

Yotam Ottolenghi

*Teaches Modern
Middle Eastern Cooking*



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If you want to know Yotam Ottolenghi—the elemental chef, restaurateur, and columnist—start by looking at the titles of his cookbooks. He has written eight, several of which have won James Beard awards and topped international bestseller lists. There's *Jerusalem*, named for his home city. *Plenty* and *Plenty More*, filled with vibrant dishes to bring people together. And, of course, his modern-classic debut, *Ottolenghi*, bursting with veggie stacks, colorful spreads, and delectable cakes and breads.

The latter title is a callback to Ottolenghi deli, the London establishment that helped make Yotam a culinary darling. A collaborative effort between the Jewish-Israeli Yotam and the Arab-Palestinian chef Sami Tamimi, the first location opened in 2002. With a menu of bright platters and bold flavors, the storefront quickly earned a loyal following and spawned a handful of other eateries across the city. As Yotam gained traction in the restaurant world, he also began contributing a weekly cooking column to the *Guardian*. His playful and approachable take on cooking—and emphasis on cross-cultural recipes—won over readers around the globe. Soon, his name was synonymous with vivacious, vegetable-forward Middle Eastern cooking.

Over the years, Yotam has developed his own distinct vision of this cuisine, one that's bountiful and inclusive by design. His penchant for intense and contrasting flavors can be traced to his childhood, where he reveled in a heady mix of Jewish, Arab, and European ingredients. Some of his formative memories involve seeing bunches of fragrant parsley, mint, and cilantro at the market; the sweet aroma of fresh-baked flatbreads wafting through the streets; vendors stuffing fried falafel into fluffy pita; stacks of apricots, grapes, and pomegranates, all at peak ripeness. The result? A chef who loves to “create drama in the mouth,” as he puts it. (Fittingly, his latest cookbook, released October 13, 2020, is called *Ottolenghi Flavor*.)

“I love the idea that if you sit around a big table and fill it with delicious things, you get people talking to each other,” he says. “I come from a part of the world with a lot of confrontation. The first barriers are always crossed around a table of food—that's the power of eating and dining. Food has an incredible ability to bring people together. I want you to go into the kitchen without stress, share a delicious Middle Eastern meal with friends, and be proud of what you created.”

Here, he hopes to inspire you, instilling you with confidence in your ability to cook Middle Eastern cuisine. “It's not so complicated,” he says. “It's a skill, and it takes a bit of practice, but once you try a few times, you can do it proudly.”



Homemade



Condiments

Yotam grew up surrounded by markets bursting with intense (and sometimes opposing) flavors. Understandably, his dishes go big on taste and contrast. The short recipes in this chapter will help you achieve that goal, too.

Yotam calls the condiments in the following pages “flavor bombs”—easy-to-prepare, long-lasting add-ons (and -ins) that can bring depth and complexity to a multitude of dishes. Yotam often doubles or even triples the recipes as called for so his supply never runs short. You might consider doing the same.

Flavor bombs are sometimes added to a dish during cooking. Other times, they’re drizzled, sprinkled, or spread on at the end, providing a crucial final flourish. Either way, the right one can transform a plate or create a new balance therein. Dukkah, an Egyptian nut and spice blend, brings crunch to dishes that seem too flabby; harissa or shatta are chili pastes for ratcheting up heat and spice levels; sumac-marinated onions offer a hit of acidity to a rich or fatty dish.

And while many of these condiments are available in stores, Yotam believes they’re worth making on your own. Then your fingerprints will be on them, literally and figuratively, making your food feel all the more special.



Smoky Marinated Feta

ingredients

10 garlic cloves,
peeled

1 lemon; skin peeled
into 6 strips

4 bay leaves

2½ tsp chipotle chili
flakes

250 ml olive oil

1 tsp flaky sea salt

1¼ tsp paprika

2 blocks Greek feta
(360 g), cut into ½-
inch cubes

Serves 4 to 6 • This flavor bomb is made by letting feta sit in an oil bath infused with garlic, lemon, bay leaves, and charred chili flakes. Charring the aromatics adds an intense, smoky flavor to the oil, which the feta absorbs to beautiful effect.

You'll use this condiment in Yotam's recipe for Pea Spread With Smoky Marinated Feta (see page 23), but the yield here is more than what you'll need for that dish. That's okay—marinated feta keeps for up to 5 days in the refrigerator (the flavors only get better the longer it sits), and it's equally delicious on toast or in a salad.

method

Place a small sauté pan over medium-high heat. Once the pan is very hot, add the garlic and cook for 3 to 4 minutes, turning halfway, until cloves are charred.

Add the lemon strips and bay leaves, and cook for about 90 seconds until lightly charred.

Add the chipotle chili flakes and cook, stirring continuously, until well-toasted and fragrant, about 30 seconds. Remove the pan from the heat, then add the oil, salt, and paprika. Stir for about 30 seconds to combine.

Add the feta to the oil and stir gently so that each piece of cheese is coated in oil, then transfer the cheese and liquid to a shallow container. Allow the feta to marinate at room temperature if you'll be eating it within a few hours. Otherwise, refrigerate it in an airtight container. (If using later, take the feta out of the refrigerator about an hour or so before you want to serve it to allow the oil to come back up to room temperature and desolidify.) Smoky Marinated Feta keeps in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.





Tahini Sauce

ingredients

60 g tahini paste
1½ tbsp lemon juice
1 garlic clove, crushed
A pinch of salt,
or to taste
3 tbsp water, plus 1 tsp
water, or as needed

Makes about ¾ cup • “Tahini is something that runs in the veins of the people in the Middle East,” Yotam says. “It’s like the olive oil of southern Europe.”

This paste made from ground toasted sesame seeds is ubiquitous in Middle Eastern cooking, with some families using it at every meal. Yotam’s favorite brands come from Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel—he likes to turn the plain paste into a versatile and velvety sauce that can be drizzled over fresh meat kebabs, chopped salads, roasted vegetables, and more.

method

Combine all the ingredients except the water in a bowl and whisk to combine. Slowly add the water while whisking until the mixture is smooth and pourable. Taste for seasoning and adjust if necessary.

Set aside at room temperature if using soon, or refrigerate in a sealed container if making ahead. Tahini Sauce keeps in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.



Confit Garlic Oil

ingredients

12 garlic cloves, peeled
6 thyme sprigs
1 green chili
200 ml olive oil
Salt

Makes about 1 cup • This is the ideal condiment to have on hand anytime you want to add a warm, mellow garlic flavor to a dish. Cooking the cloves slowly leaves them slightly sweet—perfect as a garnish or for mashing into a confit. You also get a lovely garlic-infused oil that can be drizzled over salads or used for dipping bread.

You can play with this recipe by adding other aromatics to the oil (sage leaves, or orange or lemon skin). Feel free to double or triple the recipe, too: Cook the garlic in an ovenproof pan at 120°C/250°F with enough oil to submerge the cloves. Seal the pan tightly with foil, and cook until the cloves are soft and very lightly colored. Store the cloves in their oil in an airtight jar at room temperature for several weeks.

method

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Cover and cook until the garlic is soft and just beginning to color, about 20 to 25 minutes.

Leave the lid on, remove from the heat, and set aside for 10 minutes; the garlic will continue to cook in the heat of the oil.

Strain the oil into a clean glass jar and spoon in the garlic, thyme, and chili. Once cool, transfer everything to an airtight, sterilized jar and store at room temperature for several weeks.

Labneh

ingredients

900 g full-fat yogurt

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt

Muslin or cheesecloth

Makes 450 grams • Labneh is a creamy, concentrated yogurt beloved throughout the Middle East. It's made by draining the whey out of yogurt, leaving you with a thick, rich condiment that can be used in myriad ways.

Labneh can be served as part of a mezze spread, ideally drizzled with olive oil and herbs and scooped up with pita. It's also lovely as a condiment alongside lamb kebabs or roasted vegetables (see Yotam's recipe for Grilled Carrots With Labneh and

Dukkah on page 39), or it can be used like cream cheese and spread across toast with sliced cucumbers and a sprinkle of za'atar. And it doesn't always need to be savory—Yotam likes to use it in lieu of yogurt during brunch (see his recipe for Labneh With Berries on page 31).

You can use any type of full-fat yogurt to make labneh—sheep's milk will be tangier and cow's milk creamier. The only type to avoid is set Greek yogurt, which won't drain properly.

method

Add the yogurt and salt to a medium bowl and mix well to combine.

Line a colander with a piece of muslin or cheesecloth large enough to hang over the sides, and place the colander over a bowl.

Transfer the yogurt to the center of the cheesecloth and fold in the overhang so that the yogurt is completely covered.

