

Mediterranean Cooking

Countries of the Mediterranean:

Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

What is a Mediterranean way of eating?

Very simply put the Mediterranean way of eating is based on the traditional foods and eating patterns of the people and countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean diet, focuses more on fruits, veggies, whole grains, beans, nuts, and legumes (the very base of the pyramid); lean proteins from fish and poultry; good fats from olive oil; and some dairy, while consuming sweets and red meats on fewer occasions (the very top of the pyramid).

Other characteristics:

1. Eliminate fast food for whole foods
2. Eat more veggies, fruits, grains, and legumes
3. Swap fats: olive oil instead of butter
4. Reduce intake of red meat (lamb is often the red meat of choice)
5. Eat some dairy and eggs
6. Don't drink your calories
7. Share meals with others!

Top Groceries Items:

1. Veggies (fresh and frozen): Garlic, leafy greens, onions, tomatoes
2. Main fat: Olive oil
3. Nuts (filled with protein, fiber, and healthy fat): Almonds, cashews, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, sunflower seeds
4. Dairy in moderation: "Real" cheese, low fat milk, Greek yogurt, eggs
5. Protein: White fish, salmon, shell fish, poultry
6. Whole grain: Barley, bulgur, couscous, oatmeal, pasta, polenta, quinoa, rice
7. Spices (Add bold flavor without extra salt): Basil, bay leaf, cilantro, mint, parsley, oregano, cumin, paprika, turmeric
8. Fruit (fresh and frozen, canned without added sugar): apples, apricots, avocados, bananas, berries, cherries, dates, figs, grapes, lemons, melon, oranges, peaches, plums, pomegranates
9. Beans and Legumes (budget friendly and good source of fiber and protein): black beans, chickpeas, hummus, kidney beans, lentils, pinto beans, cannellini

Kristyn Slick

kristyn@makingmealtimememories.com

www.makingmealtimememories.com

Chicken Shawarma

Recipe from The Mediterranean Dish

¾ tbsp ground cumin	8 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
¾ tbsp turmeric	1 large onion, thinly sliced
¾ tbsp coriander	Juice of 1 lemon
¾ tbsp garlic powder	1/3 cup olive oil
¾ tbsp paprika	Pita pockets
½ tsp ground cloves	Greek Tzatziki sauce
½ tsp cayenne	Baby Arugula
salt	Pickles or kalamata olives

In a small bowl, mix the cumin, turmeric, coriander, garlic powder, sweet paprika and cloves. Set aside the shawarma spice mix for now.

Pat the chicken thighs dry and season with salt on both sides, then thinly slice into small bite-sized pieces.

Place the chicken in a large bowl. Add the shawarma spices and toss to coat. Add the onions, lemon juice and olive oil. Toss everything together again. Cover and refrigerate for 3 hours or overnight (if you don't have time, you can cut or skip marinating time)

When ready, preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Take the chicken out of the fridge and let it sit in room temperature for a few minutes.

Spread the marinated chicken with the onions in one layer on a large lightly-oiled baking sheet pan. Roast for 30 minutes in the 425 degrees F heated-oven. For a more browned, crispier chicken, move the pan to the top rack and broil very briefly (watch carefully). Remove from the oven.

While the chicken is roasting, prepare the pita pockets. Make tahini sauce according to this recipe or Tzatziki sauce according to this recipe. Make 3-ingredient Mediterranean salad according to this recipe. Set aside.

To serve, open pita pockets up. Spread a little tahini sauce or Tzatziki sauce, add chicken shawarma, arugula, Mediterranean salad and pickles or olives, if you like. Serve immediately!

Notes:

Middle Eastern (Ottoman Empire-Turkey) street food from 18th century

Traditional chicken shawarma is basically well-marinated chicken, layered on a vertical rotisserie or spit where it's slow-roasted for days--in its own juices and fat--until perfectly tender and extra flavorful! To serve it, shave a layer of shawarma off the spit and pile it up into a pita pocket, jazz it with tahini sauce and heaps upon heaps of fresh toppings!

Kristyn Slick

kristyn@makingmealtimememories.com

www.makingmealtimememories.com

Tzatziki Sauce

Recipe from The Mediterranean Dish

¾ English cucumber, partially peeled and sliced	1 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp kosher salt, divided	2 cups Greek yogurt
4-5 garlic cloves, peeled, finely grated or minced	¼ tsp white pepper
	Pita bread and veggies for serving
	Optional mix-in: tbsp of minced mint or dill

Prep the cucumber. In a food processor, grate the cucumbers. Toss with ½ tsp kosher salt. Transfer to a fine mesh strainer over a deep bowl to drain. Spoon the grated cucumber into a cheese cloth or a double thickness napkin and squeeze dry. Set aside briefly.

In one large mixing bowl, place the garlic with remaining ½ tsp salt, white vinegar, and extra virgin olive oil. Mix to combine.

Add the grated cucumber to the large bowl with the garlic mixture. Stir in the yogurt and white pepper. Combine thoroughly. Cover tightly and refrigerate for a couple of hours.

When ready to serve, stir the tzatziki sauce to refresh and transfer to serving bowl, drizzle with more extra virgin olive oil, if you like. Add a side of warm pita bread and your favorite vegetables. (also see notes for more ideas) Enjoy!

