

JEWISH HOLIDAY FEASTS

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY COCO MASUDA



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DEDICATION

To Bella and Ethel,
To Loretta and Bessie,
and to Jewish mothers everywhere regardless
of race, creed, sex, or place of national origin.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

AUTUMN

ROSH HASHANAH

Persimmon and Pomegranate Salad
Round Raisin Challah
Honey & Cumin-Glazed Cornish Hens
Couscous with Saffron and Vegetables
Braised Apples and Red Cabbage with Wine
Hannah's Honey Cake

YOM KIPPUR

Fresh Vegetable Soup with Chicken and Noodles
Toasted Bagels with Eggplant Spread
Spiced Pear and Almond Cake

SUCCOTH

Sweet and Hot Pepper Tomato Soup with Mint
Pita Stuffed with Eggplant Salad and Feta Cheese
Fennel, Cucumber, and Orange Salad
Baked Figs with Honeyed Yogurt

WINTER

HANUKKAH

Spinach Salad with Tangerines and Dried Cranberries
Classic Potato Latkes
Zucchini Latkes
Fresh Salmon Latkes
Cauliflower and Carrot Latkes
Sweet Cottage Cheese Latkes with Apple-Pear Puree

SPRING

PURIM

Hamantashen with Prune Filling
Hamantashen with Fig Filling
Walnut and Dried Cherry Rugelach
Apricot-Almond-Chocolate Balls
Chocolate-Orange Squares

PESACH

Carrot-Matzo Ball Soup
Rolled Turkey Breast with Mushroom-Spinach Stuffing
Asparagus with Orange Vinaigrette
Dried Cherry and Pear Haroset
Sweet-Potato Kugel
Passover Biscotti

SUMMER

SHAVUOTH

Cold Beet and Cucumber Soup
Asparagus and Herbed Cheese Strudel
Poached Salmon with Two Sauces
 Lemon-Mustard Sauce
 Roasted Tomato and Red Pepper Sauce
Very Berry Blintzes with Berry Sauce

YEAR ROUND

FOODS OF THE SABBATH

Golden Challah Bread
Tomato and Onion Braised Brisket
Roasted Garlic Potato Wedges
Sugar Snap Peas and Honeyed Carrots
Strawberry, Pineapple, and Mango Compote

INDEX

TABLE OF EQUIVALENTS

INTRODUCTION



“DON’T DO ANYTHING TOO WEIRD,” a traditional Jewish cook advised us as we began this book. “I like new ideas, but I also like going back every year to my comfortable old recipes. Nobody wants to be eating experiments, especially on the High Holy Days.” * She was right, of course. And we felt pretty much the same way. We wanted to make a nice little book that would have everything: recipes that conform to the requirements of the holiday, that meet the expectations of traditional taste, that preserve the richness and meaning of the beloved customary foods. We wanted to do them in a light style with fresh, flavorful ingredients tailored to today’s health-conscious needs. Simple but interesting; not boring but not difficult or intimidating either. * We tasted and tested and researched traditional Jewish holiday foods from every part of the world—from Russia, Spain, and Greece to Israel, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Among the differences, we found an amazing consistency in the way these dishes reflect the land they are from, their time of year. They all, in some way honor the wisdom of the earth: winter’s sleep, spring’s awakening, the cornucopia of summer, the autumn harvest. The feasts and festivals of the Jewish calendar, which together tell the sacred story of a people, are tied to the cycles of nature, its demands and generosity. That is why we decided to arrange the book by season and to cook with foods and ingredients that eloquently reflect that hallowed bond. “These are the feasts of the Lord,” announces Leviticus 23:4, “which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.” * We introduce each

holiday with some background information about its history and meaning. Wherever possible, we include explanations about how each dish fits into the tradition and why it is served. * Finally, because today's cook almost always enjoys limited time in the kitchen, all recipes are straightforward and quickly prepared. We hope you will find this a concise and complete one-stop helper for every holiday: easy to use, exciting to cook from and, most of all, not too weird.

