

GOURMET RECIPES

Around the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean region is shared by many countries that may be physically and culturally different and yet show similarities, not least in terms of their food.

All these countries surrounding and nestled up against the Mediterranean share the heat of the sun combined with the wealth of the sea; this makes for a stunning range of food: freshly landed seafood and fish, mouth-watering salads, vegetables and fruit, and meat from the adjacent, often herb-covered hillsides.

Red meat is not a big part of the diet; neither are cream or butter. The soils may be rich, but the terrain is often rugged and water supply critical. Fruit and nut trees are much at home on the sun-baked slopes which are well suited to sheep, goats, chickens and pigs. Grapevines flourish, and the ancient olive groves provide yet another reason why the food of this region is so in tune with modern life. It's fresh and healthy!

In this column we are featuring several beautiful cookbooks based on recipes from around the Mediterranean: *Stylish Mediterranean* by Sophie Braimbridge, *Spanish Kitchen* by Linda Tubby, *The Lebanese Cookbook* by Hussien Dekmak, and *The Olive and Caper* by Susanna Hoffman.

Sophie Braimbridge is a chef, writer and presenter who runs her own cookery school. She was classically trained by the Roux brothers and is a veteran of leading restaurants, including Le Gavroche, The River Café and Chez Panisse in San Francisco. Linda Tubby is a leading food writer and



food stylist in the UK who began in fashion, then switched to food and never looked back. Tubby has written several cookbooks and her work also appears in *Food and Travel*, *BBC Good Food* and *Waitrose Food Illustrated*.

Hussien Dekmak was born in Beirut and has been cooking since his teens. He trained at Al Hamra in London, and opened his own Le Mignon in 1997. This is his first book, and we're sure won't be his last! Susanna Hoffman is both a chef and an anthropologist who has lived and worked in Greece for thirty years cooking, bargaining in the *agora* and gathering stories and recipes all over the country many of which you'll see here.

Each of these books is a lively adventure in reading as well as cooking! So sit back, relax and cruise the Mediterranean while you plan dinner tonight!

On today's menu:

- [Smoked Aubergine \(Eggplant\) Purée \(Baba Ghanoush\)](#)
 - [Sawda Dajaj \(Fried Chicken Livers\)](#)
 - [Toum \(Garlic Sauce\)](#)
 - [Prawn, Haricot and Dill Salad](#)
 - [Stuffed Calamares \(Calamares Rellenos\)](#)
 - [Yogurt Cake with Ouzo-Lemon Syrup](#)
 - [Ouzo-Lemon Syrup](#)
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Starting at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, we'll enjoy the most popular appetizer along this coast:

Smoked Aubergine (Eggplant) Purée (Baba Ghanoush)

A classic Turkish dish served as an appetizer, and a favourite to be found in countries up and down the East Coast!

From *Stylish Mediterranean*, where author Sophie Braimbridge tells us that grilling the aubergine whole gives it a creamy, smoky flavour that is so prevalent in the region's cuisine.



When in Turkey a few years ago we simply had to try Baba Ghanoush all over the country, and we find this recipe to be completely authentic and utterly delicious! Serve with warm pita bread or as a dip with raw vegetables.

Serves 4

- 2 medium aubergines (500 g total weight)
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 large garlic clove, crushed with a pinch of salt
- 100 g Greek-style yogurt
- 1 Tbsp tahini
- 2 tsp coarsely chopped flatleaf parsley
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

To garnish:

- Paprika or pomegranate seeds
- Drizzle of extra virgin olive oil

Roast the aubergines on a griddle, over a flame or on the top of your gas range for about 20 minutes (baking them in the oven doesn't give the smoky flavour).

Meanwhile, toast the cumin gently in a dry frying pan for a few minutes, then grind in a pestle and mortar or spice grinder.

When the aubergines are cooked, place them in a sieve over a bowl and leave for about 5 minutes to cool slightly and drain off any bitter juices. As soon as they are cool enough to handle, peel away the burnt skin and break off the thorny stem. Return to the sieve and press down with a large metal spoon to drain off any remaining juices.

When the aubergines have drained, coarsely chop the flesh and mix together with the cumin, garlic, yogurt, tahini, parsley and pepper. Taste and add more salt if necessary.

Garnish with a sprinkle of paprika or pomegranate seeds, drizzle with olive oil and serve.

Tony's wine recommendation:

A Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand or a Pouilly-Fumé from the Loire

Then move south to Lebanon, a beautiful country stretching across a small section of the Mediterranean. Famous for its natural landscape which combines bewitching beaches, glorious mountains and emerald-green fields... and wonderful food of exceptional taste and variety! We loved this dish.

