



PENGUIN BOOKS

Tamarind & Saffron

Claudia Roden is the author of the highly praised *The Book of Jewish Food*, which won the André Simon Award, the Glenfiddich Food Book of the Year, the Guild of Food Writers' Food Book Award, the *Jewish Quarterly* Prize and the James Beard Award. Her other books include the seminal *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*; *Picnic*; *The Good Food of Italy - Region by Region*; *Mediterranean Cookery*; and *Coffee: A Connoisseur's Companion*. She has now won six Glenfiddich prizes for her books. She lives in London.

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Favourite Recipes from the Middle East

Claudia Roden



PENGUIN BOOKS

By the Same Author

A New Book of Middle Eastern Food

Coffee: A Connoisseur's Companion

Mediterranean Cookery

The Food of Italy

Picnic: A Guide to Outdoor Food

The Book of Jewish Food

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*For my children and their families, Simon, Nadia and Anna,
Ros and Clive, Cesar, Peter, Sarah and Ruby*

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Introduction *This selection of recipes represents the cooking of various countries in the Middle East. Morocco, Turkey and Lebanon, which are renowned for their cuisines, feature most prominently (each claims to have the third best after France and China). The recipes are old and traditional, but the choice of dishes is modern in that it assembles the kind of food people want to eat and cook today - delicious, exciting, wholesome and easy to prepare.*

The general culture of the Middle East has it that to really please your guests you must show that you have worked very hard to prepare a meal. You have to offer an assortment of small pies, stuffed vegetables, little meatballs and the like, which require wrapping, hollowing, filling, rolling. It is almost an insult to offer something that looks as though it took little time. You can see why people have the idea that Middle Eastern food is excessively labour-intensive. But it does not have to be.

Many of the simpler dishes are really appealing. It is the special combinations of ingredients – rice and lentils with caramelized onions; bulgur (cracked wheat) with tomatoes and aubergines; artichokes and broad beans with almonds; spinach with beans or chickpeas or with yoghurt - and their delicate flavouring which make them wonderful. Although often the only flavourings are olive oil and lemon juice, every country has its traditional sets of aromatics. There is the fried garlic with cumin and coriander of Egypt; the cinnamon and allspice of Turkey; the sumac and tamarind of Syria and Lebanon; the pomegranate syrup of Iran; the preserved lemon and harissa of North Africa. The tantalizingly contradictory flavours of spicy hot with sweet of Morocco include saffron, ginger, cinnamon and cumin with hot red pepper and honey.

Another attractive side of Middle Eastern cuisines is the great use which is made of grains, vegetables, pulses, fruits, nuts and yoghurt, which are now seen as the important part of a healthy diet.

The spread of Islam in the seventh century and the establishment of an Islamic empire across Asia, North Africa, Spain and Sicily, and of the Ottoman empire over an enormous territory from the fourteenth century until the twentieth, brought a certain unity in cooking traditions and means that similar dishes appear in different countries in different regional versions.

Some of the recipes in this book are classics from *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food*. Almost half are new, and the old ones are often given in a new version. I have sometimes simplified a method. The kind of adaptation I have made is to bake pies instead of frying them; to use less butter or replace it in some dishes with oil; and to cook fish for a shorter time. I have also used an easier square shape for some large individual filo pies.

When I first came to England in the mid-fifties, no one here had eaten aubergines, let alone cooked them. I had to explain courgettes as 'baby marrows'. You could only buy products such as pitta bread, filo pastry and vine leaves in Cypriot stores in Camden Town. Certain products such as sumac, the ground red berry with a lemony flavour, tamarind paste and the sweet and sour pomegranate syrup or molasses made from the boiled-down juice of sour pomegranates were not available anywhere. Now bulgur and couscous, chickpeas and filo, are in our supermarkets as well as prepared foods such as hummus, baba ghanoush and taramasalata, falafel and filo pies, and literally every ingredient used in Middle Eastern cooking can be found in the many Middle Eastern and Indian stores which have mushroomed around our cities. And with the proliferation of Lebanese, Turkish, Persian and Moroccan

restaurants, Middle Eastern food has become familiar. It has even been integrated in the menus of fashionable new restaurants offering what has come to be known as 'contemporary British' or 'modern European' food. The choice of dishes is a response to the new situation and to the reality that most people have less time to cook.

