

# ISRAELI RECIPES

## For Shabbat Shalom Around Town

Compiled by Temple Micah members Rochelle Stanfield and Kathlene Collins

**Sources:** Marlena Speiler, *Jewish Cooking – traditions, techniques, ingredients and recipes*; Faye Levy, *Feast from the Mideast*; Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food*; Evelyn Rose, *The Complete International Jewish Cookbook*

### General guidelines

Faye Levy in *Feast from the Mideast* suggests as a general rule: "...aromatic, light cuisine, with plenty of fresh salads. To flavor sauces and stews, cooks rely on liberal amounts of fresh garlic, lemon juice and herbs like flat-leaf parsley, dill, mint, and cilantro rather than pepper and other pungent spices. For seasoning meats they like sweet spices, such as cinnamon, cloves and allspice. Creamy sesame tahini is the favorite sauce..." also cumin for seasoning chicken and meats.

Claudia Roden in *The Book of Jewish Food* notes that couscous is very very popular in Israel. (Pick your favorite couscous recipe and serve it—rsg.)

And Marlena Spieler observes that while in the past, each region had its own, very distinctive Jewish food (the spicy food of the Sephardim rarely served on traditional Ashkenazi tables and vice versa), "the establishment of the state of Israel...has changed this considerably, bringing Jews together again, starting at the table."

The recipes below focus on the Middle Eastern cuisine typical of the region, but include notes from the many traditions that have been brought together in Israel.

B'tay avon!

### Welcoming Starters

Hummus, baba ghanoush or chopped liver are all quick and easy appetizers that appear on Israeli tables often. Here are a couple of alternatives that won't take much more time but are a bit more festive.

#### **Smoky eggplant and pepper salad** (from Marlena Spieler's *Jewish Cooking*)

4-6 servings

Place two small eggplants (split in half lengthwise) and two red peppers (left whole) in a roasting pan pop into a 375 degree oven for 17 minutes. Turn the vegetables over and roast for another 17 minutes, or until skins are blackened. Remove from oven and place in a tightly sealed container or plastic bag for about 30 minutes to steam.

Peel the vegetables over the bowl you'll be using for the salad (to reserve juices) and roughly chop. Put chopped vegetables in the bowl and add:

3-5 cloves of very fresh garlic, slivered  
½ teaspoon ground cumin  
Juice of ½ to 1 lemon (to taste)  
A good dash (1/2 teaspoon) sherry vinegar  
3-4 tablespoons olive oil  
1-2 shakes of cayenne or a dash of hot sauce such as Tabasco  
Coarse salt to taste

Mix well to combine. Garnish with fresh chopped cilantro and serve with pita wedges or crackers.

**Spicy pumpkin dip** (from Marlena Spieler's *Jewish Cooking*)

6-8 servings

This is a beautiful dip, and you can adjust the spices to suit your taste. Serve with bread, crackers or crudités (celery, cucumber slices, even apple wedges are delicious).

3-4 tablespoons olive oil  
1 finely chopped onion  
5-8 cloves of finely minced garlic  
1-1/2 lbs pumpkin, peeled and diced (this is about 4 cups. You can substitute the less traditional butternut squash - kc)  
1-2 teaspoons ground cumin  
1 teaspoon paprika  
¼ - ½ teaspoon ground ginger  
¼ - ½ teaspoon curry powder (sweet or hot)  
1/3 cup diced tomatoes (canned or fresh)  
1-2 tablespoons tomato paste  
½ - 1 minced Serrano or Jalapeno pepper  
Pinch of sugar  
Juice of ½ a lemon  
Salt  
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro to garnish

Sautee onions and ½ of the garlic in olive oil until softened. Add the pumpkin cubes, cover and cook for about 10 minutes or until half-tender.

Add all spices to the pan and cook for 1-2 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, minced pepper, sugar and salt and cook over medium high heat until liquid has evaporated.

When the pumpkin is very tender, mash into a coarse puree. Add the remaining garlic and taste for seasoning. Add lemon juice and salt to taste. Let cool to room temperature, sprinkle with cilantro and serve.

And one more that's so easy you can't even call it a recipe!

### **Israeli white cheese and olives**

Put 6-7 ounces of soft white (farmer's) cheese in a bowl and mash a bit with the back of a spoon. Crumble in about 2-1/2 ounces of feta cheese. Stir (really mash) in about 1/2 to 3/4 of a cup of sliced green olives and about a teaspoon of fresh thyme leaves. Serve with crackers, pita wedges or crudités.