Place a heavy weight over the cheesecloth (a few cans or jars will do), and transfer the bowl to the refrigerator. Let the yogurt drain for at least 12 hours and up to 48 hours.

After draining, discard the collected water. The remaining yogurt should lose at least half of its volume and be very smooth and creamy, like cream cheese. Labneh keeps in the refrigerator in an airtight jar or container for up to 5 days, sealed with a thin layer of olive oil on top.



Quick-Pickled Chilies

ingredients

2 tbsp apple cider vinegar

1 tsp granulated sugar

1 tsp salt

2 small mild red chilies, thinly sliced, seeds and all

Makes about ¼ cup • While raw chilies can be quite spicy, pickling them takes some of the edge off and adds a bit of sweetness, saltiness, and a splash of vibrant color to a plate.

These chilies are truly a quick pickle and can be ready in as little as 30 minutes (though they'll only improve with time). Try them on everything from grilled vegetables to roasted chicken, as well as in Yotam's Roasted Eggplant Salad With Quick Lemon Paste and Quick-Pickled Chilies (see page 37).

method

Add the vinegar, sugar, and salt to a small bowl, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Add the chilies, stir well to combine, and leave to pickle for at least 30 minutes before using.

If not using immediately, store the chilies in the refrigerator in an airtight container.





Quick Lemon Paste

ingredients

1 large lemon, end trimmed, sliced into 1/4-inch-thin rounds, seeds removed

4 tbsp lemon juice

1 tbsp salt

• Preserving lemons opens a whole new avenue in terms of flavor. The combination of salt, lemon juice, and time softens and breaks down the lemon skin and turns it into a sharp, aromatic treat. Yotam stirs preserved lemon into dressings and sauces, mixes it into yogurt, and even uses it with roasted vegetables (see his recipe for Roasted Eggplant Salad With Quick Lemon Paste and Quick-Pickled Chilies on page 37).

You can buy preserved lemons at many stores or you can make them yourself, but bear in mind that they take time: two to three weeks of preserving in order for the flavors to fully develop. But Yotam has figured out a trick to speed things up, creating a quick-preserved lemon that's similar in flavor and aroma.

The technique calls for boiling thin slices of lemon with lemon juice and salt, then blitzing them in a food processor until you have a thick, spreadable paste. The end result keeps for weeks in the refrigerator.

method

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan set over medium-high heat. Simmer until salt is dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes, then lower the heat to medium-low. Cover and cook until the lemon rinds start to look translucent, about 12 minutes.

Set aside to cool slightly, then transfer to a food processor and blitz until smooth and thick. Add a tablespoon of water if you need to thin out the mixture; the result should be spreadable paste.

Transfer the preserved lemon paste to an airtight container and, if not using immediately, pour a thin layer of olive oil over the top. Cover and keep refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.

Saffron Water

- Saffron Water can be used in both sweet and savory productions, and a little bit goes a very long way. Stir a few drops into a cheesy risotto or a crepe batter, or use it to jazz up a sweet rice pudding.

method

Soak the saffron threads in the water for at least 30 minutes (or overnight if you're working ahead). The color of the water will intensify as the saffron soaks. Store in a sealed jar at room temperature for several weeks.



ingredients

1 tsp saffron threads
120 ml hot water

Za'atar Oil

ingredients

2 tbsp za'atar
3 tbsp olive oil

Makes about ¼ cup • Za'atar is a versatile spice, and it becomes even more versatile when mixed with oil. Spread it over store-bought or homemade pizza dough instead of tomato sauce and bake as you would, or spoon it over roasted chicken or other mezze such as hummus or butter bean mash.

method

Combine the za'atar and olive oil together in a small serving bowl. If not using immediately, store the oil in an airtight container at room temperature for several weeks. Stir before using.

And Everything Nice

Yotam's flavor bombs hint at the multitude of herbs, spices, preserves, and syrups found in Middle Eastern cuisine. Here are a few essentials that are worth keeping in your pantry at all times

Za'atar

Za'atar refers to a specific herb grown around the Eastern Mediterranean that's similar to marjoram, oregano, or thyme. But it's also used to describe a versatile spice blend made with said herb. Every chef has their own formula for this blend, but it usually consists of za'atar (or thyme) mixed with toasted sesame seeds, salt, and other spices like sumac, cumin, and/or coriander. Premixed za'atar blends are widely available, but you can also make your own: Mix together 2 tablespoons each of dried marjoram, oregano, or thyme, then add some toasted sesame seeds and sumac along with ½ teaspoon of salt.

Baharat

This all-purpose spice blend translates simply as "spice." Recipes for baharat vary by chef and household, but they usually contain some combination of paprika, black pepper, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, and cardamom. The result is a warm, slightly-sweet-slightly-smoky blend, making it ideal for seasoning meats, root vegetables, soups, and stews.

Sumac

Sumac trees produce clusters of ruby-hued berries, which can be crushed into a purple-red powder with myriad culinary uses. Sumac powder has a tangy, acidic flavor

reminiscent of lemon juice, and it's used extensively in the Middle East in both sweet and savory recipes. To preserve its bright color and flavor for presentation, sumac powder is often added at the end of cooking.

Barberries

These small red berries are common in Iranian cooking and are great for adding a sweet-tart profile to stews, rice dishes, and some desserts. Barberries are usually sold dried and should be rehydrated before using. If you can't track them down in a market or online, dried sour cherries are a good substitute.

Dried limes

As the name implies, these limes are boiled in a salt brine, then left to dry until they're small and hard, resembling walnuts. Like barberries, dried limes are popular in Iranian recipes. They can be added whole to braises, soups, and stews or ground into a powder and sprinkled over rice and salads.

Pomegranate molasses

Sticky and thick, pomegranate molasses is simply pomegranate juice that's been reduced to a syrup. It's both sweet and tart (most don't have additional sugar beyond the juice itself), which can add complexity and depth of

flavor to salad dressings, marinades, glazes, and more.

Aleppo pepper

Named after the storied Syrian city, Aleppo pepper is made from dried and coarse-ground Halaby peppers. It has a beautiful deep-red color and a mildly spicy, fruity flavor that enhances dips, dressings, and sauces with a slow-building heat. Note that it's sometimes called Aleppo-style pepper (much of its production has moved to Turkey and elsewhere due to the ongoing conflict in Syria) or Silk Chili on some websites.

Urfa biber

Also known as Urfa pepper, this Turkish chili flake is similar to Aleppo pepper, albeit with a deeper, smokier flavor and darker, almost burgundy color. Use it in stews or chilies, or to season kebabs or grilled meats, or sprinkle it atop salads or scrambled eggs. Just bear in mind that this chili is often packed with salt, which enhances its flavor but might affect how aggressively you season other components of a dish.

Most of these can be found at your local specialty spice shop or Middle Eastern grocery, or at Whole Foods. Alternatively, check online stores like [Penzeys](#), [New York Shuk](#), [Burlap & Barrel](#), [Kalustyan's](#), and [Persian Basket](#).

Dukkah

ingredients

2 tbsp coriander seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
1½ tbsp black and white sesame seeds
30 g blanched hazelnuts, toasted
30 g pine nuts, toasted
1 tsp dried oregano
½ tsp paprika
¼ tsp salt

Makes about ½ cup • Dukkah, which means “to pound” in Arabic, is an Egyptian condiment made from nuts, seeds, and herbs. It’s both crunchy and aromatic, so it gets a lot of play in Yotam’s kitchen—he sprinkles it over panfried whitefish, scrambled eggs, and his grilled carrots drizzled with melted

butter (see his recipe for Grilled Carrots With Labneh and Dukkah on page 39).

Dukkah is one of those condiments that’s infinitely versatile: Try making it with different nuts and spices, like pistachios, walnuts, black pepper, mint, marjoram, za’atar, and more. You can also play with different consistencies—some dukkahs are quite powdery, and some, like Yotam’s, are more coarse. With a condiment this adaptable, it’s worth experimenting to find a version you love.

method

In a small saucepan set over medium heat, toast the coriander seeds, cumin seeds, and sesame seeds, shaking the pan occasionally, until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes.

Add toasted spices and all remaining ingredients to a food processor and pulse a few times until the nuts and seeds are roughly chopped. Set aside in a small bowl.

Store the dukkah in an airtight container at room temperature for several weeks.





Sumac-Pickled Onions

ingredients

1 medium red onion,
thinly sliced into half-
moons

1½ tsp sumac

2 tbsp lemon juice

¼ tsp salt

Makes ½ cup • Sumac is a crushed berry with a vibrant garnet hue and an acidic flavor similar to lemon. It grows across the Middle East and around the world, and it adds drama to dishes both in terms of color and flavor.

