



Dyna Eldaief

# EGYPTIAN FLAVORS

50 RECIPES

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## INTRODUCTION

Egypt has a rich history with many significant developments going back to ancient Egypt. Not only was this ancient civilization pioneering in architecture, astronomy, medicine, and the creation of a writing system, but it was a culture rich in design, music, art, and cuisine. The life line for the country has always been the Nile River where ancient civilization took root and blossomed, using successful farming practices developed around this remarkable water source. Tomb paintings depict animals and crops as food sources, and dishes from ancient Egypt have been passed down through the generations, retaining time-honored characteristics. *Molokhiya* was depicted as a food for the pharaohs and can still be found today across the globe. In my homeland of Australia, I buy it in various markets in the city, although I can only find it fresh for a short period in the summer months. The rest of the year I buy it frozen. My father still grows a crop of this herb every year and we are all invited to celebrate the first pick of the season—and often the last as well. My children have grown up loving this dish and it is almost always their first choice for a birthday dinner. It is amazing to think that we are still eating some of the same dishes that Egyptians ate thousands of years ago.

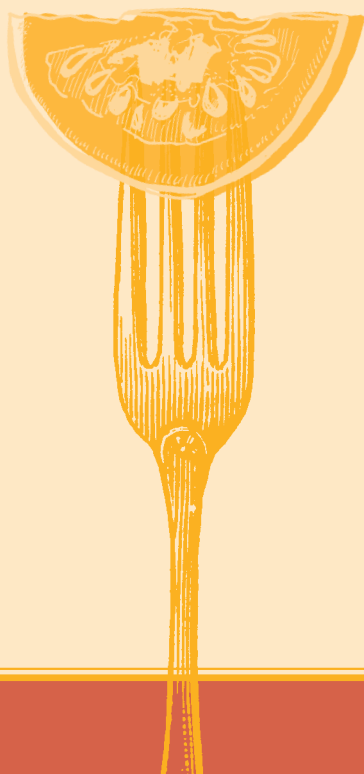
For this book I have put together a collection of fifty traditional Egyptian recipes to give you an insight into the

history of Egyptian cuisine and its indigenous ingredients, as well as offering nutritional information and something a little more personal—what the dish signifies to me. It is my hope that you will enjoy this book, not only for its recipes and the history that goes with them, but also that it might inspire you to use these incredible ingredients in dishes of your own. For me, cooking food that is part of my heritage is like looking through a portal to the past and I invite you to come on the journey with me.





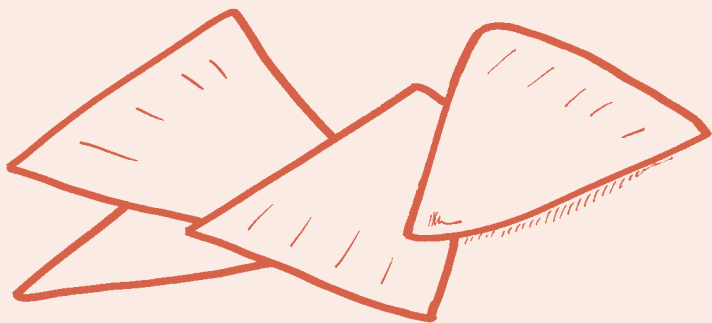
# DIPS, STARTERS, AND SOUPS



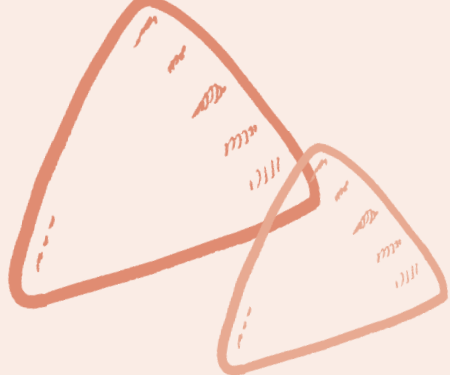
## 'EISH MIHAMMAS | PITA CHIPS

Serves: 6-8

These intensely crunchy and immensely satisfying pita chips have become hugely popular in the West over the last few years, finding their way into many supermarkets and delicatessen stores. In the Middle East however, they have been enjoyed for far longer than that. They are often served as an appetizer at wedding receptions where it can be hard to stop eating them before the next course is served! While pita bread can be simply dried in the oven or on the grill as it is when making *fatta* (bread and rice soaked in stock), for me this is the equivalent of wearing pyjamas to a wedding! In the same way that one should dress up properly for a wedding, it is worth making the effort with this dressed-up version of pita bread too.







## Ingredients:

5 pieces (1 packet) white or whole wheat pita bread

Vegetable oil, for frying

Sea salt flakes

Dukkah, to serve (optional, page 12)

- Cut each pita bread into quarters, and then cut each quarter in half, making 8 triangles.
- Heat the oil in a medium-sized pan. The oil is hot enough for frying when it can brown a small piece of bread in 10–15 seconds. Gently place 2 or 3 pieces of bread at a time into the oil and fry until just golden in color, before turning over to cook the other side.
- When both sides are lightly colored, remove and place on a paper towel. Lightly sprinkle with salt flakes, or *dukkah* (page 12), and serve alongside dips such as *hummus bi-t-tahina* (page 16) or *baba ghanoug* (page 18).