Sawda Dajaj (Fried Chicken Livers)

From *The Lebanese Cookbook*. Author and Chef Hussien Dekmak's *Le Mignon*, which he calls "an outpost of classic Lebanese cooking in Camden (London)," was described by food writer Patricia Wells as "some of the finest Lebanese food I have ever tasted."



The Lebanese Cookbook is full of recipes and photographs; it makes a great read, with a "Welcome to Lebanon" piece followed by "How to Put a Lebanese Meal Together"! We're ready to book a flight tonight... but, meanwhile, will get back to our own kitchen to make this unusual appetizer.

Serves 2

- 4 Tbsp vegetable oil, for frying
- 100 g chicken livers
- Salt and black pepper
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1 tsp pomegranate molasses (available in Mid East stores)
- 1 Tbsp [garlic sauce](#) (recipe below)

Heat the oil over a high heat in a frying pan so it is a couple of centimetres deep. When it is hot, add the chicken livers and stir continuously until cooked, about 15–20 minutes.

Drain the oil from the pan, then add salt, pepper, the lemon juice, pomegranate molasses and garlic sauce and stir for a couple of minutes.

Serve hot with other starters and toasted bread.

Toum (Garlic Sauce)

This recipe makes a large quantity but will keep in the fridge for a week. It goes with a lot of things... especially French fries!

- 2 peeled garlic heads
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 egg white
- 500 mL vegetable oil
- Juice of 2 lemons, or more to taste

Put the garlic cloves and salt in a blender or food-processor and whiz to a smooth purée. Add the egg white and whiz again until smooth. With the motor running, very slowly pour in the vegetable oil in a constant, steady stream until all the oil is used up and the sauce is the consistency and colour of mayonnaise. Add the lemon juice and keep whizzing until smooth. Taste and add more if necessary. Serve. Yum!

Tony's wine recommendation:

California Merlot, Oregon Pinot Noir or Australian Shiraz

Prawn, Haricot and Dill Salad

Stylish Mediterranean, indeed! Our boat stopped in Morocco for this tasty mixed salad, which can be put together in 20+ minutes! Author Sophie Braimbridge told us that, as the country was once administered by France, most Moroccans speak French and the influence of French cooking is still apparent. Here, rocket is used like an herb, more for its pepper flavour than as a decorative bed of leaves. Makes a tasty first course or small summer main dish!



Serves 4

- 400 g tinned haricot beans
- 450 g medium to large raw headless prawns
- 100 g large tomato
- 75 g rocket (arugula)
- ½ large lemon (you need 3 Tbsp lemon juice)
- 1 large garlic clove
- 1–2 tsp coarsely ground cumin seeds (depending on freshness)
- ½ large mild red chili
- 3 Tbsp coarsely chopped dill, leaves only
- 5 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Rinse and drain the beans well. Set aside.

Rinse and drain the prawns well. Peel them and place on kitchen paper to absorb any remaining water. Set aside.

Cut the tomato into chunks and place in a large salad bowl. Coarsely chop the rocket and add to the tomatoes.

Gently heat a large frying pan. Coarsely grind the cumin in a pestle and mortar or spice grinder. Juice the lemon. Finely chop the garlic, chili and dill. Set aside.

Turn up the heat under the frying pan to high and add 2 Tbsp of the oil to the hot pan. Add enough prawns to cover the base of the pan and cook for 1 minute. (Cook in batches if there are too many prawns to fit in the pan, as they should be cooked quickly and fiercely to retain their juice and prevent them from drying out.) Quickly turn over the prawns, cook for 1 minute, then push a little to the side so you can fit the cumin, garlic and chili into the pan. Add 1 more Tbsp of oil on top of the spices so they get a chance to quickly fry in oil, and not burn on the base of the pan. Cook briefly until the garlic starts to lightly brown, add the haricot beans and quickly add the lemon juice and dill. Remove the heat, season with salt and pepper and mix briefly.

Pour over the tomatoes and rocket in the bowl, add 2 more Tbsp of extra virgin olive oil to the salad and serve warm or marinated at room temperature. If you wish to prepare in advance, you might want to add the rocket when the prawns are cool.

Tony's wine recommendation:

Alsace Pinot Gris, Barrel-Fermented Ontario Chardonnay or a Rhône white

Stuffed Calamares (Calamares Rellenos)

Spanish Country Kitchen author Linda Tubby says "I use small squid for this recipe. Even smaller ones, calamaritos, are only 1 inch long and are delicious fried in a light batter to serve as a tapa. Calamares are also cooked *en su tinta* (in their own ink) – black, shiny and very good – and as *fritos a la romana* (floured and fried squid rings)."