Sumac pairs particularly well with onions; the combination of the two creates a cooling condiment that's a great substitute for dairy. You'll see these pop up in Yotam's recipe for Smacked Cucumber Salad With Sumac-Pickled Onions (see page 41), but try them on roasted chicken, kebabs, or rice dishes, too.

method

Add all ingredients to a small bowl and toss well to combine.

Allow to soften and pickle for at least 20 minutes before serving, or transfer to a sealed airtight container and keep refrigerated for up to 3 days.

Quick Shatta

ingredients

90 g mild red chilies, such as Fresno chilies (about 6), roughly chopped
180 g plum tomatoes (about 2), roughly chopped
½ tsp salt, divided
3 tbsp cider vinegar
8 tbsp olive oil

Makes about ½ cup • Almost every culture has its own version of chili sauce or paste. In the Middle East, the most common one is called shatta.

Shatta is traditionally made by pounding fresh red or green chilies with salt and allowing them to ferment in the sun for a few days. More contemporary iterations call for mixing everything in the food processor and letting it naturally ferment in a sterilized jar at room temperature. Yotam has developed an even faster version by adding a bit of cider vinegar to develop an acidic flavor in no time. His Quick Shatta can be spooned over anything you want to spice up—sandwiches, hummus, rice, kebabs, roasted vegetables, soups, and more. It's also called for in his recipe

for Mafalda Pasta With Quick Shatta (see page 45).

There are many variations of shatta, including ones made with tomato, parsley (or other herbs), and different spices and vinegars. Play around to find a version you like using different types of chilies and herbs, and more or less tomato (more tomato waters down the chili kick, so think about what you'll be using your shatta for).

method

Add the chilies, tomatoes, and salt to the bowl of a food processor and pulse a few times until coarsely chopped but not at all puréed, scraping down the sides of the bowl.

Add the vinegar and olive oil, and pulse 1 or 2 times more, until just incorporated.

Transfer the shatta to a small bowl and set aside. If not using immediately, transfer the shatta to an airtight container and pour enough olive oil over it to seal the top. Cover tightly with a lid and refrigerate for up to 1 week.



ingredients

40 g dried Kashmiri red chilies or guajillo chilies
25 g dried ancho chilies
4 garlic cloves, peeled
2 tsp cumin seeds
1 tbsp coriander seeds
1½ tsp caraway seeds
1 tbsp tomato paste
1 tbsp dried rose petals
1½ tsp granulated sugar
1½ tsp Kashmiri chili powder, or paprika
2 tbsp lemon juice
1 tbsp rosewater, divided
4 tbsp cider vinegar
½ cup olive oil, divided
1½ tsp salt



Rose Harissa

Makes about 1½ cups • Harissa is a North African chili paste that's wonderful when stirred into soups and stews or spooned over roasted vegetables and meats. It's called for in Yotam's recipes for Green Herb Shakshuka (see page 33) and Roasted Cauliflower With Harissa Chili Oil (see page 47).

Store-bought harissas are available by the jar or tube at many Mediterranean markets or online at Kalustyan's, but making your own is a fun and easy way to customize the flavor, as Yotam does here with the addition of rosewater and dried rose petals. A word to the wise: Harissa has a serious kick, but you can remove the stems and seeds from the chilies after they rehydrate to bring the heat level down.

method

Place a large frying pan over high heat. Once the pan is very hot, add the chilies and garlic. Toast until fragrant and charred, about 2 minutes. Pick out the garlic and set aside. Transfer the chilies to a heat-proof bowl.

Pour enough boiling water over the chilies to cover them, and then weigh them down with a small plate. Soak for 30 minutes to soften and rehydrate, then strain. Roughly chop the chilies and add them to the bowl of a food processor.

Meanwhile, add the cumin, coriander, and caraway seeds to the same pan, and toast over medium-high heat until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer the seeds to a mortar and pestle and roughly crush them before adding them to the food processor along with the chopped chilies, garlic, tomato paste, rose petals, sugar, and chili powder or paprika. Pulse a few times until roughly chopped and combined.

Add the lemon juice, half of the rosewater, the cider vinegar, 4 tablespoons of olive oil, and a pinch of salt to the food processor. Blitz until you have a coarse paste.

Transfer the mixture to a bowl and gently stir in the remaining rosewater and remaining 4 tablespoons of olive oil.

Transfer the harissa to a sterilized airtight jar and keep refrigerated if not using right away. Harissa keeps, covered with a layer of oil, in the refrigerator for several weeks.

Messbe



Spitthead

In many parts of the world you'll find tables laden with small dishes, all beautifully arranged. These colorful bounties are designed to whet the appetite, start a meal, or even serve as the main course itself. This is known as the mezza spread, and it's welcoming and generous in spirit.

Mezze is popular in Morocco, Spain, Greece, Italy, Israel, Palestine, and elsewhere. The exact recipes change from place to place, but the idea is generally the same: major flavor, minor fuss. This often means spreads, dips, or little bites, all usually served with bread for scooping. It's the ultimate informal feast, enjoyed with a glass of something good (wine, vodka, aniseed liquor) and a group of friends. And when it comes to mezza, manners get thrown out the window. Everyone tucks in together, rubbing elbows and using forks as fencing swords. Double dipping is not a crime—as Yotam likes to say, we're all in this together.

If you're going to serve a mezza spread, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, there's the matter of making things in advance—cooking and serving so many different dishes in one meal is a lot of work. Fortunately, many mezza components can be made well ahead of time, and plenty of dishes taste better the next day. Most cooked salads and legumes offer this luxury, as do slow-cooked meats.

Second is the issue of temperature. Ideally, no more than one element should be served warm. Mezza, in general, should be served at room temperature. This is good for the cook, who doesn't need to be cooking or reheating things at the last minute, and for the guests, who can take their time with the bounty before them.

Third, mezza needs to be easily shareable, so that everyone around the table can help themselves without too much of a fuss—this is why dips, spreads, and small snacks are ideal mezza candidates.

Finally, mezza must look as delicious as it tastes, with contrasting colors, textures, and serving platters. A mezza table is a tapestry of beautiful things. If it doesn't look good, it won't be eaten.



Muhammara

ingredients

5 red bell peppers, cored, seeded, and quartered

1 white onion, peeled and roughly chopped

2 plum or Roma tomatoes, halved lengthwise, stems removed

1 red chili, stem removed

5 tbsp olive oil, divided

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1½ tbsp tomato paste

2 tsp cumin seeds

2 tsp coriander seeds

8 garlic cloves, peeled

2 tbsp pomegranate molasses, divided

100 g walnuts, toasted and roughly chopped

100 g pomegranate seeds, plus 1 tbsp for serving

1 tbsp parsley leaves, roughly chopped, for serving

Serves 6 • Roasted or grilled vegetables are the base for many salads and spreads around the Mediterranean. There are countless variations, depending on the vegetables, spices, aromatics, and more, but what they all share is an intensity of flavor that comes from a specific cooking process: Slowly roasting or grilling vegetables creates concentrated, caramelized flavors that prime the palate for more complex courses later in a meal.

Muhammara is a roasted pepper dip with origins in Syria and Lebanon. Recipes differ from region to region or even from one Middle Eastern household to the next; Yotam's is a simple version made by roasting all of the vegetables together in the oven and blending them together, then incorporating toasted walnuts and fresh pomegranate seeds at the end. Some recipes call for adding bread or more nuts to the mix to make a thicker spread, but he prefers the lightness of this version. Serve it alone with warm flatbread or as part of a larger dinner spread.

method

Preheat the oven to 220°C/425°F.

Add the peppers, onion, tomatoes, and chili to a large parchment-lined baking tray. Toss with 3 tablespoons of oil, ½ teaspoon of salt, and plenty of black pepper. Roast in the oven for 20 minutes.

While the vegetables are roasting, add the tomato paste and 1 tablespoon of the oil to a small frying pan set over medium heat and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the tomato paste is a deep red and is caramelized. Set aside to cool.

Add the cumin and coriander seeds to a small pan and toast over medium heat, stirring frequently, until aromatic and

you can hear a light popping noise, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove the spices from the heat and grind into a coarse powder with a mortar and pestle.

Remove the peppers and onions from the baking tray, add the garlic cloves, and mix lightly. Put the tray back in the oven and roast for another 20 minutes or until vegetables are softened and lightly charred.