## **Refreshing salads**

### **Israeli Diced Salad with Zahtar** (from Levy's *Feast*)

4 servings

1 American cucumber, or 1/2 seedless cucumber or 3 Middle Eastern or pickling (Kirby) cucumbers

1/3 – 1/2 cup finely chopped onion

8 ripe but firm plum tomatoes, or 4 medium tomatoes, cut in small dice

3-4 Tablespoons chopped Italian parsley

2 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil or vegetable oil

1-2 Tablespoons strained fresh-squeezed lemon or lime juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

2-3 teaspoons zahtar (see below)

Peel cucumbers and cut in small dice. If onion is strong, rinse with cold water, drain and pat dry (or soak in vinegar for 20 minutes—rsg).

In glass bowl, mix together diced cucumbers, tomato, onion and parsley. Add oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Sprinkle with zahtar. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Zahtar is available in Middle East shops. If you can't find it, toast 2 teaspoons sesame seeds and let cool. Mix with 1 teaspoon dried thyme. (Note: Claudia Roden in *The Book of Jewish Food* has what I think is a more authentic version, the mixture of thyme, roasted sesame seeds, sumac (available in Greek or Middle Eastern stores) and salt—rsg)

### **Another Mixed Israeli Salad** (from Claudia Roden)

Serves 8

2 Bibb lettuces

2 firm ripe tomatoes

1 peeled cucumber

1 green pepper, seeds removed (optional)  
A few small or 1 long radish (optional)  
1 ½ mild red onions or 9 scallions, chopped  
3 Tablespoons flat-leaf parsley  
5 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
Juice of 1 lemon  
Salt and pepper  
(She doesn't say zahtar, but you could sprinkle it on—rsg)  
Cut all the vegetables into very small dice or pieces and put them in a bowl with the onions and flat-leafed parsley. Just before serving, dress with olive oil, lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste.

### **White Bean Salad with Spicy Dressing** (Marlena Spieler's *Jewish Cooking*)

4 servings

About 2 cups diced fresh tomatoes  
One onion, finely chopped  
½ - 1 jalapeno pepper, minced  
1 green bell pepper, cut into ½ inch dice  
A pinch of sugar  
4 cloves of very fresh garlic, slivered  
1 14-ounce can of cannelloni beans, drained  
3-4 tablespoons olive oil  
Zest and juice of 1 lemon  
1 tablespoon cider or wine vinegar  
Salt and pepper  
Chopped cilantro or parsley for garnish

Toss tomatoes, onion, jalapeno, bell pepper, sugar, garlic and beans in a bowl with salt and plenty of ground pepper. Whisk together olive oil, lemon zest, lemon juice, and vinegar and drizzle over salad, tossing lightly to combine. Chill before serving and garnish with parsley or cilantro.

## **Warming soups**

Israeli soups tend to be hearty – any of the three recipes below could easily be served as a main dish.

**Tomato Soup with Israeli Couscous** (from Spieler – this is a delicious soup and very easy and quick to put together – kc)

Serves 4 - 6

2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 chopped onion

1-2 diced carrots  
14 ounce can diced tomatoes  
6 garlic cloves, roughly chopped  
6-1/2 cups chicken or vegetable stock  
1 to 1-1/2 cups Israeli (great big round) couscous  
2-3 springs of fresh mint, chopped  
1/4 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/4 bunch cilantro, chopped  
Cayenne pepper to taste  
Salt and ground pepper to taste

Sautee onions and carrots in oil until soft (about 10 minutes). Add tomatoes, half the garlic, stock, couscous, mint, ground cumin, cilantro, cayenne, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, add remaining garlic, then reduce heat and simmer gently for 7-10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until couscous is just tender.

**Lubiya** (again, from Spieler – she starts with dried black-eyed peas but I had terrific results using canned, which makes this another very speedy and satisfying soup - kc)

4 servings

2 14-ounce cans black-eyed peas, drained  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
2 medium onions, chopped  
4 garlic cloves, minced  
2-3 mild fresh chili peppers (Serrano, Jalapeno, or Anaheim, depending on how hot you like it)  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 teaspoon ground turmeric  
1-1/4 cup diced tomatoes (canned or fresh)  
2-1/2 cups chicken, beef or vegetable stock  
2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, chopped  
Juice of 1/2 lemon

Heat oil and sautee onions, garlic and chili pepper for about 5 minutes. Stir in cumin, turmeric, tomatoes, stock, half the cilantro, and the black-eyed peas and simmer for about 20 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and remaining cilantro and serve immediately.