ROSH HASHANAH



LESHANA TOVA TIKOSEVU—May you be inscribed for a good year—is the familiar greeting of Rosh Hashanah, the high holy days that begin the Jewish new year. A time of reflection and resolution, Rosh Hashanah is also a time of joy and hope for the year to come. The holiday begins on the first of Tishre, which falls in late September or early October, and continues through the Ten Days of Awe, or Days of Penitence, until Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This ancient holiday time resonates with much of the modern world which, at this time of year, has returned from summer retreats to begin the new season: at school and college, in business, in the fields, and with friends and family as the social calendar gets under way. * Rosh Hashanah is known under many names, each underscoring a different aspect of the holy days' significance. As Yom ha-Din, or the Day of Judgment, this is a time of examination, evaluation, and repentance. As Yom ha-Zikaron, the Day of Remembrance, it refers to the eternity of time and the continuity of past and present. As Yom Teruah, or the Day of the Blowing of the Horn, it recalls the shofar, or ram's horn, which is sounded during the religious services as a reminder of spiritual awakening. * On Rosh Hashanah, special additions to the dinner table include the season's new fruits, like pomegranates, avocados and persimmons, a plate of sliced apples or bread, and a pot of honey for dipping. These signify hope for a sweet year ahead and are eaten with the accompanying prayer: "May it be Thy will, Oh Lord our God, to renew unto us a happy and pleasant new year."

PERSIMMON AND POMEGRANATE SALAD

Serves 8

One of the gustatory joys of Rosh Hashanah is the introduction of fruits not commonly enjoyed by the family. This salad offers two of them in a slightly sweet and sour combination meant also to represent the wish for fruitfulness and plenty in the new year. The Fuyu is the preferred persimmon in this salad because of its crisp texture.

- 8 cups torn spinach leaves or other seasonal greens, (about 1 pound)
- 3 Fuyu persimmons, cut into thin wedges
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- 7 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Seeds from 1 large pomegranate (about 1 cup)

IN A LARGE BOWL, COMBINE SPINACH, PERSIMMONS, AND ONION. Whisk together vinegar and oil. Toss with salad. Add salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with pomegranate seeds and serve.



ROUND RAISIN CHALLAH

Makes 1 loaf

During Rosh Hashanah, challah is often shaped into forms other than the usual braid. It may look like wings to associate man with the angels or like a ladder to facilitate our prayers reaching heaven. As a round form such as this one, the challah recalls the crown of God's kingdom or the circle of life.

- 2 packages dry yeast
- 1/8 teaspoon saffron threads
- 2/3 cups warm water (about 110 degrees F.)
- 5 egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 7 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 4 1/2 to 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups raisins
- 1 egg yolk, beaten

IN A LARGE BOWL, SOAK YEAST AND SAFFRON IN WATER ABOUT 5 MINUTES. Stir in egg yolks, eggs, oil, sugar, and salt. Add enough flour to form a stiff but sticky dough, about 4 1/2 cups. Turn dough out on floured surface and knead until smooth and elastic, about 6 minutes, working raisins in dough while kneading. Form into a ball and place in a greased bowl. Turn dough to grease entire surface. Cover with plastic wrap and place in a warm spot until doubled in bulk, about 2 hours.

Punch down dough and knead briefly. Roll dough into a rope about 24 inches long. Coil rope into a spiral round loaf. Place on a greased cookie sheet. Brush with beaten yolk and let rise in warm place until doubled, about 45 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Bake until dark golden brown, about 35 to 40 minutes. Cool thoroughly before slicing.

HONEY & CUMIN-GLAZED CORNISH HENS

Serves 8

The honey in this recipe symbolizes the hoped-for sweetness as the new year begins with this festive dish as its centerpiece.

