

The Splendid Meze Table

recipes by Bob Beer, presented at West Coast Virtual Camp 2021

Green Favas with Olive Oil

Zeytinyağlı Tane Bakla

Ingredients:

1 bag of frozen peeled green favas, about 2 cups*
(make sure this is the individual beans, not in the pod)
1 medium to large onion
1/3 c extra virgin olive oil
1-2 T chopped fresh dill, to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Easily one of the simplest mezes to make, this is one of the *zeytinyağlı* dishes, a broad category of vegetarian dishes cooked with olive oil. They are served cold or at room temperature, which brings out their flavor much better. Compare the warm and cold versions and you'll see a huge difference!

Peel and halve the onion, then chop it coarsely, in irregular slivers, from end to end.

Add the onions and favas to the pot raw, add the oil, and just enough water to barely cover them. Bring to a boil, then reduce to low and cover. Cook gently for around 10-15 minutes, checking frequently to make sure the favas are soft but not falling apart.

Remove from heat, add the dill and gently mix, then cover and let it sit covered for 5 minutes. Open and allow to cool completely before serving.

*If you have fresh favas in the pods, you'll need to shell and peel them. Shelling is obvious. To peel, first heat a pot of water, then throw the shelled beans into and parboil for about 30 seconds, then strain. As soon as they're cool enough to handle, take a small sharp knife and slit down the outer side of the bean, and give a squeeze; the bean should pop out of the skin easily.

Acika

This is actually a breakfast spread for a lot of people, but there are many versions. I've had it at both breakfast and dinner.

Ingredients:

1 c walnuts, chopped small
2 T tomato paste
2 T hot or mild pepper paste*
2-3 t dry mint
2-3 cloves garlic, crushed
1-2 T Turkish red flake pepper** to taste
salt, if needed.

Mix the paste with the walnuts, and then add as much oil until you notice that you're getting a little oil coming out of it. Add the mint and garlic, flake pepper and salt. Be careful with the salt as both the pepper paste and the flake pepper may already contain salt. Add a little more oil if the pepper and mint have absorbed it all.

*This is just like tomato paste, but made with sweet or hot peppers. It's an *olmazsa olmaz*, a *sine qua non* of Turkish cooking. The hot variety is not fiery hot, so unless you're really averse to heat, use that one in this dish because it brings a great flavor. The sweet one has a very different flavor, and is often used simply for the color it lends to dishes. You can use tomato and pepper paste in the proportions you like; many Turkish recipes just say "paste," without specifying.

**"Pul Biber." This is a mildly hot, aromatic pepper similar to Aleppo pepper, also available at Turkish/Middle Eastern food stores. In Turkey it comes in two varieties: Plain, and oiled and salted. The oiled one releases its flavor more quickly and is more for adding to finished dishes; the plain is for dishes that will be cooked. Either one will work here, but get the oiled one if you can.

Eggplant in Olive Oil and Tomato Sauce

Soslu Patlıcan/Şakşuka

Ingredients:

Two of the narrow variety of eggplants*

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1-2 cloves garlic, sliced

4 ripe Roma or other tomatoes, or a small can of crushed tomatoes

1 T tomato paste (optional)

Chopped parsley

salt, to taste

pepper, to taste

Olive oil for cooking and garnish

This dish is a mainstay of the “rakı table,” and you’ll find it at every meyhane. Because it’s one of the “olive oil dishes,” it’s served cold or at room temperature.

Peel the eggplants in stripes; that is, alternately peel a strip of peel longwise, and leave the peel for an equal width. Now cut the eggplants into cubes about $\frac{3}{4}$ ” wide. Toss them with a couple of teaspoons of salt, and place in a colander to drain. This is supposedly done to “remove the bitterness,” but what it really helps with is preventing them from soaking up oil like a sponge.

When you see some liquid dripping out, you’re good. Rinse the eggplants to remove excess salt (some will remain) and pat dry with a kitchen towel.

Now you can either toss the cubes with some olive oil and broil them, turning frequently, until they begin to brown, or fry them in olive oil (be sure to drain well). The second method is more traditional, the first wastes less oil. However you do it, the eggplant should be completely tender, no leathery eggplant please! Set aside.

To prepare the tomatoes:

Place a grater into a bowl, and grate the tomatoes on the coarsest side. The inside will grate, leaving the peel in your hand. (One of the best tricks of Turkish cooking, that you’ll use again and again! You’re welcome.)

Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ c olive oil in a pan and add the onions. Fry gently without browning until they are soft and transparent. If you’re using some tomato paste, cook it in the oil for a minute or so now. Add the garlic and cook a minute or so longer. Add the tomatoes and cook gently, stirring occasionally, till the sauce has thickened a bit. Check for salt, add pepper to taste. Remove from heat, and gently mix with the eggplant. If you’ve fried the eggplant, you should have plenty of oil, but it’s still nice to add a dollop over the top when serving.

*You can use the large round type as well, but they can break down a little faster, and we’re not making baba ghanouj here!

Shrimp Casserole with Kashar

Kaşarlı Karides Güveç

Ingredients:

1 ½ c small shelled shrimp

2 large ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped

1/2 c chopped sweet red pepper (Get the long sweet ones like Marconi or Corno di Toro if you can)

½ c chopped green pepper (Turks prefer one called *sivri biber*; the closest thing in the US is shishito.

2-3 cloves garlic, sliced thinly

¾ c grated kashar cheese*

4T butter

½ t each of salt, pepper and ground red pepper or paprika, or to taste

This is one of the most popular hot mezes.

Chop your peppers; if you are using shishitos, just slice them into thin rounds.

Heat half of the butter in a pan. Add the peppers and garlic and sauté till softened. Add the shrimp and sauté till they turn opaque. Add the tomatoes, salt, pepper and paprika and mix well. Continue cooking on medium heat until the tomatoes begin to break down and release their juice. Add the rest of the butter, and cook for five minutes more.

Pour the mixture into an oven-proof casserole (or preferably, two for small servings). Top with the grated cheese, and put into a 360-degree oven till the top browns, about 15 minutes. Using the next-to-top rack will help.

Serve hot.

You can also do a very similar dish with mushrooms. In Turkey they boil the mushrooms, but if you slice and sauté them first, you get a much better texture.

*Available in Greek groceries as kasseri. Turkish groceries may have two kinds, *taze* (fresh, very similar to mozzarella or string cheese) and *eski kaşar*, “old” (aged) kashar. The Greek one is closer to this. You can use either one but the aged one is obviously more flavorful.