**Yemeni Wedding Soup** (Ftut) (from Roden)

Serves 4

1 lb slightly fatty beef, cut in 2-inch pieces  
2 marrow bones (if you can find them)  
Salt and plenty of black pepper  
1/4 teaspoon ground caraway seed

¼ teaspoon ground turmeric  
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom  
1 large potato, cubed  
2 medium zucchini, cut in cubes  
1 tomato, peeled  
2 scallions, sliced

Put the meat and marrow bones in a pot with 7 ½ cups water. Bring to the boil and remove the scum. Add salt, pepper, and spices and simmer for 1 hour, or until the meat is tender. Add the vegetables and cook ½ hour more. Extract the bones and discard, but first scrape the marrow out and add it to the soup.

## Enticing entrees

### Turkey Schnitzel (from Roden)

(“Ask anyone in Israel to name a wholly Israeli dish and the answer will be turkey schnitzel,” Roden writes.)

Serves 4

4 large slices of turkey breast, less than ½ inch thick  
Salt and pepper  
Flour  
2 eggs lightly beaten with a Tablespoon of water  
Fine bread crumbs or matzo meal  
Oil for frying  
1 lemon, quartered

If the turkey slices are not thin enough, flatten them between 2 pieces of wax paper. Put a board on top and hammer it. Season the slices with salt and pepper. Dip in flour, then in the beaten eggs, and finally dredge in the bread crumbs or matzo meal. Fry in sizzling medium-hot oil, about 1/3 inch deep, for about 4-5 minutes on either side, until lightly browned. Drain on paper towels and serve with lemon quarters.

Suggested side – **New Potatoes and Olives**, from Spieler. Another one that hardly counts as a recipe. Slice 8 large new potatoes and boil until tender (about 10-15 minutes). Drain and sprinkle with three minced garlic cloves, a tablespoon of sherry vinegar, a large pinch of ground cumin or toasted cumin seeds, and a pinch of cayenne pepper. Then drizzle with 2-3 tablespoons of olive oil and garnish with 2-t tablespoons of chopped cilantro and a handful of oil cured black olives.

**Yemenite Poached Fish in Spicy Tomato Sauce** (from Spieler – I made this for a big group for Passover (I doubled the recipe) last year and it was a huge hit – very easy and foolproof and just delicious.)

Serves 8

1-1/4 cups passata (bottled strained tomatoes – available at Whole Foods. You can substitute tomato juice, but the passata is a bit thicker so reduce to 1 cup if you do – kc)  
2/3 cups fish stock  
1 large onion, chopped  
4 tablespoons chopped cilantro  
4 tablespoons chopped parsley  
5-8 cloves of garlic, crushed  
Chili paste or fresh minced chili to taste (I used a heaping teaspoon of Thai red chili paste)  
Large pinch ground ginger (about 1/8 teaspoon)  
Large pinch curry powder  
1/4 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric  
Large pinch ground cardamom  
Juice of two lemons, plus extra is needed  
2 tablespoons vegetable or olive oil  
3-1/4 lbs white fish filets (cod, flounder, tilapia, or something similar, or a mixture)

Put passata, stock, onions, herbs, chili, garlic, spices and lemon juice in a large pan and bring to a boil. Remove the pan from the heat and add the fish filets to the hot sauce (try for one layer). Return to the heat and allow sauce to boil up briefly, then reduce heat and simmer very gently for about 5 minutes, or until fish is done (test with a fork – if it flakes easily, it's ready). Taste the sauce and add lemon juice, salt and/or pepper to taste.

Suggested side dish - This would be very good with couscous, as there's plenty of good sauce – kc

### **Artichoke Bottoms Stuffed with Meat** (from Roden)

(“This is famous as one of the grand old Jerusalem dishes,” Roden.)