You can be flexible in the way you plan menus. Mezzes or appetizers - one of the appealing features of Middle Eastern cooking - can be served with drinks, as a first course or as side dishes. You can make a casual meal out of two or three, accompanied by bread and perhaps cheese or yoghurt and olives. A large assortment can be offered at a buffet party. The traditional drinks served with appetizers are arak (or raki), the anis-flavoured spirit distilled from grapes, and the Moroccan *mahia*, made with figs or dates. Beer too goes well with appetizers. For those who do not take alcohol, fruit juices or chilled yoghurt beaten with water or soda are traditional alternatives.

For most of the fish dishes you may use alternative kinds of fish. Feel free to use a cheaper fish or one more easily available than the one suggested. Lamb is the traditional meat of the Middle East, but beef or veal can be used instead; and in many recipes, such as stews, meat and poultry are interchangeable. Rice, couscous and bulgur are the staples of the area. The best way to end your meal is with fresh fruit or with dried fruit and nuts. Puddings and pastries are for special occasions.

This book is all about pleasure and enjoyment but it is also a way of discovering other worlds and other cultures.

Note

Quantities are given in both imperial and metric measures. A rounded figure is generally given for the conversion - to make things easier and more comfortable - except where exactness is important to the success of a recipe or because of the weight of commercial packets, jars, tins and pots used.

Appetizers and Salads *Mezzes, as appetizers are called in Arabic, are an important feature of Middle Eastern food. Traditionally served with spirits such as the anis-flavoured arak, they are meant to provide little tastings and to sharpen the appetite, not to satisfy it. A large array can be prepared for a buffet party. They also make interesting side dishes at the dinner table.*

You will find foods which can also be served as mezzes, such as filo cigars, marinated fried fish and fried fish balls, in other sections of the book.

Dukkah: An Egyptian Seed, Nut and Spice Dip

- * 500g (1lb) sesame seeds
- * 250g (8oz) coriander seeds
- * 120g (4oz) hazelnuts
- * 120g (4oz) ground cumin
- * salt and pepper to taste

Dukkah (pronounced do'a) is a dearly loved speciality in Egypt. On a recent visit to Australia I was stunned to find that it has become extremely fashionable there. Wineries produce their own blends of 'Aussie dukkah' and sell it in elegant packages. Restaurants offer it so that people can dip in with their bread soaked in olive oil. In Egypt it is served at breakfast or as an appetizer. It is a very personal and individual mix which varies from one family to another. The Aussie one is based on my mother's. It can be stored for months in covered jars.

Put the seeds and nuts on separate trays and roast them in a preheated 250°C (500°F, gas 8) oven for 5–10 minutes or until they begin to colour and release an aroma. Put them together in the food processor with salt and pepper and grind them until they are finely crushed but not pulverized. Be careful not to over-blend or the oil from the too finely ground seeds and nuts will form a paste. Dukkah should be a crushed dry mixture, not a paste.

Variation

- * Some people use peanuts or almonds instead of hazelnuts, and some add dried mint.

Bulgur and Tomato Salad

Serves 6–8

- * 250g (8oz) bulgur
- * 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- * 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- * juice of 1 lemon
- * salt
- * ⅓ teaspoon chilli flakes or a pinch of chilli powder to taste
- * 1 fresh red or green chilli pepper, very finely chopped
- * a good bunch of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
- * a good bunch of mint, finely chopped
- * 6 spring onions, finely chopped
- * 2 large tomatoes, finely diced

Kisir is the more filling and rustic Turkish equivalent of the Lebanese tabbouleh.

In a bowl, pour plenty of boiling water on to the bulgur and leave for 30 minutes or until the grain is tender. Drain and squeeze the excess water out in a colander.

Add the tomato paste, oil and lemon juice, salt and chilli flakes or powder, and mix thoroughly. You can do this in advance.

Just before serving, mix in the rest of the ingredients.

