

THE FEARLESS OLIVE

BY REEMA ISLAM



An Armenian Christmas dinner

As we move into 2015 and bid adieu to the Christmas festivities of 2014, the Armenians start preparing for their Christmas, on 6 January. Known as the first Christian country, Armenia remains one of the strong holds of the Eastern Christian belief system. The Epiphany or the revelation that the baby Jesus was indeed a blessed prophet is commemorated on 6 January, along with a Blessing of the Water ceremony in memory of his baptism in the Jordan River.

The Eastern Christians did not follow the Roman practice of celebrating Christmas on 25 December and by the fourth century CE, they were the only Eastern Christians to carry this tradition on till this day.

The Armenians normally fast six days before Christmas Day and abstain from meat during this time. But on Christmas, they consume rice and fish dishes, barley soups and walnuts glazed in jelly.

I bring to you some of their classic dishes with a spin on the recipes to make them healthier for the readers. Here's wishing the Armenian Diaspora a Merry Christmas, and a very happy New Year to all my readers.



Barley and yoghurt soup

A cuisine that can easily be traced back to a pre Christianity era, the Armenians use simple ingredients with an emphasis on flavour. Barley thus plays a significant role in Armenian cuisine as the days leading up to Christmas are spent in abstinence so a nutritious source of calories is sought for Christmas.

Ingredients:

- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- ½ cup pearl barley
- 1 fresh bay leaf
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 cups Greek-style yoghurt or thick yoghurt
- 2 tsp dried mint (you can use fresh mint as well)
- 3 egg yolks
- 2 tsp finely grated lemon zest
- 1 tbsp all purpose flour
- 2½ tbsp lemon juice
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Mint leaves, walnuts, or dried rose petals, to garnish
- Olive oil

Method:

Sauté onion in the olive oil until softened. Add barley, bay leaf and stock, and bring to a simmer. Partially cover the pan and cook for 30 minutes or until barley is tender. Combine yoghurt, dried mint, yolks and lemon zest in a bowl and whisk to combine well. In another bowl, stir the flour and lemon juice together to form a smooth paste then combine with the yolk mixture. Stir the hot stock mixture into the yolk mixture to combine well, then pour back into the pan. Stirring often, bring mixture slowly back to a simmer and cook for 1-2 minutes or until it thickens to your desired consistency.

Serving:

Serve with some sprinkling of mint and pepper on top.

Sou Boreg

Borek is a family of phyllo pastries with a filling, mostly of cheese and sprinkled with sesame seeds on top. This family seems to spread across the Balkans right into the Levant and the ends of the Middle East as the Armenian Diaspora dispersed. Originating in the former Ottoman territories, this delicious pastry with its layers of decadence makes a winner of a winter snack.

Ingredients:

- 1 lbs Dhaka Poneer, grated
- 2 tbsp chopped parsley and pinch of basil
- 2 eggs
- 1 packet phyllo dough
- Salt and pepper to taste (though a generous amount of pepper is recommended)
- ½ olive oil



½ cup sesame seeds

Method:

Mix the cheese, parsley, salt, pepper, basil and eggs in a bowl. Take phyllo dough from package; lay flat on counter and cover with damp cotton towel to keep from drying. After every 2 sheets fill in a layer of the cheese-egg mix. Brush the top with olive oil. Preheat your oven at 180 degrees then bake the phyllo at 350 degrees until golden brown. About 10 minutes before they are done open the oven and sprinkle some sesame seeds on top which will also get browned by the time the pastries are done.

Serving:

To give it a Bangladeshi twist serve with coriander chutney.

Lamb Casserole

As Armenian cuisine is said to be up to 2000 years old, these Eastern Christians absorbed the culture and cuisine of whichever area they inhabited. From the sixteenth century till the twentieth century, the Armenians were forced to travel extensively as their country was under the Ottomans, who expelled them to countries far and wide. Thus the Armenian Diaspora expanded and today this merry mixing of cultures through cuisine shows exactly how widely spread the Armenians were as their cuisine ranges from Turkish, Middle Eastern to Persian dishes. Meat is of course an integral part of this agrarian culture just like dairy products and cheese.

Ingredients:

- ½ kg lamb cubes, remove all fat
- 1 round eggplant, peeled and sliced
- 1 capsicum, sliced
- 1 onion, sliced
- 400g of tomato sauce (boil tomatoes with pinch of salt, pepper, garlic and celery)
- 1 cup water, 1 tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp basil
- ½ c olive oil

Method:

Drench the eggplant slices in salt and leave for half an hour, then wash the salt off and pat dry. Combine tomato sauce, water, black pepper, and basil in small saucepan and simmer for ½ hour. Coat the meat with flour and lightly fry them in ¼ cup of the olive oil till slightly brown. Then sauté the capsicum and onion for 1 minute. Line bottom of a casserole dish with the eggplant and top with meat and vegetables. Pour sauce over mixture. Bake at 375 degrees for 1 hour.

Serving:

Serve over rice or noodles and sprinkle coriander or parsley and squeeze some lemon on top as well.

Photo: Collected

Vaseline Skin Center

TAKING CARE OF SENSITIVE SKIN IN WINTER

For sensitive skin

Winter is a tough time for skin. The air makes it dry and dehydrated. And for sensitive skin, winter is tougher. But by following some simple rules, sensitive skin can surely battle against the harsh cold.

Protect with proper outfits: Choose cotton or cotton flannel instead of blends or synthetic fabrics -- the latter may cause irritation of skin.

Have an extra sweater handy. Wear gloves; cover your feet with socks. Wrap around a muffler. These are areas that may be left uncovered if you are careless, resulting in rapid dehydration of those portions of the skin.

Follow sensitive skin care regime: Cleanse your skin to remove dirt and irritants, but use lukewarm water instead of hot or cold. Think twice before using cleansers on sensitive skin: many of them contain acidic ingredients or additives. When in doubt, test in a small patch of skin before applying it all over.

After cleansing, gently pat the skin with a dry towel. If your skin is extremely sensitive, it is advisable to consult a dermatologist regarding which moisturiser you should use. Put on sunscreen when you go outdoors for protection from UV rays.

Read labels: What kind of ingredients and preservatives (if any) does your moisturising cream use? Different people are sensitive to different things. If you happen to know what makes your skin go all funny (or you can consult a dermatologist to find out), simply avoid those products that contain it.

Use non-fragrant products: While smelling like a garden of flowers may well be desired, it is best to be avoided if your skin is sensitive. The additives can be detrimental for sensitive skin.

Apply Vaseline Petroleum Jelly: This 100 percent pure petroleum jelly can heal dry skin very fast. Being fragrance-free, non-irritating and hypoallergenic, Vaseline Petroleum Jelly is a great product to use for sensitive skin.

LS Desk

For any feedback or query about skin care:

www.vaseline.com



GET THE ORIGINAL VASELINE PETROLEUM JELLY
THERE IS NO JELLY PURER



THE HEALING POWER OF Vaseline