Notes:

A long time ago, when the Ottoman Empire was still in full trading swing, India was enjoying the simple pleasures of raita sauce, a seasoned yogurt-based dip. During this time, the Indian people were ruled by an elite Persian class that enjoyed the North Indian rice dish known as biryani.

However, the Indians would make the rice dish too spicy for the palette of the Persian elite. To balance out the fire of the spices, the Persians began to enjoy the soothing taste of the raita sauce. Cool as cucumber and soothing as yogurt, this classic Indian sauce was the perfect solution to the spicy rice.

Tzatziki is a creamy Greek yogurt sauce with cucumbers and fresh garlic. This is a versatile sauce that is the perfect accompaniment to many Mediterranean dishes. You can also slather it on your sandwiches; or simply use it as a dip with warm pita and your favorite vegetables!

Kristyn Slick

kristyn@makingmealtimememories.com

www.makingmealtimememories.com

Tabouli Salad

Recipe from The Mediterranean Dish

½ cup extra fine bulgur wheat	12-15 fresh mint leaves, stems removed,
4 Roma tomatoes, finely chopped	washed, well-dried, finely chopped
1 English cucumber, finely chopped	4 green onions
2 bunches parsley, part of stems removed,	salt
wash and well-dried, finely chopped	3-4 tbsp lime juice
	3-4 tbsp olive oil

Wash the bulgur wheat and soak it in water for 5-7 minute. Drain very well (squeeze the bulgur wheat by hand to get rid of any excess water). Set aside.

Very finely chop the vegetables, herbs and green onions as indicated above. Be sure to place the tomatoes in a colander to drain excess juice.

Place the chopped vegetables, herbs and green onions in a mixing bowl or dish. Add the bulgur and season with salt. Mix gently.

Now add the lime juice and olive oil and mix again.

For best results, cover the tabouli and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter. If you like, serve the tabouli with a side of pita and romaine lettuce leaves, which act as wraps or "boats" for the tabouli.

Other appetizers to serve next to tabouli salad: Hummus; Baba Ganoush; or Roasted Red Pepper Hummus

Notes:

Tabouli is likely the topmost famed Mediterranean/Middle Eastern salad there is. It is from the mountains of Lebanon and Syria in the Middle Ages.

The true star in a tabouli recipe is the very finely chopped parsley--lots of it! Parsley holds well against the citrus in the dressing; that's why tabouli is even better the next day. Some tabouli recipes like this one, call for a few fresh mint leaves and green onions, while others use only parsley and red onions instead.

Tabouli makes a great and bright addition to the dinner table next to your grilled kabobs or shawarmas, for example. But it can also be included as part of mezze along with other small plates like, Creamy Hummus; Falafel; Turkish fried eggplant; and spicy Middle Eastern Potatoes.

Kristyn Slick

kristyn@makingmealtimememories.com

www.makingmealtimememories.com

Greek Orange Honey Cake with Pistachios

Recipe from The Mediterranean Dish

5 large eggs	2 tsp baking powder
1 cup low-fat Greek yogurt	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 1 tbsp olive oil
2 cups sugar	Handful of shaved almonds for topping
5 tbsp ground almonds	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shelled salted pistachios
Zest of 1 lemon	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup honey
Zest of 1 orange	Juice of 2 oranges
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour	Juice of 1 lemon
1 cup course semolina (or Cream of Wheat)	

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Grease a 9 x 13 baking pan with butter and dust with flour (shake the pan a little to get an even coating of flour).

Make the cake batter. Place all the cake ingredients (except the shaved almonds) in a large mixing bowl. Mix with a wooden spoon or a whisk to combine.

Pour the batter into the prepared baking pan and spread evenly with a spatula.

Bake in heated oven for 25 to 30 minutes, until golden and well cooked-through. To be sure, insert a wooden skewer into the center of the cake, it should come out clean if the cake is done.

Remove from the oven and let the cake completely cool in the pan.

Once the cake has cooled, prepare the honey syrup. Toast the pistachio in a dry non-stick pan over low to medium heat (pan needs to be large enough for the remaining syrup ingredients). Once they start to smell, stir in the honey. Add the orange juice and lemon juice. Bring to a boil for 1 to 2 minutes, or until nice and syrupy. (Do NOT taste the hot syrup, it will burn your mouth)

Stab the cake all over with a small knife or a skewer to create holes. Pour the honey pistachio syrup all over the cake as evenly as possible. If you need to, use a spoon to distribute the pistachios across the top of the cake. Sprinkle shaved almonds, if using.

You can cut the cake into 12 to 15 squares and serve at this point (see notes for best results.)

Notes:

This recipe is an inspiration from the island of Aegina, where pistachios and honey from local beekeepers are aplenty! This recipe also speaks to Mediterranean culture because it is not laden with butter or frosting.

The syrup needs to be hot when you pour it on the cooled cake, the cake will better absorb it. Also, for best results, allow the cake to sit for a few hours before cutting and serving. It is even better the next day when the flavors and the moisture have settled in.

Kristyn Slick

kristyn@makingmealtimememories.com

www.makingmealtimememories.com