Variation

- * An added 2 tablespoons of sour pomegranate concentrate or molasses gives the grain a brownish tinge and a sweet-and-sour tartness.

Tabbouleh

Serves 4

- * 120g (4oz) fine bulgur
- * 500g (1lb) firm ripe tomatoes, diced
- * salt and pepper
- * ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- * ¼ teaspoon ground allspice
- * juice of 1 lemon or more to taste
- * 4 spring onions, thinly sliced
- * a large bunch of flat-leaf parsley (250g/8oz weighed with stems), finely chopped by hand
- * a bunch of mint (about 70g/3oz weighed with stems), finely chopped
- * 150ml (5fl oz) extra virgin olive oil
- * 2 gem lettuces to garnish or for serving

This is a homely old-style version of the very green and tart parsley and mint salad you find in Lebanese restaurants. Indian and Middle Eastern stores sell large bunches of flat-leaf parsley weighing between 200 and 250g (7–9oz).

Soak the bulgur in plenty of cold water for 10 minutes. Rinse in a colander and put into a bowl with the tomatoes. Leave for 30 minutes to absorb the tomato juices. Mix gently with the rest of the ingredients except the lettuce.

A traditional way of eating tabbouleh is to scoop it up with small gem lettuce leaves or very young vine leaves.

Bread Salad

Serves 6–8

- * 1½ pitta breads
- * 3 medium firm ripe tomatoes, cut into 1¼cm (½in) pieces
- * 3 small cucumbers, peeled, cut in half lengthways and sliced
- * 1 green pepper, seeded and cut into small slices
- * 5 radishes, sliced (optional)
- * 1½ mild red onions or 9 spring onions, chopped
- * a bunch of rocket leaves, coarsely shredded
- * a bunch of purslane leaves or lamb's lettuce, coarsely shredded
- * 5 cos lettuce leaves, cut into ribbons
- * a small bunch of flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- * a few sprigs of mint, chopped
- * 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- * juice of 1 lemon
- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * salt and pepper
- * 1 tablespoon ground sumac

Fattoush is a rustic country salad of Syria and Lebanon which has become part of the standard menu of Lebanese restaurants.

Cut open the pitta breads and toast them under the grill until they are crisp, turning them over once. Break them into small pieces in your hands.

Put all the vegetables into a large bowl with the rocket and purslane leaves or lamb's lettuce, cos lettuce, flat-leaf parsley and mint.

For the dressing, mix the olive oil with the lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper and sumac. Just before serving, add the toasted bread and toss well with the dressing.

Variation

- * The old peasant way of making *fattoush* is to moisten and soften the toasted bread with water and a little lemon juice before imbuing it further with the dressing. It becomes deliciously soggy.

Rocket, Tomato and Cucumber Salad

Serves 4

- * a bunch of rocket leaves, about 60g (2½oz)
- * 4 plum tomatoes, quartered
- * 2 small cucumbers, peeled and cut into slices or half-moons
- * 1 small red onion, chopped, or 4 spring onions, sliced
- * 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- * 1 tablespoon wine vinegar
- * salt and pepper
- * 100g (4oz) feta cheese, cut into 2cm (¾in) cubes (optional)
- * 8 black olives (optional)

Tear the rocket leaves and put them into a bowl with the tomatoes, cucumbers and onion. Dress with a mixture of oil, vinegar, salt and pepper.

Garnish if you like with the feta and olives.

Chopped Artichokes and Lemons

Serves 4–6

- * 400g (14oz) (1 packet) frozen artichoke bottoms, defrosted
- * salt
- * 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- * pepper
- * 1–2 garlic cloves, crushed (optional)
- * a few sprigs of dill, chopped
- * peel of 1 preserved lemon, rinsed and chopped (see [pages 84–5](#))

This is a splendid dish and quick to make with the frozen artichoke bottoms obtainable in Middle Eastern stores.

Boil the artichoke bottoms in salted water till tender. Drain and chop them and mix with the rest of the ingredients.

Serve cold.