Once they're cool enough to handle, peel and discard the tomato and pepper skins (don't worry if you can't remove it all). Add the peeled roasted vegetables, the tomato paste mixture, the ground spices, 1 tablespoon of pomegranate molasses, ½ teaspoon of salt, and a good grind of pepper to a food processor and pulse into a coarse paste, leaving the mixture slightly chunky. Add the walnuts and pulse just enough to roughly blitz (you want the mixture to still have some texture). Stir in the pomegranate seeds.

To serve, transfer the muhammara to a serving plate or bowl and create a slight well in the center. Garnish with the extra pomegranate seeds and parsley, then drizzle the remaining tablespoon each of pomegranate molasses and olive oil over the top.



Pea Spread With Smoky Marinated Feta

ingredients

100 g Smoky Marinated Feta, plus 3 to 4 tbsp oil from marinade

600 g frozen peas, defrosted

10 g tarragon leaves, roughly chopped

15 g mint leaves, roughly chopped

1 garlic clove, crushed

1 lemon; 1½ tsp finely grated zest, 2 tbsp juice

4 tbsp olive oil

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

½ tsp cumin seeds, toasted and roughly crushed in a mortar and pestle



Serves 4 • This is a slightly different mezze in that it uses barely cooked peas. It's not traditional in any sense—it doesn't have the depth of richer, long-cooked mezze dishes—but it pairs well with other mezze like hummus and muhammara because it's so light and vibrant. Frozen peas work as beautifully here—they have the same bright green color and grassy flavor as their fresh counterparts.

Mezze dishes need big flavors, which here comes in the form of a marinated feta topping.

The feta adds richness, saltiness, and a bit of smoke to the dish and offsets the sweet, bright flavor of the peas.

Try to spread this mezze on a dark-colored plate or platter for maximum visual contrast, and serve it with warm flatbreads or crudité's on the side.

method

Make the Smoky Marinated Feta (see page 7).

Add the peas, tarragon, mint, garlic, lemon zest and juice, olive oil, a pinch of salt, and a bit of freshly ground black pepper to a food processor, and pulse a few times until you have a coarse paste. Taste for seasoning and add more lemon or salt if necessary—it should taste very bright and fresh.

Spread the pea mixture onto a plate and top with the Smoky Marinated Feta, being sure to add some of the garlic cloves and lemon strips from the marinade as well. Spoon a generous amount of the aromatic smoky feta oil over the spread (about 3 to 4 tablespoons), and then sprinkle the dish with cumin.

The Big World of Little Eats

You've already learned how to make a few of Yotam's favorite dips and salads, but there are countless other mezze recipes to try. Want to expand your horizons? Round out your table with some favorites from around the world

Baba Ghanoush

This roasted eggplant dip is Lebanese in origin, but it's become extremely popular across the Levant (and far beyond). Most recipes involve mashing smoky roasted eggplant with tahini, olive oil, lemon juice, and other seasonings, resulting in a thick paste. Scoop it up with pita or flatbread, or serve it alongside raw vegetables or grilled kebabs.

Mast-o Khidar

Think of this yogurt and cucumber dip as tzatziki's not-so-distant cousin. In Iran, where mast-o khidar is popular, it's typically made with thicker Persian-style labneh as opposed to Greek yogurt. The most basic version calls for finely diced cucumbers and herbs, but toppings like toasted nuts or dried rose petals can also be added for festive effect. Like many mezze, mast-o khidar is great with any type of bread, as a stand-alone side, or atop grilled meats.

Taramosalata

Notable for its pink color, this tangy Greek delicacy claims cured fish roe as its key ingredient. The roe is blended with olive oil, lemon juice, and bread or potatoes until it becomes a medium-thick paste with a notably salty flavor. It's best served with bread or raw vegetables.

Matbucha

This Moroccan dish is popular across the Maghreb and Israel, and translates to "cooked [salad]." Western palates will likely recognize matbucha as a dip made with cooked tomatoes, bell peppers, garlic, and chilies. It can be mild or spicy and deployed in various applications. Try using it as a sandwich spread or as a condiment for grilled meat or seafood.

Tabbouleh

Reportedly invented in the mountains of Lebanon and Syria, tabbouleh is now a popular salad around the world. It usually consists of finely chopped parsley, mint, tomatoes, onions, and cracked bulgur, all dressed with olive oil and fresh lemon juice.

Kibbe

These small patties of ground meat, cracked bulgur, diced onions, and spices are usually round or football-shaped and often fried or baked (they're a very finger-friendly food). Sometimes they're served in soup or eaten raw—the latter variation, called kibbe nayyeh, is a Lebanese specialty.

Dolma

While the word "dolma" comes from the Turkish "dolmak" (to fill), nearly every country across the Balkans, South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East has its own version of these petite parcels of meat and/or rice wrapped in a leaf and cooked until tender. So there's no shortage of fillings (meat, rice, seafood, fruit, legumes), wrappers (grape leaves, mulberry leaves, cabbage), and sauces or toppings (tahini, yogurt-garlic sauce, tomato sauce) to test and taste.



Hummus With Confit Garlic and Tahini

ingredients

60 g Tahini Sauce

12 confit garlic cloves,
plus 4 tbsp Confit
Garlic Oil

550 g cooked chick-
peas (see Basic Chick-
peas, right, or canned)

180 g to 210 g tahini
paste (depending on
brand)

Salt

1/4 cup lemon juice

5 tbsp plus 2 tsp
ice-cold water, plus
extra

1½ tbsp parsley, finely
chopped

Serves 6 • In Jerusalem, hummus is a polarizing topic—every family and restaurant believes they know the “right” way to make it, but the truth is that there is no one right way. One thing that’s not up for debate is that freshly made hummus, served slightly warm and at the center of the table, is worth the extra effort.

Homemade hummus starts with cooking your own chickpeas, which you can learn more about in the sidebar at the right. Once the chickpeas are cooked, Yotam has a few more tricks to help you reach hummus nirvana: two types of tahini (tahini paste and tahini sauce), confit garlic (not traditional but delicious nonetheless), and a garnish of whole cooked chickpeas tossed in a light garlic and parsley dressing.

Serve hummus as part of a mezze platter with bread and crudité. Plain hummus can be made ahead of time,

but cover it with plastic and gently press down on the surface to prevent a skin from forming.

method

Make the Tahini Sauce (see page 8).

Make the Confit Garlic Oil (see page 9).

Set about 100 grams of the cooked chickpeas aside in a small bowl.

Add the remaining chickpeas, tahini paste, 8 of the confit garlic cloves, ½ teaspoon salt, and the lemon juice to the bowl of a food processor and blitz until smooth, 2 to 3 minutes. With the machine running, slowly drizzle in the ice water



until completely smooth and aerated. You may have to add slightly more water to reach the desired texture. Taste and adjust for seasoning if necessary.

Add the parsley, 2 tablespoons of Confit Garlic Oil, and a pinch of salt to the bowl with the reserved chickpeas, and stir to combine. Set aside.

Transfer the hummus to a shallow platter and smooth it out with the back of a spoon, creating a slight well in the center. (It's okay if the hummus is a little runny; hummus will set as it cools.) Spread the Tahini Sauce into the well, then spoon the herbed chickpea mixture over the top of the tahini. Top the dish with the remaining confit garlic cloves along with some of the aromatics in the jar (thyme and chili). Finish with a drizzle of Confit Garlic Oil.

Basic Chickpeas

ingredients

200 g dried chickpeas

1½ tsp baking soda,
divided

1 tsp salt

Makes 550 grams

• The key to lip-smacking hummus? Cooking your own chickpeas. The first ingredient? Baking soda. Use a bit to soak dried chickpeas a day in advance, which helps break down the legume's skin. This allows them to absorb more moisture, ultimately making for a softer, smoother hummus. (If you really

want to skip this step, there are a few high-quality canned chickpea brands. Look for ones from Spain or Portugal.) Cook times can vary greatly—as little as 30 minutes or up to 1 hour—depending on a number of factors, including age and the freshness of the pea. For hummus, it's important to boil the chickpeas until they can easily be squished between your fingers, ensuring a smooth blend. And only add salt in the last 15 minutes of cooking; if you season chickpeas too early, they won't ever soften.

method

Soak the chickpeas overnight in a large bowl with enough cold water to cover by several inches, plus 1 teaspoon of baking soda.

Drain and refresh, then add to a large pot with enough water to cover by 2 to 3 inches and the remaining ½ teaspoon of baking soda. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then lower the heat to medium, cover with a lid, and cook for at least 30 minutes and up to 60 minutes, skimming the top as necessary, until soft enough to crush between two fingers. Remove the lid, add the salt, and continue to cook for 15 minutes to season the chickpeas. Drain and set aside until ready to use.