## DUKKAH | ALMOND SPICE BLEND

Makes: 2 cups

*Dukkah* is a blend of spices and nuts which are usually toasted and then combined in a pestle and mortar. The word *dukkah* derives from an Arabic word which means ‘to crush’ or ‘to pound.’ Nuts such as peanuts, almonds, or hazelnuts can be used along with cumin, coriander, sesame seeds, salt, and sometimes even dried herbs, and can vary in their composition and quantity.

Traditionally the blend is served with good quality olive oil and fresh bread. Alternatively, it is delicious sprinkled on top of my crispy pita chips (page 10) before serving. Be careful not to overcook the sesame seeds when dry toasting as they will become bitter if they brown.





### Ingredients:

60 g (2 oz) / ½ cup sesame seeds

30 g (1 oz) / ½ cup coriander seeds

1 tablespoon cumin seeds

1 teaspoon whole peppercorns

1 teaspoon salt

140 g (5 oz) / 1 cup unsalted almonds, roasted

- Heat a frying pan without oil and add sesame seeds, coriander seeds, cumin seeds, and whole peppercorns. When the spices become fragrant, remove from the heat and leave to cool.
- Place the spices in a spice blender or food processor, along with the salt and almonds, and pulse to a coarse powder. Even better, pound the ingredients using a pestle and mortar so the oils are released—this will give your *dukkah* more texture and character.
- Serve sprinkled over crunchy pita chips (page 10) or place in a bowl alongside cold-pressed olive oil and fresh bread. Dip pieces of bread into the oil and then into the *dukkah*.

## TAHINA | TAHINI DIP

Makes: 150 g (5½ oz)

*Tahina* is a dip made from a sesame seed paste called tahini. It is widely used throughout the Middle East in *halva*—sweet confections—as well as in savory dips, sauces or spreads, dressings, or even to thicken soups. It has a dense texture high in oil, fibre, and calcium but lower levels of sugar and saturated fats like those found in peanut butter. In Alexandria, unlike other parts of Egypt, it is also added to—or served on top of—*fuul medammis*, Egypt's national dish.

### COOK'S TIP

This delicious dip can be served with crudité's or as a perfect accompaniment to grilled or fried fish.





### Ingredients:

3 tablespoons tahini paste

$\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon crushed garlic

$\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt, or to taste

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cumin

Juice of half a lemon or 1 tablespoon white vinegar

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 ml) water

Small handful of fresh flat-leaf/Italian parsley, chopped

- Place the tahini paste, crushed garlic, salt, cumin, and lemon juice or vinegar in a blender and mix well to form a smooth paste.
- Add water a little at a time and keep mixing well. If the mixture begins to separate, add more water and keep mixing until smooth. If the mixture looks thicker than desired, add a little more water.
- Add the parsley then pulse just enough to combine. Serve immediately or refrigerate in an airtight container. This will keep for a couple of days.

## HUMMUS BI-T-TAHINA | HUMMUS DIP

Makes: 450 g (1 lb)

Hummus has become quite well known around the world as a dip. It is one of the easiest and tastiest ways to incorporate chickpeas into your diet. If you are looking to make healthier eating choices, this dip is great as a spread for salad sandwiches and wraps as it is much lower in cholesterol than using butter and has greater nutritional value too.

If you want to prepare the dip in a hurry, you could use a 400 g (14 oz) can of cooked chickpeas instead of the dried ones.

### COOK'S TIP

Tahini may be made from hulled or unhulled sesame seeds, and the two versions are different nutritionally, as well as in taste and color. Tahini made with unhulled seeds is richer in vitamins (E, F, and B) and minerals (especially calcium), and it is darker with a stronger flavor. If you decide to use the unhulled version, start with 1 tablespoon of the paste and add more as required, as it is quite difficult to abate the flavor intensity if there is too much to begin with.



## Ingredients:

150 g (5½ oz) dried chickpeas

Juice of 1 lemon

2 cloves garlic, crushed

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon ground cumin

70 g (2½ oz) tahini paste

Salt, to taste

Ground smoked paprika, to garnish

- Put the dried chickpeas in a bowl, cover with cold water, and leave overnight.
- Drain the chickpeas, place them in a saucepan, and cover with fresh water. Bring to the boil and cook on a high heat for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat and simmer for 2 hours or until soft. Drain.
- Place the chickpeas in a food processor and blend to a smooth consistency. Add the lemon juice, garlic, olive oil, cumin, and tahini and blend until smooth. Taste and season as required.
- Transfer to a bowl, garnish with paprika, and serve or refrigerate. This dip will keep in the fridge for several days and is great as a butter substitute for sandwiches.