Yoghurt and Cucumber Salad

Serves 6

- * 4–6 small cucumbers or 1 large one, diced or cut into half-moon slices
- * salt
- * 500g (1lb) thick strained Greek yoghurt
- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 1–2 tablespoons dried crushed mint or 2 sprigs of dill, finely chopped
- * white pepper

Unless the salad is to be eaten as soon as it is made, it is best to salt the cucumber and let the juices drain before mixing with the yoghurt, otherwise it gets very watery. The small cucumbers now available in supermarkets have a better flavour.

Peel and dice the cucumbers, or cut them in half lengthways, then into half-moon slices. Unless the salad is to be served immediately, sprinkle with plenty of salt and leave for 1 hour in a colander for the juices to drain.

Beat the yoghurt in a serving bowl with the garlic, mint and pepper. (Add salt later if necessary, as the cucumber is already salty.) Rinse the cucumber of excess salt if necessary, drain, then mix into the yoghurt.

Variation

- * Beat 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil, 1 tablespoon of vinegar and 3 tablespoons of chopped dill into the yoghurt.

Spinach and Yoghurt Salad

Serves 4

- * 500g (1lb) spinach
- * 225ml (8fl oz) thick strained Greek yoghurt
- * 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- * 3/4 teaspoon sugar
- * salt and pepper
- * 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- * juice of ½ lemon

An Iranian speciality.

Wash the spinach and remove the stems only if they are thick and hard. Drain and put in a large pan. Cover with a lid and put over a low heat until the leaves crumple into a soft mass. They steam in the water that clings to them in very few minutes.

Drain, and when cool enough, squeeze out the excess water with your hands. Chop with a sharp knife and mix with the rest of the ingredients.

Taramasalata

- * 250g (9oz) smoked cod roe
- * 3–4 slices of white bread, crusts removed, soaked in water
- * juice of 1 lemon or to taste
- * 125ml (4fl oz) mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ sunflower oil and $\frac{1}{2}$ extra virgin olive oil

Grey mullet roe was once used in Turkey and Greece but smoked cod roe has generally replaced it. I like to use a mixture of sunflower and olive oil, which allows the taste of the roe to dominate.

Skin the smoked cod roe and put it through the food processor with the bread, squeezed dry and the lemon juice.

Gradually add the oil in a thin trickle while the blades are running and blend to the consistency of mayonnaise. Cover with clingfilm and chill. If it is too liquid do not worry, it will become thick and firm after an hour or so in the refrigerator.

Hummus bi Tahina

- * 180g (6oz) chickpeas, soaked in water overnight
- * juice of 2 lemons, or to taste
- * 2–3 garlic cloves, crushed
- * salt
- * 4 tablespoons tahina (sesame paste)

This chickpea purée (hummus) with sesame paste (tahina) is the most popular and widely known Middle Eastern dip.

Drain the soaked chickpeas and boil in fresh water for about 1 hour, or until they are soft. Drain, reserving the cooking water. Blend the chickpeas to a purée in the food processor. Add the remaining ingredients and a little of the cooking water - enough to blend to a soft cream paste. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Add more lemon juice, garlic or salt if necessary.

Pour the cream into a flat dish and serve with Arab bread or pitta.

Optional garnishes

- * Dribble 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil over, and sprinkle on 1 teaspoon of paprika or 1 tablespoon of finely chopped flat-leaf parsley.
- * Garnish with a pinch of hot chilli powder and ½ teaspoon of ground cumin, making a star design of alternating red and brown.
- * Sprinkle with a few whole cooked chickpeas, put aside before blending.
- * Sprinkle with ground sumac and a little chopped flat-leaf parsley.
- * This is a delicious hot version. Pour the hummus bi tahina into a shallow baking dish. Fry 2 tablespoons of pine nuts lightly in 2 tablespoons of butter and sprinkle them with the melted butter over the dish. Bake for about 20 minutes in a 200°C (400°F, gas 6) oven.

