

GOURMET RECIPES

Saffron Shores

Spring is here – Easter, Passover and our birthday are upon us! All of these special days call for a feast, and we've got the perfect idea for something different and yet very, very festive: *Saffron Shores: Jewish Cooking of the Southern Mediterranean* by Joyce Goldstein.

Goldstein, a nationally known chef, is also an author, teacher and Mediterranean cooking expert, and this book shows her at her best. The dishes are exotic yet appealing; they read wonderfully well and you'll find yourself marking pages for "must try" recipes throughout the book. These days, happily, all the ingredients are readily available from your grocer or the plethora of ethnic and specialty shops that dot our world today.



A little note of history here: Goldstein tells us that most Jews in North America are of Ashkenazic origins; that is, their families come from Eastern and Central Europe. It is Ashkenazic cuisine that most of us think of as Jewish food: the well-known and well-loved rib-sticking dishes such as matzoh ball soup, gefilte fish, brisket and latkes, kugel, challah and rugelach.

These are old favourites, and as times change, the overall culinary spotlight in the last few years has been on Mediterranean cooking, which now includes the cuisine of the Sephardic or Mediterranean Jews. Sefarad was the Hebrew name given to the Iberian peninsula in ancient times, and any Jewish food that is not Ashkenazic comes under this broad title.

Another point that we didn't know: the term Sephardic can apply to quite diverse cuisines and cultural influences. The Sephardim were outgoing and

participated actively in whatever community they lived in; they shared recipes and culinary traditions with their non-Jewish neighbours, and their food reflected the cuisine of their homeland but adapted to follow the kosher laws!

Joyce Goldstein devotes pages to history, both actual and culinary: Jews in Muslim Lands, Signature Flavors of Judeo-Maghrebi and Judeo-Arabic Cuisine, and The Kosher Laws. She gives marvellous menus for special events and high holidays, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Purim and Hanukkah.

Got your interest? It surely got ours, for this is wonderful Mediterranean cooking and a fascinating history book with a special twist. We loved *Saffron Shores: Jewish Cooking of the Southern Mediterranean*, and we know you'll love the book and the results! Shalom, everyone, let's eat!

On today's menu:

- [Potato and Egg Cake](#)
- [Tunisian Fish Ball Tagine](#)
- [Stuffed Butter Cookies](#)

Potato and Egg Cake

Joyce Goldstein says this dish, also known as *marcoude*, is a North African Sephardic version of the Spanish potato tortilla. This version is called *cuajada* in *La Table Juive*, and is based on an Arabic term for *qas'ab*, a Spanish cooking vessel such as a *cazula*.



Whew, that's a lot to absorb... we liked this fact, though: if you use only half the eggs, it becomes a potato gratin or potato cake! Whatever, it's delicious, and you'd better be ready to serve seconds.

Serves 8 as a side dish, 4 as a main

- 2½ lbs. russet potatoes, peeled and cut into pieces

- 4 to 6 cloves garlic
- 8 eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 large green onions, including tender green parts, minced
- 3 Tbsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Freshly grated nutmeg to taste

Cook the potatoes and garlic in salted boiling water until the potatoes are hot, about 20 minutes. Drain and mash with a fork. Stir in the eggs, green onions, parsley, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Mix well.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Oil a 10-inch round pie dish or gratin dish and heat it in the oven. Spread the potato mixture in the dish. Bake until golden, about 30 minutes. Serve hot or warm.

Accompanying wine? Tony recommends...

An oak-aged Chardonnay from the new World (although you'll probably not serve this dish alone, so the meat or fish will determine your wine choice).

Tunisian Fish Ball Tagine

In Spain, Sephardic fish balls, called *albondigas*, were seasoned simply with parsley and maybe a little cheese, then fried and served with tomato sauce. Tunisian Jewish fish balls are more highly seasoned. To hold the fish together, most cooks use fresh breadcrumbs, and during Passover, matzoh meal is substituted. This is a tasty, spicy dish perfect for a crowd or buffet. Goldstein suggests serving the tagine on couscous.



Serves 6 to 8

For the fish balls

- 1½ lb. mild white fish, such as cod, sole, snapper or bass
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh coriander

- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 1½ tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp harissa (available at ethnic markets)
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1½ cups fresh bread or matzoh crumbs
- 1 egg, beaten
- Olive oil for frying

For the tomato sauce

- 3 Tbsp olive oil
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 5 Tbsp tomato puree or 4 tomatoes chopped
 - 2 cups fish broth or water
 - Salt and fresh ground black pepper to taste
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- Couscous for serving
 - Chopped fresh flat leaf parsley for garnish

To make the fish balls, bone and finely chop the fish. In a food processor or large bowl, combine the fish with all the remaining ingredients except the egg and oil. Mix well. Add the egg and mix until smooth. Dipping a spoon and your fingers in cold water, remove a sample of fish paste and roll into a ball. Fry in a little olive oil and taste and adjust the seasoning. Form the rest of the fish paste into 1-inch balls. Either fry now, or place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and refrigerate for up to 3 hours.

In a large sauté pan or skillet, heat ½ inch oil over medium high heat and fry a few fish balls at a time until lightly browned. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain.

To make the tomato sauce, in a large saucepan, heat the oil over the medium heat. Add all the remaining ingredients and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer. Add the fish balls and simmer for 15 minutes. Serve over couscous, sprinkled with parsley.

Accompanying wine? Tony recommends...

The spiciness of this dish would lend itself to off-dry Riesling (Ontario or German Kabinett quality), although a Chianti Classico would go well, or an Oregon Pinot Noir.

Stuffed Butter Cookies

Called *menenas* by Sephardic Jews, these cookies, also known as *maamoul*, are very popular around Easter-time with non-Jews in Syria. Once you understand how to fold the dough around the filling, the cookies are easy to prepare. They can also be stuffed with nuts and dried fruits. Trust us, they are delicate and delicious, and, pardon the pun, very Moorish!



Makes about 30 cookies

For the nut filling:

- 2 cups (½ pound) walnuts, almonds or pistachios, fine chopped
- 1 cup sugar or to taste
- 1 Tbsp rose water
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter at room temperature
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 3½ cup sifted flour
- 2 to 4 Tbsp milk or water
- 1 Tbsp orange flower water or rose water

- Confectioner's sugar for dusting

To make the filling: In a medium bowl, combine all the ingredients and stir to blend.

Preheat the oven to 300°F. In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy, then gradually stir in the flour. Stir in the milk or water and orange flower or rose water. On a lightly floured surface, knead until dough holds together and is easy to shape.

Pinch off a walnut-sized piece of dough. Roll it into a ball and hollow out with your thumb. Pinch the sides up to form a pot shape. Place a spoonful of filling into the hollow, then pinch the dough closed over the filling. Press and score the sealed edge if desired. Bake until set but not browned, about 20 minutes. Carefully transfer to wire racks. While warm, dust heavily with

confectioner's sugar.

Accompanying wine? Tony recommends...

A sweet sparkling wine like Asti Spumante, a Cream Sherry or a 10-Year-Old Tawny Port or Commandaria St. John from Cyprus.

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Happily tested by Helen Hatton and Ron Morris.