GENERAL

middle eastern authentic recipes best traditional recipes from lebanon syria jordan palestinian territories and israel

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When you think of Middle Eastern cuisine, images of aromatic spices, fresh herbs, and hearty grains come to mind. But the region's culinary landscape is far richer than any single dish can represent. From the lemon tangy salads of Lebanon to the slow cooked stews of Jordan, each country offers a tapestry of flavors that have been refined over centuries. This guide explores the best traditional recipes from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestinian territories, and Israel, offering you a taste of authentic Middle Eastern cooking that you can recreate at home.

Why Middle Eastern Authentic Recipes Matter

Middle Eastern food is more than a collection of dishes; it is a cultural heritage that reflects history, geography, and community. Authentic recipes preserve the techniques and ingredients that have been passed down through generations, ensuring that the flavors remain true to their origins.

By cooking these dishes, you:

- Celebrate the region's culinary diversity.
- Support traditional farming and spice cultivation.
- Introduce family and friends to new flavors.
- Learn about the social rituals that accompany each meal.

Below we dive into the most iconic recipes from each country, complete with ingredient lists, cooking methods, and serving suggestions.

Lebanese Culinary Highlights

Classic Lebanese Mezze

Mezze is the quintessential Lebanese dining experience—a spread of small plates that encourages sharing and conversation. A typical mezze includes hummus, tabbouleh, baba ganoush, and stuffed grape leaves.

- 1 cup cooked chickpeas (or 1 can, drained)
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- Salt to taste
- Water as needed
- Paprika and chopped parsley for garnish

1. Blend chickpeas, tahini, garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, cumin, and salt in a food processor.
2. Add water a tablespoon at a time until the mixture reaches a creamy consistency.
3. Transfer to a serving bowl, drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle paprika, and garnish with parsley.
4. Serve with warm pita and fresh vegetables.

Beef Kibbeh

Kibbeh is a staple in Lebanese households, especially during holidays. The dish consists of spiced minced meat wrapped in a thin crust of bulgur wheat.

- 2 cups fine bulgur wheat, soaked for 30 minutes and drained
- 1 lb lean ground beef (or lamb)
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Fresh mint leaves for garnish

1. In a skillet, heat olive oil and sauté onions until translucent.
2. Add ground beef, allspice, cinnamon, salt, and pepper; cook until browned.
3. Stir in pine nuts and let the mixture cool slightly.
4. Divide the bulgur into two portions: one for the outer shell and one for the filling.
5. Form a small oval shape with the outer bulgur, place a spoonful of the meat mixture inside, and seal the edges.
6. Repeat until all bulgur is used.
7. Pan fry the kibbeh in hot oil until golden brown on both sides.
8. Serve warm, garnished with mint leaves.

Syria's Rich Gastronomy

Shish Taouk (Grilled Chicken Skewers)

Shish Taouk is a beloved Syrian dish that showcases marinated chicken grilled to perfection. The yogurt based rub tenderizes the meat and infuses it with subtle citrus flavor.

- 1 lb boneless chicken thighs, cut into cubes
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Olive oil for brushing

1. In a bowl, whisk together yogurt, lemon juice, garlic, paprika, cumin, cayenne, salt, and pepper.
2. Add chicken cubes, coat evenly, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours (or overnight).
3. Preheat grill or grill pan to medium high heat.
4. Thread marinated chicken onto skewers.
5. Brush with olive oil and grill 3–4 minutes per side until cooked through.
6. Serve with a side of tabbouleh and warm flatbread.

Fatteh (Layered Bread and Yogurt)

Fatteh is a comforting layered dish featuring crispy pita, lentils, and yogurt, often served at gatherings.

- 4 pita breads, cut into strips and toasted
- 1 cup cooked lentils
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- Olive oil for drizzling
- Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish

1. In a small bowl, mix yogurt, tahini, garlic, lemon juice, cumin, and a pinch of salt.
2. In a serving dish, layer toasted pita strips, lentils, and drizzle with yogurt sauce.
3. Repeat layers until all ingredients are used.
4. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil and parsley garnish.
5. Serve immediately.

Jordanian Flavors

Mansaf (Jordan’s National Dish)

Mansaf is a celebratory dish made of lamb cooked in a tangy yogurt sauce and served over rice and flatbread. It is traditionally presented on a large platter for family and friends.

- 2 lbs lamb shoulder, cut into large chunks
- 2 cups plain yogurt
- 1 cup water
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 cup rice (short grain or basmati)
- 1/2 cup toasted almonds
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
- Olive oil for drizzling

1. In a large pot, combine lamb, yogurt, water, salt, cumin, and cinnamon. Bring to a gentle simmer.
2. Cover and cook for 1½–2 hours until the lamb is tender and the sauce thickens.
3. Meanwhile, cook rice according to package instructions.
4. In a shallow pan, toast almonds and pine nuts until golden.
5. To serve, spread rice on a platter, arrange lamb pieces on top, pour the yogurt sauce over, and garnish with toasted nuts, parsley, and a drizzle of olive oil.
6. Accompany with flatbread or fresh salad.

Ma''amoul (Stuffed Shortbread Cookies)

Ma''amoul are sweet pastries filled with dates or nuts, often prepared for holidays and special occasions.

- 2 cups fine semolina
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1 cup warm water

- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon rose water (optional)
- 1 cup dates, pitted and chopped (or 1 cup walnuts)
- Ground cinnamon for dusting

1. In a bowl, whisk semolina, flour, sugar, baking powder, and a pinch of salt.
2. Add melted butter, warm water, and rose water; mix until a smooth dough forms.
3. Divide dough into small balls, flatten each, and press a spoonful of dates or walnuts into the center.
4. Seal the dough around the filling and shape into a round.
5. Place on parchment paper and bake at 350°F (180°C) for 15–20 minutes until golden.
6. Dust with cinnamon before serving.

Palestinian Traditions

Musakhan (Sumac Seasoned Roast Chicken)

Musakhan is a comforting dish of roasted chicken seasoned with sumac, served over flatbread with caramelized onions.

- 4 chicken thighs, bone in
- 2 large onions, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon sumac
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Flatbread (taboon or pita) for serving
- Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish

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