Brunch



Spread

Every morning when he was growing up, Yotam's mother would lay out a beautiful spread of fresh bread, vegetables, cheeses, yogurt, eggs, cold cuts, and coffee. For the family, starting the day on a full stomach was its own kind of joy. Now that Yotam is an adult, his breakfasts are often a rushed affair, hastily thrown together while he tries to get out the door on time.

This is why weekend brunches get special reverence. It's when Yotam has time to luxuriate in the cooking process, making an array of sweet and savory dishes to linger over as people come and go. Breakfast transitions into lunch, conversation ebbs and flows, everyone grazes. The table never looks empty.

Fundamentally, brunch is a democratic meal. You're creating a spread (think jellies and jams, yogurt, granola, cheese, smoked fish, breads, spreads, dips, and more), then letting your guests pick their favorites. Fresh flavors and snack-friendly portions also allow everyone to fill up while still eating relatively light. The focal point of an Ottolenghi-approved brunch spread is an egg dish, which here is his Green Herb Shakshuka: something substantial but not overly heavy, endlessly versatile, and, of course, visually enticing. Those rich, orange yolks are just waiting to be popped.

Many of Yotam's favorite brunch dishes can be prepared in advance—the vegetable base for his shakshuka as well as the labneh used in his berry platter can both be made 1 to 2 days ahead of time (the berries for the latter recipe can also marinate for 12 hours before serving). Serve everything all at once for a leisurely midmorning feast.





Middle Eastern Bread Spread

ingredients

Za'atar Oil

350 g (about 3) vine tomatoes

4 tbsp olive oil, divided

1 garlic clove, crushed

Salt

4 pita breads, store-bought or homemade, lightly toasted if desired

200 g block fresh cheese, such as feta, cut into ½-inch planks

1½ tsp runny honey

1 small bunch radishes and fresh herbs such as mint or parsley, for serving

Serves 4 • A big brunch spread calls for special bread: in this case, fresh, fluffy pita. Breads need condiments, and here Yotam relies on a few. The first is a simple-yet-satisfying mixture of tomato, garlic, and olive oil—a classic Mediterranean combination that also appears in Italian panzanella and Catalan/Spanish pan con tomate.

Second is olive oil infused with za'atar, an herb similar to marjoram, oregano, and thyme that grows around the Eastern Mediterranean. It's dried, then mixed with sesame seeds, salt, and sumac.

Third is a fresh white, salty cheese. Yotam prefers feta, but goat cheese works, too. If you're lucky to live near a market that has multiple kinds of white cheeses, taste around and see which variety you like best—some are saltier

than others, or creamier, or tangier.

The whole idea of this spread is to dip the bread in a bit of Za'atar Oil, spoon some tomato over it, and eat it in tandem with a nibble of cheese. Yotam serves fresh vegetables and herbs on the side to energize the palate and prepare the appetite for heartier cooked egg dishes that come later in the meal.

method

Make the Za'atar Oil (see page 13). Set aside in a small bowl or other serving container.

Grate the tomatoes on the coarse end of a



box grater. Transfer the grated tomatoes to a fine-mesh sieve set over a bowl and set aside to drain for 5 to 10 minutes. Place the tomatoes in a fresh bowl and discard the accumulated tomato water (or reserve it to flavor soups and stews, or as the base of a cocktail). Add 3 tablespoons of the oil, the garlic, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt. Stir to combine and transfer to a serving bowl.

Slice the pita into quarters and arrange it on a platter or large wooden board.

Place the Za'atar Oil alongside the tomato and pita.

Arrange the feta on the platter or board and drizzle with the honey and remaining tablespoon of olive oil. Nestle the radishes and fresh herbs alongside and serve.

Breaking Bread

There's so much more to Middle Eastern bread culture than the humble pita—and it's all worth exploring

Read up on Middle Eastern bread making and you'll discover an embarrassment of riches: Distinctive doughs, cooking techniques, and toppings abound. You can't go wrong with a pile of fresh pitas alongside your mezze spread or main courses, but there's far more to explore.

For starters, consider **laffa**, a softer, fluffier version of the pita (sans pocket). Laffa is popular in Israel, where it's cooked in a clay, wood-fired oven called a taboon. It can be used as a sandwich wrap or as a ferry for various dips and mezze.

Then there are the flatbreads. **Lavash**, thin and unleavened, is a common accompaniment for mezze or salads as well as a wrapper for grilled meats in Armenia and Iran. It's cooked in a clay oven called a tonir and often sold in large flat sheets.

Man'oushe is a pliable yeasted bread that's a popular street snack in Lebanon, where it's often eaten for breakfast. It's stretched by hand and cooked on a domed griddle, resulting in a slightly crispy, slightly chewy base that's commonly slathered in olive oil and za'atar.

Persian **nan-e barbari** resembles Italian focaccia, but instead of being brushed with olive oil, it's topped with a mixture called roomal—boiled water, flour, and baking soda—that adds moisture and makes for a deliciously craggy crust. Oblong in shape, nan-e barbari is often studded with black and white sesame seeds.

Or try a stuffed flatbread, like **gözleme**. Made from a thin, unyeasted dough, this is a perennial favorite from Turkey. Popular fillings include minced meat and onions, spinach and cheese, or assorted vegetables. Cooked on a griddle, it can be served flat, rolled into a wrap, or folded up into a handheld snack.



Labneh With Berries

for the orange oil

100 ml good-quality olive oil

10 g lemon thyme or thyme sprigs, plus a few extra picked thyme leaves to serve

1 orange; 6 strips of skin finely shaved

for the berries and labneh

450 g labneh

200 g fresh or frozen blackberries

250 g fresh or frozen raspberries

300 g strawberries, hulled and halved lengthwise (or quartered if they're larger)

200 g blueberries

60 g granulated sugar

1 lime; 1 tbsp juice, 1 tsp finely grated zest

1½ tbsp sumac, plus extra to serve

150 g cherries, pitted

Serves 6 • This display of the season's best produce can double as a brunch accompaniment or light dessert. It's a layered platter of rich homemade or store-bought labneh topped with multiple kinds of sweet, juicy berries and a bit of orange-infused olive oil.

The berries you use are totally up to you—try using what's in season at the moment. You can also use frozen berries, which are often less expensive and just as high quality. And while some people may balk at the idea of putting olive oil on a sweet dish, fear not—this oil has a mellow, grassy flavor punctuated by floral orange peel. You'll make more oil than you need here; store any extra in a glass jar to drizzle over salads or lightly cooked vegetables later on.

As with all vegetable platters, the goal is to create layers of flavor. The tangy labneh forms the base, the lime juice and sumac echo and enhance the acidity of the berries, and the orange-and-thyme-infused oil provides a savory balance. Serve as-is or alongside granola.

method

Make the labneh 12 to 48 hours ahead of time (see page 10).

Make the orange oil. Place the olive oil in a small saucepan set over medium-low heat and warm for about 7 minutes or until tiny air bubbles form. Add the thyme and orange strips, remove from heat, and set aside. Allow to infuse for at least 30 minutes or overnight.

Make the berry topping. Add ⅓ each of the blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries to the bowl of a food processor along with the sugar, lime juice, and sumac, and blitz until completely smooth,

1 to 2 minutes. Pour the berry purée into a mixing bowl and set aside.

Add all of the remaining berries, the blueberries, and the cherries to a large bowl along with the blitzed fruit, and stir gently to combine. If not using the topping immediately, keep the mixture refrigerated, bringing it back up to room temperature before serving.

To serve, spread the labneh onto a large platter, smoothing it out with the back of a spoon. Spoon the berry mixture over the labneh. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the orange oil, then top with a few strips of orange skin and the picked thyme. Lastly, sprinkle with the lime zest and a good pinch of sumac.

Green Herb Shakshuka

ingredients

1 tbsp Rose Harissa
8 tbsp olive oil
800 g leeks (roughly 550 g once trimmed), washed and sliced in half lengthwise, then trimmed into ½-inch half-moons
Salt
10 garlic cloves, 7 crushed and 3 thinly sliced
2 tsp cumin seeds, toasted and finely crushed in a mortar and pestle
100 g cilantro, roughly chopped in the food processor
60 g dill, roughly chopped in the food processor
100 g parsley, roughly chopped in the food processor
150 g (about 10) scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced
450 g baby spinach
1 tsp ground turmeric
Freshly ground black pepper
3 limes; juice from 2, plus 1 cut into wedges to serve
8 medium eggs

Serves 4 • Shakshuka is a dish with probable North African origins, though Spain, Ottoman Turkey, and Yemen also lay claim to it. The delicious mix of eggs braised in a pan with a vegetable-based sauce is ideal for being mopped up with bread or pita.