Serves 6-8

About 10 artichoke bottoms (either fresh or frozen (14 oz), not canned)  
1 onion, chopped  
2 Tablespoons sunflower oil  
2 Tablespoons pine nuts  
10 oz ground veal, lamb, or beef  
2 Tablespoons finely chopped flat-leafed parsley  
About 1/2 teaspoon salt  
Pepper  
A pinch of nutmeg  
1/2 teaspoon allspice or cinnamon  
1 small egg, lightly beaten

Juice of ½ lemon

Prepare fresh artichokes and soak in acidulated water or defrost the artichokes. Fry the onion in the oil until golden. Add the pine nuts and stir until lightly colored. Mix the meat, parsley, salt, pepper, nutmeg, allspice or cinnamon, and egg, and work to a soft paste with your hands. Then work in the onions and pine nuts. Take lumps of the meat mixture and fill the artichoke bottoms, making little mounds. Place them in a shallow baking dish.

Mix the lemon juice with about 2/3 cup of water and pour into the dish. Cover with foil and bake at 350 degrees for ½ hour or until the meat is done. Serve hot or cold.

Suggested side dish – **Italian Cold Pasta**, from Spieler. This is very easy, and although it sounds ridiculously simple, it's absolutely delicious. Cook 12 ounces of fresh egg noodles (fettuccini or linguini) as directed. Drain and rinse thoroughly under cold running water (this step is essential to keep the noodles from sticking together). Toss in a generously sized serving bowl with 4 cloves of very fresh garlic, slivered, about 1/3 of a cup of good quality olive oil (be generous!), about 1/3 cup of chopped fresh parsley, and 2 cups of high quality sliced, pitted green olives. Serve at room temperature.

### **Falafel**

Serves 12 as an appetizer, 4-6 as a main dish

1 pound dried chickpeas

A large bunch of flat-leafed parsley or cilantro or a mixture of the two, finely chopped (1 cup)

8 scallions, finely chopped

Salt

¼ teaspoon or more cayenne or chili pepper

2 teaspoons ground cumin

2 teaspoons ground coriander

6 garlic cloves or to taste, crushed in a press

1 teaspoon baking powder

Vegetable oil for frying

Soak the chickpeas for 24 hours. Drain, rinse, and drain well. Dry them a bit on a tea towel or paper towels.

Chop the flat-leafed parsley (it should be dry) and scallions in the food processor, then put them aside. Put the chickpeas in the food processor and blend to a smooth soft paste. The longer you process the better. Add salt, cayenne pepper, cumin, coriander, garlic and baking powder and continue to process until the paste is very soft and holds well together. Add the flat-leafed parsley and scallions and blend very briefly—just enough to mix them in. Allow the paste to rest for 1 hour.

Heat about 1 inch of oil in a pan to medium hot. Take small, walnut-sized lumps and make round flat cakes about 1 ½ inches in diameter, and deep-fry a few at a time. It is easier if you put the little cakes on a plate and push them in at the same time with a flexible spatula (they are too soft to be picked up). (There is a contraption that you can buy in Israel which you can use to make them. You press some paste into a small cup and push it out.) The oil should be hot enough to start with so that it sizzles as the falafel goes in; then reduce the heat to low. Fry until golden brown, turning over once. Lift out with a slotted spatula and drain on paper towels. Serve with an Israeli salad in pocket of hot pita bread. (Recipe doesn't say, but there is usually a tahini (sesame paste) sauce poured over and hot sauce if you wish—rsg.)

Suggested side dish – falafels are best with zesty salads. Here are two possibilities:

### **Tabouleh**

Put 1-1/2 cups bulgur wheat in a bowl and cover with cold water. Leave to soak for about 30 minutes. Drain bulgur thoroughly in a sieve and return it to the bowl. Add 1 large bunch of scallions, thinly sliced, and squeeze together with your hands to combine. Add 1 finely chopped cucumber, three chopped tomatoes, ½ teaspoon ground cumin, one large bunch of chopped parsley, one large bunch of chopped mint, the juice of two lemons (or to taste), about ¼ cup of olive oil and mix well. Serve with plain yogurt, tomato wedges and sliced cucumbers.

### **Cucumber and Walnut Salad** (from Spieler)

Finely dice one large (English) or three small (Kirby) cucumbers (skin on). In a serving bowl, mix diced cucumbers with 3 finely minced cloves of garlic, 1 cup of sour cream or Greek yogurt (may use a combination – add more if the salad is not creamy enough), 2-3 tablespoons of chopped fresh dill, ¼ cup of chopped walnuts and plenty of salt and fresh ground black pepper. Serve garnished with dill sprigs and another tablespoon of chopped walnuts, toasted if you like.