Falafel

Serves 10

- * 500g (1lb 20z) dried split broad beans, soaked in cold water for 24 hours
- * salt and pepper
- * 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- * 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- * a pinch of chilli powder (optional)
- * 1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- * 1 large onion, very finely chopped or grated
- * 5 spring onions, very finely chopped
- * 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- * a large bunch of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
- * a large bunch of coriander, finely chopped
- * sunflower or light vegetable oil for deep-frying

These flavoursome broad bean rissoles, called ta'amia in Cairo, are a national dish of Egypt. You must buy the large broad beans which are sold already skinned as 'split broad beans' in Middle Eastern stores.

The long soaking of the beans to soften them is all-important. Drain the beans very well and let them dry out a little on a towel. Then put them through the food processor until they form a paste, adding salt and pepper, cumin, coriander, chilli powder and bicarbonate of soda. The paste must be so smooth and soft that it will hold together when you fry it. Let it rest for at least 30 minutes.

Add the rest of the ingredients except the oil. If you chop or grate the onions in the food processor, strain them to get rid of the juice.

Knead the mixture well with your hands. Take small lumps and make flat, round shapes 5cm (2in) in diameter and ½cm (¼in) thick. Let them rest for 15 minutes, then fry them in deep hot oil until they are crisp and brown, turning them over once. Lift out with a slotted spoon and drain on kitchen paper.

Serve hot, accompanied by hummus ([page 11](#)) or baba ghanoush ([page 13](#)), a tomato and cucumber salad and pitta bread.

Note

If the paste does not hold together it usually means that it has not been properly mashed. You can remedy this by adding 2–3 tablespoons of flour.

Baba Ghanoush

Serves 4–6

- * 1kg (2lb) aubergines
- * 2–3 garlic cloves, crushed (optional)
- * salt
- * 4 tablespoons tahina (sesame paste)
- * juice of 2 lemons, or more to taste

This dip, also called moutabal, is offered as a mezze in every Arab restaurant.

Grill or roast the aubergines until very soft inside (see below). Peel them in a colander, then chop the flesh with a pointed knife and mash it with a fork, letting the bitter juices run out through the holes in the colander.

Add the garlic, a little salt, the tahina and lemon juice, beating well and tasting to adjust the flavouring. You may use a food processor.

Pour the cream into a shallow dish and serve with Arab or pitta bread to dip in.

Optional garnish

- * 1 tablespoon of finely chopped flat-leaf parsley and a dribble of 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil.

To roast and mash whole aubergines

Prick the aubergines in a few places with a pointed knife so that they do not burst. Turn them under the grill for about 20 minutes until the skin is black and blistered and they feel very soft inside when you press them, or roast them in the hottest possible oven for about 30 minutes or until they feel very soft, turning them at least once. When cool enough to handle, peel them in a colander. Then chop the flesh with a knife and mash it with a fork in the colander to let the juices escape.

Aubergine Purée with Olive Oil and Lemon

Serves 4

- * 2 aubergines (about 500g/1lb)
- * 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- * juice of ½ lemon or to taste
- * Salt

This is one of the simplest, most common and most delicious ways of eating aubergines. Use firm aubergines with a shiny black skin. In the variations, pomegranate molasses, which are also called concentrate or syrup in Middle Eastern stores, are the boiled-down concentrated juice of sour pomegranates.

Grill or roast the aubergines (see [page 13](#)). Peel them in a colander, then chop and mash the flesh to a purée with a fork or a wooden spoon, letting the juices escape through the holes of the colander.

Beat in the oil and lemon juice and some salt.

Serve cold.

Variations

- * For a Turkish version add 2 crushed garlic cloves and 3 tablespoons of thick strained Greek yoghurt. Reduce the olive oil to 1 tablespoon.
- * For a spicy Moroccan version add 1 crushed garlic clove, ½ teaspoon of harissa (see [page 171](#), or a pinch of cayenne and ½ teaspoon of paprika), ½ teaspoon of ground cumin and a tablespoon of chopped coriander leaves.
- * For a Syrian flavour mix in 2 tablespoons of pomegranate molasses instead of lemon juice.
- * Add 3 tablespoons of flat-leaf parsley, 1 chopped tomato, 4 chopped spring onions and ½–1 finely chopped (and seeded) fresh chilli pepper.

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