GLAZE

- ½ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 3 tablespoons cumin seed, toasted and crushed
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

4 Cornish hens, split in half

Salt and pepper

COMBINE GLAZE INGREDIENTS. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Rinse hens and blot dry. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Using about a third of the glaze, brush both sides of hen halves. Place, skin side down, on a baking sheet with low sides. Place in oven and roast 10 minutes. Turn heat down to 375 degrees F., brush hens again with half the remaining glaze and roast 5 minutes. Turn hens over and roast 10 minutes. Brush with remaining glaze and roast until deep golden brown, about 5 minutes more. Let stand about 10 minutes before serving.



COUSCOUS WITH SAFFRON AND VEGETABLES

Serves 8

The ruby glint of dried cranberries brightens this unusual dish of Sephardic inspiration. It may be served hot with the main course as a vegetable or at room temperature as a salad course or side dish.

- 2 cups chicken broth
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon saffron threads
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups couscous
- ¾ cup dried cranberries or currants
- 2 medium zucchini, trimmed and diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- Salt and pepper
- 3 scallions, sliced

IN A LARGE SAUCEPAN, BRING BROTH, WATER, OIL, SAFFRON, AND CINNAMON TO A BOIL. Gradually stir in the couscous. Cook, stirring until liquid is absorbed, about 2 minutes. Stir in cranberries, zucchini and carrots. Cover and let stand 15 minutes. Taste for salt and pepper and turn out into a serving bowl, breaking up lumps with your fingers. Sprinkle with scallions. Serve warm or at room temperature.

BRAISED APPLES AND RED CABBAGE WITH WINE

Serves 8

This hearty vegetable side dish combines the honey and apples of the traditional Rosh Hashanah table.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 large sweet onion, chopped
- 2 large apples, cored and chopped
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 large head red cabbage, cored and shredded
- ½ cup dry red wine
- ½ cup chicken broth or water
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup chopped parsley

IN A LARGE SKILLET, HEAT OIL. Cook onion and apples until very soft. Stir in honey and cook 1 minute. Add cabbage and cook until wilted. Add wine and broth or water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover, and simmer until cabbage is tender, about 15 minutes. If mixture is too liquid, uncover and cook over high heat for a few minutes until some of the liquid evaporates. Stir in salt and pepper and serve sprinkled with parsley.

HANNAH'S HONEY CAKE

Serves 12

Cookies, cakes, honey-laced goodies, and sweets of many kinds recall the hope for sweet and joyful days ahead. Moist with coffee and apples, these almond-topped squares are a welcome reminder.

- 1 cup hot brewed coffee
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup honey
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup vegetable or canola oil
- 3 eggs
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 large apple, cored and grated
- 12 whole blanched almonds

PREHEAT THE OVEN TO 350 DEGREES F. Grease a 9 × 13-inch baking pan. In a small bowl, combine coffee and baking soda. Set aside. In a large bowl, beat honey, sugar, and oil until well blended. Beat in eggs, one at a time, until mixture looks homogenized. In a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg.

Beat flour mixture into honey mixture alternately with coffee mixture until well combined. Stir in apple. Pour batter into prepared pan. Place almonds on top of batter, to mark the center of each of 12 squares. Bake until golden brown, about 45 minutes. Cool and cut into squares.

YOM KIPPUR



THE MOST SOLEMN OF THE JEWISH HOLY DAYS, YOM KIPPUR IS A DAY OF REFLECTION, ATONEMENT, AND COMPLETE FASTING. At the conclusion of this day of worship and self-examination, friends and family come together to exchange greetings and renew their strength. Foods served to break the fast are light and simple restoratives, which usually include both salty and sweet dishes. * This break-the-fast menu is readied the day before; in fact, the flavors are enhanced by a day of melding. It begins with soup, always welcome nourishment and comfort. Toasted or fresh bagels are accompanied by an eggplant spread that is just savory enough after a day of fasting. The easy-to-prepare almond dessert satisfies a natural craving for something sweet. Made with pears, a fruit of the season, it is a moist cake that keeps exceptionally well.