While the most common shakshuka sauce is tomato-based, Yotam was inspired to make a green version by slowly cooking a huge quantity of herbs and green vegetables together (a technique that is common across the Persian Gulf). Slow-cooking the herbs in this way makes the base earthy and fragrant while still feeling fresh. The runny egg yolks add richness, and everything gets an extra oomph from a drizzle of spicy harissa and a sprinkle of freshly fried garlic.

There's a lot of vegetable prep involved here, so to save on time, use a food processor to roughly chop the herbs and scallions. When it's time to cook them, patience is key—they must be slowly cooked over moderate heat and stirred often to avoid sticking and burning on the bottom. The longer you cook the base, the better it will taste.

Note: In lieu of fresh lime juice, you can also use store-bought or homemade preserved lemons to add acid at the end of cooking, or dried black limes, which can be stirred directly into the base. Preserved lemons are available at Mediterranean markets or online at [New York Shuk](#); black limes are available at Mediterranean markets or online at [Burlap & Barrel](#) or [Kalustyan's](#).

You can get ahead by making the base a day in advance; just bring it back up to temperature in the pan before cracking in the eggs. Serve with warm flatbread and labneh as the centerpiece of a brunch spread.

method

Make the Rose Harissa (see page 18).

Add 5 tablespoons of the olive oil to a large sauté pan set over medium heat. Once hot, add the leeks and ½ teaspoon of salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 15 minutes. Add the crushed garlic cloves and cumin, stirring occasionally, until aromatic, 2 to 3 minutes, then add cilantro, dill, parsley, and scallions. Cook, stirring often, until fragrant and deep green, about 20 minutes.

Increase heat to medium-high and add the spinach, working in batches if necessary, cooking it down between each batch to incorporate into the herbs. Add the turmeric, 1 teaspoon of salt, and a good grind of pepper. Taste for seasoning and adjust if necessary. Add 300 milliliters of water to create a “sauce” for the eggs to cook in. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has almost completely evaporated, about 10 minutes.

Stir in the lime juice. Taste for seasoning and adjust if necessary.

Make 8 wells in the green base. Crack an egg into each well and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Cover and cook for about 3 to 5 minutes over low heat or until the whites are set and the yolks are runny (cook for 3 to 5 minutes longer if you want the yolks more firmly set).

Make the crispy garlic. While the eggs are cooking, add the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil to a small frying pan set over medium-high heat. Once sizzling hot, add the sliced garlic and cook, stirring often, until garlic is lightly golden, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the Rose Harissa.

Spoon the crispy garlic and harissa mixture all over the eggs.

Serve immediately with lime wedges to squeeze alongside.



Vegetable



Optimal



At Ottolenghi restaurants, Yotam's abundant and inviting vegetable displays recall the beautiful market stalls of his youth. He plays with colors, textures, and proportions because he recognizes that we eat with our eyes first.

Believe it or not, the same alluring aesthetic that Yotam achieves in his own kitchen can be achieved in yours, too. The beauty of showcasing produce is that these ingredients are often at their best when cooked ahead of time, which makes kaleidoscopic veggie spreads perfect for delighting friends and family. And, like Yotam, you shouldn't be afraid of going big.

Think back to your most memorable meals: Chances are many of them revolve around a sense of largesse. You can make any meal feel celebratory by bringing out large platters and presenting fresh veggies and grains. The trifecta of recipes in this section, when taken together as a whole, hit every flavor and texture sensation. The soft eggplant salad is garnished with a bitter preserved lemon paste; the carrots and labneh are all about the interplay between sweet and sour; the cucumbers provide a welcome crunch and a grassy, herbaceous flavor. Mix, match, and share generously.



Roasted Eggplant Salad With Quick Lemon Paste and Quick-Pickled Chilies

ingredients

1¼ tbsp Quick Lemon Paste

2 tbsp Quick-Pickled Chilies

20 g pistachios, lightly toasted and roughly chopped

2 lbs large Italian eggplants (about 3 eggplants), trimmed and cut into 1-inch-thick rounds

10 tbsp olive oil, divided

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

10 g dill, roughly chopped

5 g parsley, roughly chopped

10 g basil leaves, roughly chopped

1½ tsp maple syrup

Serves 4 • Eggplant is a somewhat misunderstood vegetable—many people find it intimidating for no good reason. One of the simplest and best methods for cooking eggplants is to slice and roast, as Yotam demonstrates here.

Eggplant is an excellent base for salads and mezze dishes, thanks to its meaty texture and incredible ability to absorb and carry flavors. It pairs well with almost anything: loads of fresh herbs, grilled or roasted meats (especially lamb, which is fragrant and fatty), and dairy (yogurt or salty feta cheese). Once you know how to cook it, it's an easy and impressive showpiece for a vegetable-laden table—there's always at least one eggplant dish on display in the storefront at Ottolenghi cafés.

In this recipe, Yotam uses a mixture of dill, parsley, and basil, though you can feel free to substitute other soft green herbs such as cilantro. He adds a bit of Quick Lemon Paste and Quick-Pickled Chilies for complexity and kick.

method

Make the Quick Lemon Paste (see page 12).

Make the Quick-Pickled Chilies (see page 11).

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F. Lightly toast the pistachios for about 6 minutes. Set aside.

Change the oven temperature to 200°C/400°F.

In a large bowl, toss the eggplants with 4 tablespoons of oil, ¾ teaspoon of salt, and a good grind of pepper. Spread the eggplants out in a single layer on a parchment-lined baking tray and roast, turning over halfway, until deeply golden and cooked through, 30 to 35 minutes. Set aside to cool.

In a large bowl, mix together the dill, parsley, basil, Quick Lemon Paste, maple syrup, a pinch of salt, and the remaining 6 tablespoons of oil. Add the cooled eggplant and toss until well coated.

Arrange the eggplant on a plate and top with the Quick-Pickled Chilies and chopped pistachios.





Grilled Carrots With Labneh and Dukkah

ingredients

400 g labneh
3 tbsp dukkah
2 lbs carrots (from about 1 large or 2 small bunches), with greens
40 g tarragon, roughly chopped
8 tbsp olive oil, plus 2 tsp olive oil
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper
3 tbsp runny honey
1½ tbsp apple cider vinegar

Serves 4 • The humble carrot, with its striking color and sweet flavor, is one of Yotam's favorite vegetables. Carrots can be eaten raw, steamed, roasted, or grilled; here, they're steamed so they stay tender and crisp, then grilled to create a smoky aroma.

Yotam layers the carrots with tart, creamy labneh and tops them with a sprinkle of dukkah, a nutty, crunchy, completely delicious Egyptian condiment. The finished product is a composed platter of varying textures, colors, and intense flavors.

This is a great recipe if you're entertaining, as the carrots can be steamed and grilled ahead of time. Plate them with the labneh and dukkah just before serving.

method

Make the labneh 12 to 48 hours ahead of time (see page 10).

Make the dukkah (see page 15).

Wash and peel the carrots and trim the tops, leaving about 1 inch of the green attached. Prepare a steamer over a large pot filled with a few inches of boiling water, making sure the steamer doesn't touch the water. Add the carrots and cook until the thickest part of the stalk is easily pierced with the tip of a knife, about 10 minutes.

Make a tarragon oil. Add the tarragon to the bowl of a food processor. Add 6 tablespoons plus two teaspoons of oil and a pinch of salt. Blitz until completely smooth, about 2 to 3 minutes, scraping down the sides if necessary. Set aside.

Remove the carrots from the steamer and transfer to a large plate or bowl. Toss with the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil, ½ teaspoon of salt, and a good grind of pepper.

Place a grill pan over high heat. Once it's smoking, grill the carrots, working in batches if necessary to avoid overcrowding. Turn the carrots occasionally until lightly charred on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes.

While the carrots are cooking, make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the honey and apple cider vinegar with a pinch of salt and pepper.

Transfer the grilled carrots to the same large plate or bowl you seasoned them in before grilling, and top with the honey dressing, tossing gently to combine.

To serve, spread the labneh onto a large platter, making a well in the middle. Drizzle with the tarragon oil, then add the carrots. Spoon a generous amount of dukkah over the carrots, serving the rest of the dukkah to eat alongside. Add a final drizzle of tarragon oil.

Smacked Cucumber Salad With Sumac-Pickled Onions

ingredients

½ c Sumac-Pickled Onions

1 tsp white sesame seeds, toasted

1 lb Lebanese or Persian cucumbers (from about 6 to 8 cucumbers)

Salt

20 g parsley leaves

1 garlic clove, finely chopped

5 tbsp olive oil

Serves 4 • All around the world, cucumbers are used to balance heavier starch or meat-centric dishes. In Eastern and Northern Europe, they're sometimes mixed with dill and some cream. In Asia, they're often mixed with sesame oil and rice vinegar. And in the Middle East, they're key ingredients in the chopped salad.