## **Delectable Desserts**

**Dried Fruits Stewed in Cinnamon and Port** (Marlena Spieler calls fruit compotes the quintessential Jewish dessert, ideal after a festive meal. This recipe is actually my mother-in-law's and it's just amazing. Serve it over ice cream if you've made a dairy meal, or with very plain, crisp cookies. And if you have any left over, it makes a truly wonderful breakfast with a slice of toasted challah – kc)

About 1 pound of mixed dried fruits (and you can use up to 2 pounds – make sure you have a nice mix of apricots, prunes, pears, apples, cherries, cranberries and/or raisins, but no tropical fruits, which tend to fall apart).

1 cinnamon stick, broken into pieces

1 cup firmly packed brown sugar (light or dark)

¾ cup port (or dry red wine)

¼ cup water  
1 tablespoon vanilla extract  
½ a lemon, thinly sliced  
One small orange, thinly sliced

Put dried fruit in a pan with water to cover. Bring to a boil, boil hard for 1 minute then allow to cool and sit for at least 2 hours or overnight. Drain off water and stir in cinnamon stick, brown sugar, wine, water, vanilla, orange and lemon slices. Pour into a 9 x 9 baking dish.

Bake, uncovered, at 325 for about 40 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

### **Tunisian Almond Cigars** (from Spieler)

(This is a traditional Middle Eastern style dessert using filo pastry. Unlike some other recipes using filo that are very fussy and challenging, this one is easy and the results are impressive, and very tasty – kc)

9 ounces of almond paste  
1 lightly beaten egg  
1 tablespoon rose or orange flower water  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon almond extract  
8-12 sheets of filo dough  
Melted butter or margarine for brushing (a ½ inch diameter paint brush from a kids' watercolor set will work fine – kc)  
Confectioner's sugar and ground cinnamon for dusting

Knead the almond paste until it's soft and then mix with egg, flower water, cinnamon, and almond extract.

Preheat oven to 375 and lightly grease a backing sheet.

Divide the almond paste into 8 or 12 equal sized pieces and roll them into cylinders about 3 times as long as they are wide (about the size and shape of your thumb).

Place one sheet of filo on a piece of waxed paper or parchment big enough to hold it (keeping the remaining filo covered with a slightly damp towel to keep it from drying out and getting brittle), and brush all over with melted butter or margarine.

Put one almond paste cylinder at the corner of the filo sheet, leaving enough room to fold the near edge of the filo over the almond paste. Fold the filo over and over width ways and then over and over length ways until you have a small packet enclosing the almond paste. Transfer to baking sheet. Continue until all almond paste cylinders are wrapped in pastry.

Brush the “cigars” with butter or margarine and bake for about 15 minutes, or until golden brown. Leave to cool and then dust with powdered sugar and cinnamon and serve.

### **Israeli Icebox Cake** (from Rose)

Serves 12

6 oz semi-sweet chocolate  
2 Tablespoons water  
3 Tablespoons superfine sugar  
16 oz heavy (whipping) cream  
1 Tablespoon rum  
30 lady fingers (about 3 packages)  
2/3 cup hot water with 2 level teaspoons instant coffee  
2 oz toasted, skinned and chopped hazelnuts, walnuts or almonds

The day before, put the chocolate, water and sugar into a pan over low heat. When smooth, add 6 oz cream and bring to the boil. Immediately remove from the heat and refrigerate. Next day, put the chocolate mixture into a bowl, add 1 Tablespoon rum and beat or whisk until fluffy.

Make hot coffee. Divide the ladyfingers into three lots of 10. Prepare a triple layer of foil about 12 inches long and 6 inches wide. Take the first group of ladyfingers, dip the unsugared side into the hot coffee, then place side by side, sugared side down on the foil. Spread with half the chocolate cream. Repeat with the second layer, the remaining chocolate and finally the third layer of ladyfingers.

Beat the remaining 10 oz cream until stiff, then pipe or swirl over the cake. If to be used that day, refrigerate. If not, freeze, uncovered, until the cream is solid, then foil wrap. Defrost at room temperature for 3 hours, then chill until required. Just before serving, decorate with chopped nuts. Serve in slices.