FRESH VEGETABLE SOUP WITH CHICKEN AND NOODLES

Serves 10 to 12

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped
1 leek, white part only, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
1 large carrot, diced
1 red bell pepper, seeded, deveined, and diced
1 small fennel bulb, chopped
½ head cabbage, shredded
4 plum tomatoes, seeded and coarsely chopped
2 zucchini, halved lengthwise and sliced
½ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ cup chopped parsley
6 cups chicken broth
3 cups water
8 ounces fine egg noodles
3 whole boneless and skinless chicken breasts, cut into strips
Salt and pepper

IN A LARGE POT, HEAT THE OIL. Cook onion, leek, celery, carrot, red pepper, fennel, and cabbage until barely tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, zucchini, oregano, and parsley. Cook until bubbly, about 2 minutes. Add broth and water and simmer 20 minutes. Add noodles and chicken and simmer 10 minutes.

Add salt and pepper to taste. Cool and refrigerate. Just before serving, reheat and taste again for salt. Serve hot.

TOASTED BAGELS WITH EGGPLANT SPREAD

Serves 12

- 2 medium eggplants (about 2 pounds)
- 1 small onion, quartered
- 2 cloves garlic
- ½ cup parsley leaves
- ¼ cup basil leaves
- 1 small red pepper, roasted, peeled, and seeded
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne
- Salt and pepper
- 12 bagels, halved and lightly toasted

PREHEAT THE OVEN TO 400 DEGREES F. Prick the skin of the eggplants and place on a baking sheet. Bake until eggplants collapse, about 45 minutes. Let cool completely.

Discard the stems from eggplants and cut into chunks. Place eggplants in a food processor with onion, garlic, parsley, basil, red pepper, tomato paste, lemon juice, olive oil, and cayenne. Process until a rough paste is formed. Taste and add salt and pepper. Spread on toasted bagel halves.

SPICED PEAR AND ALMOND CAKE

Serves 12

4 cups cored and coarsely chopped ripe pears (5 or 6 pears)
2 cups sugar
½ cup vegetable or canola oil
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon grated nutmeg
Grated zest of 1 lemon
2 teaspoons baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup chopped blanched almonds
Confectioners' sugar

PREHEAT THE OVEN TO 350 DEGREES F. Grease a 10-inch round cake pan. Combine pears and sugar in a medium bowl and let stand 15 minutes. Combine oil with eggs and add to pears. In another bowl, combine flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, lemon zest, baking soda, and salt. Stir into pear mixture. Add vanilla and almonds. Pour into prepared pan and bake until cake tester inserted in center comes out clean, about 45 minutes. Cool on a rack about 20 minutes before turning out. Invert onto a serving platter and dust with confectioners' sugar.



SUCCOTH



SUCCOTH IS THE JEWISH THANKSGIVING. The weeklong festival begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur and includes many joyous aspects, each with its own name. As Hag ha'asif it is the Festival of the Harvest which coincides with the full moon and harvest time of ancient Palestine. It is also called zeman simhatenu, or Time of Rejoicing for the goodness and bounty of the earth. The word succoth, meaning booths, refers to the huts or temporary dwellings in which the Jews had to live in their 40 years wandering through the wilderness. * The building of the succah is the most visible and dramatic aspect of this holiday and one which can involve the whole family. Children enjoy stringing cranberries and 21 decorating the walls of the succah with autumn fruits and gourds. Everyone partakes of the excitement and novelty of eating the festival meals in the succah under its roof of boughs, which let the moon and stars shine through. * Foods served during Succoth represent autumn and abundance partaken in a spirit of celebration and thanksgiving. The citron and palm branch (etrog and lulav), symbols of growing things, represent Succoth and figure prominently in the festival commemorations. This menu is meant as picnic fare which can be served outdoors at room temperature.

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