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Thoughtful Food

By Susie Iventosch



Shakshouka Photos Susie Iventosch

In December, I accompanied my husband on a business trip to Israel. One day, while he attended business meetings in Tel Aviv, I ran off for a full day of market touring and cooking with Orly Ziv, who runs a great little cooking school, Cook in Israel. The feast we prepared was mouthwatering, bursting with flavors of fresh local veggies, salads, falafel and a wonderful savory dish called Shakshouka.

Our tiny band of nomadic cooks met Orly at the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv, just four blocks from the sparkling Mediterranean Sea. The vibrant colors, sights and sounds of this dynamic market featured exotic and unusual veggies, spices, rice varieties, legumes and a host of cosmopolitan characters. Colossal bunches of waist-high leeks were stationed like sentinels in front of several produce stands.

We learned about Moroccan paprika, which smells and tastes completely different than its Hungarian sibling

due to the addition of olive oil, salt and, occasionally, hot peppers.

Also, Orly says there are about 200 types of garbanzo beans all over the world - some are much smaller than the garbanzo beans typically seen in the U.S., while others are similar in size. Orly uses a combination of the two for her hummus, but only the large ones for her falafel. "They must be dried and soaked for falafel, never cooked or from a can," she said. Glad to know, because the first time I attempted falafel using canned garbanzo beans, it was a disaster.

Venturing from the "shuk" (market) to the Yemenite quarter (Kerem HaTeimanim), we arrived at Scholom & Doron for breakfast. They served pita bread with hummus and fuul, a dip made of fava beans and very similar to hummus. Delicious! While in the Yemenite district we visited several of Orly's favorite haunts to sample a variety of breads including saluf, lahouch and pita, all very different, all delicacies. One stand served burika, a Libyan specialty made with mashed potatoes and eggs wrapped in pastry and deep-fried. There was a final stop at Orly's favorite juicer, Tikva, for a glass full of vitamins - fresh squeezed pomegranate juice with a splash of lime. This was a morning of true bliss for any bona fide foodie.

Just when we couldn't eat another bite, the party moved to Orly's home north of Tel Aviv for an afternoon of hands-on Israeli cooking. The menu boasted Malabi cream with rose water syrup for dessert, homemade pita bread, hot spicy tomato salad, falafel, tahini mixed with lemon juice and buttermilk, hummus and shakshouka (or shakshuka), a rich tomato and vegetable sauce with fresh eggs poached right in the sauce. My brother-in-law, Efi Lubliner, who was raised in Israel and now resides in Lafayette, said the word "shakshouka" simply means "a mix." He said that the closest direct translation might be "mishmash." And, what an appetizing mishmash it is! Shakshouka finds its origins in northern Africa, and can easily be served for any meal of the day.

Upon returning home, we made the entire feast for New Year's Day, and I am so pleased to be able to share Orly's recipes for both her pita bread and shakshouka. I added eggplant to the shakshouka, and really enjoyed that addition. You may find that you would like to add a different ingredient to your batch, too. After all, it is a mishmash.

For more information on Cook in Israel, please visit www.cookinisreal.com.

Cooking Term of the Week

Estouffade

Estouffade has both a traditional and a modern meaning in culinary circles. Originally, the word estouffade referred to a rich brown stock, created by French master chef Auguste Escoffier. The sauce was used as a base for other sauces, or sometimes to enhance other sauces. Today, estouffade refers to a cooking technique much like braising, where the meat is marinated in wine before being seared and then slowly cooked in its own vapor.

Shakshouka

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INGREDIENTS

- 2-3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 Ortega chili, diced
- 1-2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 serrano peppers, finely diced
- 1 medium eggplant, peeled and cubed
- 4 fresh ripe tomatoes, grated on a cheese grater, juices and pulp reserved
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp. Moroccan paprika

- 1 tsp. cumin powder
- 1 tsp. ground caraway
- 4-6 eggs
- Minced fresh parsley for garnish
- Feta Cheese for garnish

DIRECTIONS

Peel and slice eggplant. Salt both sides and allow to sweat for about 30 minutes. Wipe off excess moisture and cut eggplant into small cubes. Heat oil in a large skillet. Add onion and paprika and sauté over medium heat for a few minutes until onion is translucent. Add garlic, cumin and caraway and continue to cook until fragrant, 3-4 minutes. Add eggplant, peppers and tomatoes (along with their juices) and sauté until vegetables are tender. Season with salt and reduce heat to simmer for about 8 minutes.

Crack eggs into a small bowl, one at a time, and slide into the tomato mixture. Cover and cook for about 3-5 minutes or until eggs whites are set and yolks are cooked as desired.

Serve and sprinkle crumbled feta and parsley over each serving. Serve with fresh pita bread. (Recipe below.)

Note: The shakshouka will be chunkier or smoother, depending upon how finely you chop the vegetables.

Pita Bread

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 kilogram all-purpose flour (500 grams)
- 15 grams fresh yeast or 8 grams dry yeast
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 350 grams water

DIRECTIONS

Heat oven to 450 degrees. Place flour and salt in the bowl of your mixer or KitchenAid. Sprinkle the yeast and brown sugar around the edges of the bowl. Add olive oil and half of the water and start mixing on low speed. Gradually add the rest of the water while mixing. The dough will look very sticky and wet. Continue to mix on medium-low speed for about 8 more minutes, or until the dough starts pulling away from the sides of the bowl.

Cover the bowl and allow dough to rise in a warm spot in the kitchen for about one hour, until doubled in volume.

Turn dough out of bowl onto a very lightly floured surface and form into a large loaf with your hands. (You will need to dust your hands with a little bit of flour, too.)

Divide dough into 8-10 balls and allow to rise again for about 10 minutes.

Using your fingertips, flatten and spread each ball into a flat shape, approximately 4-5 inches in diameter.

Bake for 10 minutes. The pita is ready when you can see an air bubble in the middle of each round.

These scones also freeze well. Thaw and reheat in a warm oven or toaster oven.



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