## BABA GHANOUG | EGGPLANT DIP

Makes: 340 g (12 oz)

This is another tasty dip that incorporates eggplant. This vegetable, with its deep purple–black color and smooth skin, is often underused and understated in cooking. Due to its spongy flesh, it will absorb the flavors of garlic and cumin in this dip beautifully, while also adding texture. Traditionally, the eggplant is roasted whole over an open flame until the skin becomes wrinkly and blackened. Alternatively, it can be roasted in the oven or under the grill. Place it in a closed plastic bag for a few minutes to sweat, then take it out and remove the skin, which will now peel off very easily. The bitterness which can occur in eggplants can be eliminated by squeezing out the liquid before adding it to the dip.

### Ingredients:

- 2 cloves garlic, unpeeled
- 1 large or 2 small eggplants
- 7 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 4 tablespoons tahini
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley, plus extra to garnish
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- Juice of 1 lemon







- Heat the oven to 180°C (350 °F/Gas mark 4). Place the garlic on a roasting tray and roast for 15 minutes or until soft. Allow to cool, then remove the flesh from the skin.
- While the garlic is roasting, cook the eggplant. Use a long pair of tongs to hold the eggplant over the medium flame of a gas stove. Keep turning so that the eggplant becomes soft and the skin blackens all over. Remove from the stove and leave to cool slightly, then place into a plastic bag.
- After a few minutes remove the eggplant from the bag and the skin should peel off easily. Put it in a sieve and press gently with a spoon to remove excess liquid.
- Place the eggplant, garlic, olive oil, salt, tahini, parsley, cumin, and lemon juice in an electric blender or food processor and blend. Don't over blend—you're aiming for some texture. Add a little water if the mix is too thick.
- Taste and adjust seasoning if required. Transfer to a bowl and garnish with chopped parsley. Serve with crisp Lebanese flatbread or fresh Turkish bread, or alongside barbecued meat or *kofta*.

## SALATIT ZABADI | YOGURT DIP

Makes: 350 g (12½ oz)

In Europe and Australia this dip is known as tzatziki and is available from many supermarkets, but it is such an easy dip to make that you should never need to buy it again—and it tastes delicious when freshly made. The easiest way to make *Salatit zabadi* is by using shop-bought, unsweetened Greek-style yogurt, which is lovely and thick, but if you make your own yogurt it can be thickened and used as well (see Cook's Tip, below).

Traditionally, this dip is served alongside stuffed vine leaves (*mahshi wara' enab*, page 62) as a dipping sauce. It adds acidity to the *mahshi* as well as a lovely creaminess.

### Ingredients:

- 1 large Lebanese cucumber, peeled
- 1 cup (250 g) natural Greek-style yogurt
- 1–2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1–2 teaspoons dried mint, or 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh mint
- Pinch of salt





- Cut the cucumber in half lengthways and remove the seeds from the center. Removing the seeds is not essential, but they carry a lot of water, so keeping the seeds in the dip may make it thin and runny. Pat the cucumber dry using some paper towels, then finely chop or grate the flesh.
- In a bowl, combine the cucumber, yogurt, garlic, mint, and a pinch of salt, then gently mix together. Serve immediately or store in the fridge for up to a week.

#### COOK'S TIP

- To thicken natural plain yogurt, you will need to strain it using a cheese or muslin cloth. Simply place the amount of yogurt required in the center of the cloth and bring the corners of the cloth together.
- Tie using a rubber band and leave the yogurt parcel draining in a sieve over a bowl for 30 minutes to an hour (depending on the quantity) to remove some of the liquid whey.
- If you find that you have thickened the yogurt too much, add a little of the extracted whey, stirring it back in. Do not leave the yogurt draining all day or overnight as you might end up with cheese!

## FUUL MEDAMMIS | SLOW-COOKED FAVA BEANS

Serves: 2

*Fuul* is the Egyptian word for ‘broad beans’ (also known as fava beans), and *medammis* is a word meaning ‘buried,’ which refers to the original cooking method of burying a pot of beans and water under hot coals. Today, most people prepare the dish using a slow cooker; in Egypt they often use a special *dammasa* slow cooker, which has a container of hot water above for topping up the beans as they cook. If you don’t have one, use a heavy-based pot with a tight-fitting lid.

Canned broad beans or fava beans are perfect to use here as they save so much time and you can still choose if you want to peel the beans or not. I prefer the smoother texture but it is not essential. *Fuul* can be made in advance, cooled, then refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for several months. Thaw out in the fridge overnight, then heat and add the remaining ingredients.

### COOK’S TIP

For a heartier *fuul medammis* you could add ½ small tomato, ½ small onion, and ½ small Lebanese cucumber, all very finely diced. Some people like to mash a boiled egg and some feta into the beans too. If adding any or all of these, check the flavor and add more garlic, oil, lemon juice, cumin, or salt as required.