Smacking the cucumbers here is a great stress reliever, but breaking them up also allows them to absorb the flavor of the parsley oil more easily. Salting them for about half an hour before dressing draws out any excess moisture, resulting in a salad with a more concentrated flavor and texture.

You can use English or hothouse cucumbers if you prefer them to Lebanese or Persian cucumbers, and removing the seeds is not absolutely essential. Play around with making oils out of other herbs, too—Yotam uses parsley here, but cilantro or dill are just as refreshing.

method

Make the Sumac-Pickled Onions (see page 16).

In a medium frying pan set over medium-high heat, toast the sesame seeds for 3 to 4 minutes. Set aside.

Place the cucumbers onto a chopping board and trim off the tops and bottoms.

Use the side of your knife to smack the cucumbers until they're slightly bruised and breaking apart. Use a spoon to scoop the seeds out of the middle of each half and discard. Roughly chop the cucumbers into 1-inch pieces. Transfer to a bowl and season with 1 teaspoon of salt, tossing to combine, then set aside for 30 minutes. Drain the cucumbers through a fine-mesh strainer, discarding the salty water.

Meanwhile, make a parsley oil. Add the parsley, garlic, ¼ teaspoon of salt, and the olive oil to a food processor and blitz until completely smooth.

Add the drained cucumbers, Sumac-Pickled Onions, and a few tablespoons of parsley oil to a bowl and toss well to combine. Transfer to a serving plate and sprinkle with the sesame seeds.

Transfer any leftover parsley oil to an airtight container and store in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.



Main



Courses

Many home cooks feel anxious about entertaining—often there's so much pressure to make an incredible meal that will look and taste great, not to mention impress friends and family. But you don't need to reinvent the wheel at every dinner party.

Yotam generally recommends making dishes over and over again to hone your skills, then incrementally introducing new ingredients and techniques. Once you have a sense of a recipe and have cooked through it a few times, you'll begin developing the necessary confidence to improvise. There's plenty of time for this type of experimentation, but when you're feeding a large group, it might not be the best moment to try something untested. It's okay to play it safe with a recipe you know will work.

Beyond that, Yotam encourages you to consider a few key questions when hosting. First and foremost: What kind of cook are you? Is your favorite part of the process shopping for unique ingredients, or would you rather just order that za'atar online? Do you love the challenge of cooking something new, or does the art of mastering a recipe through repetition appeal to you? From his perspective, cooking should be about comfort, ease, and the joy of feeding others. Set yourself up accordingly.

Next, consider how to build a balanced meal: Craft a menu that consists of dishes with varying levels of complexity, both for your sake as the cook and so you don't overwhelm the palates of your guests.

More practical tips: Read any recipe all the way through before starting anything so you know what you're getting into. Choose your serving platters in advance for ease of presentation. And, most importantly, forget the formalities and savor the process.



Mafalda Pasta With Quick Shatta

ingredients

4 tbsp Quick Shatta,
plus extra to eat
alongside

1 butternut squash
(2 lbs), peeled, seeded,
and cut into roughly
1-inch cubes

1 onion, peeled and
roughly chopped

7 tbsp olive oil, divided

Salt

Freshly ground black
pepper

6 garlic cloves, thinly
sliced

500 g full-fat Greek
yogurt, at room
temperature

1¼ tsp ground cumin

1½ tsp cornstarch

2 egg yolks

200 g mafalda or
farfalle pasta

5 g parsley leaves,
roughly chopped, plus
extra picked leaves to
garnish

Serves 2 • Yogurt isn't just for breakfast. It's an ancient ingredient with many complex uses. Serving pasta with a warm yogurt sauce is common around the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly in Turkey, Greece, and the Balkans. It's a deeply satisfying combination that tastes fresh and creamy—without using cream.

If you serve pasta with yogurt, it's important to cut through some of the richness, otherwise the dish can become cloying and one-dimensional. That's where the butternut squash, shatta (chili sauce), and fried garlic come in—together they make a balanced, textural, and colorful meal that you can serve straight from the pan.

It's important not to mix cold yogurt with hot sauces too quickly, or the yogurt may split. Here, Yotam uses egg yolks and cornstarch to help thicken and stabilize the yogurt sauce and prevent this from happening.

method

Make the Quick Shatta (see page 17).

Preheat the oven to 230°C/450°F.

Add the squash, onion, 3 tablespoons of oil, ¼ teaspoon of salt, and good grind of pepper to a parchment-lined baking sheet, and toss well to combine. Roast, stirring halfway, until vegetables are softened and charred, about 30 minutes. Set aside.

Make the fried garlic oil. Add the sliced garlic and 2 tablespoons of oil to a small frying pan off the heat, then place the pan

over medium heat. Cook gently until the garlic becomes deeply golden and crispy, stirring occasionally, about 12 minutes. Set aside.

In a bowl, combine the yogurt, cumin, cornstarch, egg yolks, 1 tablespoon of oil, and a pinch of salt, and stir to combine. Pour the mixture into a large sauté pan set over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring often, until thickened and just beginning to bubble, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil and add the pasta, cooking it according to the package instructions until almost al dente, usually around 6 minutes. Reserve 1 cup of cooking water to add to the sauce. Using a spider or slotted spoon, transfer the pasta to the pan with the yogurt sauce along with the reserved pasta cooking water, and stir gently to combine until the sauce is smooth and creamy.

Stir in half of the roasted squash and onion, and taste for seasoning. Spoon the remaining squash and onion over the top of the pasta.

Drizzle with a few spoonfuls of shatta, depending on how spicy you like it, serving the remaining alongside, and then top with the fried garlic oil. Sprinkle with parsley and the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil.





Roasted Cauliflower With Harissa Chili Oil

ingredients

2 large whole cauliflower with leaves (about 4 lbs)
360 g onion (1 large), peeled and cut into 8 wedges
8 Fresno chilies, stems on, slit down the center
5 g picked cilantro
1 lemon; cut into wedges

for the chili oil

90 g Rose Harissa
2½ tsp tomato paste
2 tsp Aleppo chili
1½ tsp granulated sugar
3 garlic cloves, crushed
Salt
15 tbsp olive oil, plus 1 tsp olive oil

Serves 4 to 6 • Cauliflower is a humble vegetable, but if you douse it in lots of oil or butter and slow-cook it, it will develop an intense sweetness and depth. Yotam's version takes things to another level by infusing olive oil with chilies and homemade harissa, making for a rich and potent vegetable centerpiece. He calls this dish "revenge of the vegetarians." It's impressive enough to serve as the focal point of a meat-free feast, though you can also serve it alongside lamb or chicken.

Cooking the cauliflower is a two-part process. First, briefly blanch it in boiling water, then toss it with the homemade chili oil and roast it in the oven until golden brown and crisped.

The chili oil can be made up to 2 weeks in advance and kept in the refrigerator; it's worth doubling the recipe and keeping the extra to spoon over eggs or use as a marinade for vegetables or chicken. If you're not concerned with making this vegan, feel free to use both olive oil and unsalted butter in the sauce for even more richness.

Serve this dish with warm bread and a simple green or chopped salad, or as part of a festive spread.

method

Trim the leaves at the top of the cauliflowers, exposing 2 to 3 inches of the cauliflower itself. Cut each cauliflower into quarters, making sure that the leaves remain attached at the base.

Fill a large pot with well-salted water and bring to a boil. Boil the cauliflower for 2 minutes, weighing it down with a lid a

little smaller than the pan to ensure they stay submerged. Transfer the wedges to a parchment-lined baking sheet. Add the onion and chilies to the baking sheet.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F.

Make the Rose Harissa (see page 18).

Make the chili oil. In a mixing bowl, add the Rose Harissa, tomato paste, Aleppo chili, sugar, garlic, salt, and olive oil, and whisk to combine.

Pour the chili oil over the sheet with the cauliflower, onions, and Fresno chilies. Use your hands to toss well (wear gloves if you are sensitive to spice), massaging the chili oil into all of the crevasses of the cauliflower.

Roast the cauliflower until the cauliflower is golden brown and crispy, 45 to 60 minutes.

Remove the sheet from the oven and baste the vegetables with the chili oil 2 or 3 times throughout cooking.

