: 35 to 45 minutes
Baking time: 15 to 20 minutes
Makes about 4 dozen cookies

Index

- Armenia, 11, 16; recipes of, 34, 35, 38–39
Armenian salad, 31, 34
- baqhlava* (baklava), 12, 17, 55, 56–57
Bahrain, recipe of, 58
baked lamb and bulgur, 31, 38–39
barazek, 13, 69
basboosa, 31, 59
bulgur, 31, 38, 39
- cake, semolina, 59
chicken in walnut and pomegranate sauce, 13, 66
chickpea and tahini dip, 32
chickpea patties, 41, 44–45
Christianity, 9, 15–16
cookies, sesame, 69
cracked wheat pilaf, 35
cucumber, how to seed, 34
- dates, sweet, 55, 58
desserts, 12, 13–14; recipes for, 55–59, 69
dressing, salad, 34
- eggplant: stuffed, 52; upside-down lamb and, 19, 50–51
Egypt, 11; recipes of, 42, 48, 59
Eid al-Adha, 13, 14
Eid al-Fitr, 13, 14; recipe for, 64–65
- falafel, 41, 44–45
fattoush, 36
fava beans, seasoned, 42
fish stew, spicy, 47
ful medames, 42
- Hanukkah, 14–15, 61; recipe for, 63
heygagan salata, 34
hummus bi tahini, 32
- Iran, 11, 17; recipes of, 56–57, 66
Iraq, 11, 27
Islam and Muslims, 9, 10, 11, 13–14
Israel, 11, 14–15; recipes of, 47, 63
- Jordan, 11; recipes of, 38–39, 50–51, 64–65
Judaism and Jews, 9, 14–15
- khoresht fesenjan*, 13, 66
kibbeh, 12, 38–39
koshari, 13, 48
Kuwait, recipe of, 58
- lamb: baked, and bulgur, 31, 38–39; in yogurt sauce, 7, 64–65; upside-down, and eggplant, 19, 50–51
latkes, potato, 15, 63
Lebanon, 11, 31; recipes of, 36, 38–39, 47, 50–51
lentils: in tomato sauce, 48; red, soup, 62

low-fat tips, 24, 45

mahshi, 11, 52

mansaf, 14, 64–65

map, 8

maqluba, 41, 50–51

meze, 31–39

Middle East: countries of, 8–9; history of, 8–10; holidays and festivals of, 13–17, 61; land of, 10–11; map of, 8; religions of, 9, 13, 14–16; sample menu of, 28–29

Muhammad, 9, 13, 61

nut pastry, Persian, 56–57

Oman, recipe of, 58

onions, fried, 48

peasant salad, 36

Persian nut pastry, 56–57

pilaf, cracked wheat, 35

pomegranates, 14, 32, 66

potato latkes, 15, 63

Qatar, recipe of, 58

Ramadan, 13–14, 27, 61; recipes for, 59, 62, 69

rangina, 58

red lentil soup, 62

Rosh Hashanah, 14, 15

salads: Armenian, 34; peasant, 36

Saudi Arabia, 14; recipe of, 58

seasoned fava beans, 42

sesame cookies, 69

shourbet *adas*, 13, 62

soup, red lentil, 62

spicy fish stew, 47

stew, spicy fish, 47

stuffed vegetables, 52

sweet dates, 55, 58

Syria, 13, 16; recipes of, 38–39, 47, 50–51

tahini dip, chickpea and, 32

tahini sauce, 45

Turkey, 11, 12, 17; recipe of, 35

tzavari yeghintz, 35

United Arab Emirates, recipe of, 58

upside-down lamb and eggplant, 19, 50–51

vegetables, stuffed, 52

vegetarian options, 24, 35, 51, 52, 62, 65

yahknit el samak el harrah, 47

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