We tried this recipe and couldn't get enough. Make sure you have plenty of good bread to sop up the sauce!

Serves 4

- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 16 ready prepared baby squid with tentacles, about 3 inches long (see note)
- 2 oz. chorizo, finely chopped
- ½ tsp chile flakes
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ½ cup pine nuts
- ¾ cup fresh bread crumbs
- 2 Tbsp finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus extra coarsely chopped, to serve

Tomato Sauce

- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- ½ tsp sugar
- 6 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded and finely chopped (retain any juices)

Heat 3 Tbsp of the oil in a skillet, add the onion and sauté until soft and

pale golden. Add the chopped tentacles and sauté until pale.

Add the chorizo and sauté until the fat runs out into the onion. Stir in the chile flakes.

Toast the pine nuts in a dry skillet for a minute or so until golden. Take care, because they will burn easily. Transfer to a plate to cool.

Meanwhile, put the garlic, half the pine nuts, and bread crumbs in a processor and pulse until fine. Add to the pan, stir in the parsley and let cool.

To make the tomato sauce, heat the oil in a flameproof casserole dish, add the onion and garlic, and sauté until pale gold. Increase the heat; add the sugar and the tomatoes with their juice, then simmer for a few minutes.

Stuff the squid with the cold mixture and close with a toothpick. Heat the oil in a skillet and sauté the stuffed squid on both sides until pale golden, about 2 minutes on each side. Add to the casserole dish and cook in a preheated oven at 375°F for 15 minutes. Remove from the oven, sprinkle with parsley and remaining toasted pine nuts and serve.

Note: If you have to clean the squid yourself, first pull off the tentacles. Rinse out the bodies and discard the stiff transparent quill, if any. Cut the tentacles away from the head and discard the head. Chop the tentacles into small pieces.

Tony's wine recommendation:

A Rheingau Riesling Spätlese, Semi-Dry Ontario Riesling, or Alsace Riesling

Yogurt Cake with Ouzo-Lemon Syrup

"He who gets scalded in the porridge tries to cool down even yogurt" is a Greek saying meaning something like "once burned, twice shy." It also alludes to the implacable coolness of yogurt. Chilled or not, yogurt seems cool. In a cake batter it smoothes the mixture into a sleek satin texture. In Greece, where fresh milk is not much used but cheese and yogurt lie ready

at every cook's hand, such a cake is easily made. It is often topped with a honey syrup, but we found this topping of ouzo mixed with lemon juice really takes the cake! Pure ambrosia! From *The Olive and Capers* by Susanna Hoffman.

Serves 12 to 16

- Butter or oil, for the cake pan
- 8 Tbsp (1 stick) butter, at room temperature
- ¾ cup sugar
- 4 large eggs, separated
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 Tbsp coarsely chopped lemon zest
- 1¾ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- [Ouzo-Lemon Syrup](#) (recipe below)



1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour a 10-inch springform pan.
2. Combine the butter and sugar in a large bowl, and beat with an electric mixer until creamy. Beat in the egg yolks all at once, then the yogurt and zest. In another bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, and salt together, then sift them into the bowl with the yogurt mixture. Beat to mix well.
3. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff peaks form. Whisk half the whites into the batter mixture, then gently fold in the remaining whites.
4. Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan and bake until a knife inserted in the centre comes out clean and the edges of the cake are pulling away from the pan, 45 minutes. Transfer the pan to a wire rack to cool.
5. When it is cool enough to handle, invert the cake pan over a large plate and unmold the cake. If it doesn't fall free right away, use a table knife to gently pry the cake loose.
6. Spoon about 1/3 of the syrup over the cake and allow it to soak in for 5 to 10 minutes. Repeat this process with the remaining syrup two more times. Set the cake aside for at least 1 hour before serving. The cake will keep for several days, covered and stored at room temperature.

Ouzo-Lemon Syrup

Ouzo reveals its invigorating chill in the way it turns from ice-clear to frosty once water is added. Far too underused in cooking, ouzo combined with lemon in this syrup turns the slightly tart, milky yogurt cake into a very Greek and very unusual sweet!

Makes 2 cups

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup ouzo
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- ¼ cup water
- 1½ Tbsp finely chopped lemon zest

Place all the ingredients in a medium-size saucepan over high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer briskly until thickened, 10 minutes. Cool, and use right away or store, covered, in the refrigerator indefinitely.

Tony's wine recommendation:

Moscato d'Asti, Ontario Riesling Icewine, German Riesling of Beerenauslese quality

We wish to thank:

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Happily enjoyed by Helen Hatton and Ron Morris.