Transfer the roasted cauliflower to a serving platter, spooning all of the remaining chili oil and its solids collected from the baking sheet over the top. Garnish with cilantro leaves and a squeeze of lemon juice, and serve immediately.



ingredients

¾ c Tahini Sauce

9 tbsp olive oil, divided, plus 1 tsp olive oil

7 garlic cloves, 6 thinly sliced and 1 crushed

25 g (about 2) Fresno chilies, thinly sliced

15 g (about 1½) dried ancho or cascabel chilies, stems and seeds removed and very roughly chopped

2 tsp caraway seeds

3 tbsp tomato paste

3 large plum tomatoes, diced

1 tsp granulated sugar

Salt

15 g cilantro, roughly chopped, plus 2 tbsp extra to serve

1 2½ lb side of salmon, skin and pin bones removed

300 g peeled extra-large shrimp

½ tsp paprika

Salmon and Prawns in Spicy Tomato Sauce

Serves 6 • This salmon dish is made in the spirit of generosity, featuring two types of seafood in a simple yet flavorful sauce. It also makes quite an impact on the table (present it on a beautiful platter with a bit of pomp and ceremony).

The sauce is inspired by chreime, a spicy cooking sauce with roots in Tunisia and Libya. There are many variations on chreime, but they all include tomatoes or tomato paste, oil, garlic, and spices, all of which is cooked until everything is a bright red. Fresh or dried chilies and caraway seeds are commonly added, but cumin is a fine substitute for caraway if you can't find it. Yotam uses ancho chilies to give the sauce a sweet and almost tobacco-esque tinge, which contrasts nicely with the fresh Fresno chilies.

The salmon would be impressive on its own, but Yotam adds prawns as a nod to prawns saganaki, a Greek dish that also features tomato sauce and feta. For this

particular recipe he substitutes a rich tahini sauce for the feta, which adds body and nuttiness.

This is a very forgiving dish—it's hard to overcook the salmon in the moist sauce, and there's nothing precious about the rustic presentation. The sauce itself can be made up to 2 days in advance if you're entertaining, and the salmon can easily be swapped for another fish such as trout or cod (just adjust cooking times as necessary). Serve it alongside warm bread for a complete meal.

method

Make the Tahini Sauce (see page 8).

Add 4 tablespoons of oil to a large sauté pan set over medium-high heat. Once

hot, add the sliced garlic and Fresno chilies, and cook until fragrant and lightly colored, about 3 minutes. Add the ancho or cascabel chilies, caraway seeds, and tomato paste. Cook, stirring often, until fragrant and the tomato paste is a deep red, about 1 minute.

Add the fresh tomatoes, sugar, 1 cup of water, and 1½ teaspoons of salt to the pan with the garlic and chilies. Bring to a simmer, then lower the heat to medium-low and cook at a low simmer, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes have broken down and the sauce has thickened slightly, about 12 minutes. Stir in the cilantro, reserving about 1 tablespoon for the finishing oil.

Preheat the oven to 220°C/400°F.

Season the salmon with 1 tablespoon of olive oil and ¾ teaspoon of salt. Season the shrimp with 1 tablespoon of oil and ¼ teaspoon of salt, and set aside.

Transfer the tomato sauce to a roasting tray or dish large enough to fit all or most of the salmon.

Transfer the salmon skin side down to the roasting tray on top of the sauce, tucking the tail underneath if it's too long to fit. Roast for 10 minutes, then remove from the oven and nestle the shrimp into the sauce, avoiding the top of the salmon. Return to the oven until the shrimp are just cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes.

Make a paprika oil. Add the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil, the crushed garlic, and the paprika to a small frying pan set over medium-high heat. Cook until the oil just begins to bubble and the garlic is fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes, then remove from the heat and stir in the remaining cilantro.

Remove the salmon from the oven and drizzle generously with the Tahini Sauce. Spoon the paprika oil over the top, along with a final drizzle of olive oil. Serve warm with any extra tahini on the side.

Pretty, Please

A quick primer on plating your meals with restaurant-level poise

There's an old saying in culinary school: "Appeal is half the meal." That advice isn't just for aspiring chefs. Yotam often speaks about making striking visual displays with his food, both as a way to attract customers and to enhance the natural beauty of the ingredients he's showcasing. But how, exactly, does one create a dish that pleases the eye as much as the palate? Start with these three tips:

Balancing Act

Look at the recipe's components, then consider how you'll arrange them so their physical attributes complement one another. Often this means pairing contrasting elements. Take Yotam's recipe for Grilled Carrots With Labneh and Dukkah (see page 39): To plate this dish, he spreads a base of smooth, creamy, white labneh on the bottom of a platter, drizzles it with brightly colored tarragon oil for contrast, then places the carrots on top, scattering crunchy dukkah over them before serving. In a single dish you get opposing textures (smooth and creamy, charred, crunchy), colors (white, bright green, orange), and shapes (a swoop of labneh, pointy carrots, powdery dukkah).

More Is More

Some chefs prefer an austere style with lots of negative space on the plate, but Yotam believes in the idea of plenty. He prefers to arrange platters in high, artfully loose piles. He'll also finish them with an additional glug of olive oil or a sprinkle of fresh herbs, all of which signals the concept of joyful abundance.

Step Up to the Plate

Servingware with eye-catching patterns and hues enhances the appeal of your food. Antique shops, garage sales, and online resources like [Etsy](#) or [1stDibs](#) are great places to find one-of-a-kind pieces. You want variety here, and it's fine if things don't match. Riffing on incongruity is part of the fun in creating a riotous feast.

*for
the sweet
spiced
lamb*

2 lbs boneless lamb
necks (about 4 pieces)

Salt

Freshly ground black
pepper

2 tbsp olive oil

6 garlic cloves, peeled
and roughly chopped

50 g ginger, peeled
and roughly chopped

3 vine tomatoes,
roughly chopped

1 white onion, peeled
and roughly chopped

2 jalapeños, roughly
chopped

20 g cilantro leaves
and stalks, plus 5 g
extra, chopped

1 tbsp ground cumin

1 tbsp ground cinna-
mon

1½ tsp ground allspice

150 g Greek-style
yogurt, at room tem-
perature

5 g parsley, roughly
chopped

*for the
celebration
rice*

¼ tsp Saffron Water

30 g unsalted butter

5 whole cloves

3 whole cinnamon
sticks

(cont. on page 53)

Celebration Rice With Saffron and Sweet Spiced Lamb

Serves 6 to 8 • In Yotam's estimation, rice is the one single ingredient that binds cultures and cuisines around the world together. The beauty of rice is that it can be a humble side dish or stand in the spotlight. No Middle Eastern household is complete without some type of celebratory rice dish. Often these dishes are labors of love; they have several components that are cooked separately and combined together to beautiful effect.

This dish is Yotam's version of Iranian jeweled rice—a dish studded with fruit, nuts, and spices and, in this case, topped with tender braised lamb and a yogurt gravy. It's very much in the Ottolenghi style—a dish of abundance with dramatic layers of contrasting colors and textures.

A few tricks here: Soak the rice for at least half an hour (or up to overnight) before cooking it. Doing so will make it very light and fluffy. Don't overmix the cooked rice after adding the saffron; you want some distinct sections of yellow and white rice. If you can't find lamb neck, look for lamb shoulder or other stewing or braising cuts, such as pork shoulder. Serve with a simple chopped salad or grated tomato, if you'd like.



400 g basmati rice,
washed well and
soaked for 30 minutes
to overnight

Salt

for the garnish

60 g golden raisins

20 g barberries

2½ tbsp apple cider
vinegar

30 g unsalted butter

80 g blanched
slivered almonds

Salt

5 g cilantro, roughly
chopped

10 g parsley, roughly
chopped

method

Preheat the oven to 165°C/330°F.

Pat the lamb dry and season all over with ½ teaspoon of salt and a good grind of pepper. Heat the oil in a large ovenproof saucepan or Dutch oven set over medium-high. Once hot, sear the lamb until golden brown all over, turning every few minutes, about 10 minutes in total.

Add the garlic, ginger, tomatoes, onion, jalapeños, and cilantro leaves and stalks to a food processor, and blitz until finely chopped but not puréed.

Transfer the lamb to a separate plate. Add the garlic-ginger mixture to the pan and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and lightly colored, about 8 minutes. Add the cumin, cinnamon, and allspice, and cook for 30 seconds, then return the lamb to the pan along with 4½ cups of water, 1½ teaspoons of salt, and a good grind of pepper. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, cover, then transfer to the oven. Cook until tender, about 3 hours.

After 3 hours, remove the lamb from the oven, uncover, and baste with the juices in the pot. Return the lamb to the oven for another 30 minutes, basting once again halfway through, until the lamb is brown on top and the sauce has thickened. Remove from the oven and set aside.

In the last half hour that the lamb is cooking, make the celebration rice.

Make the Saffron Water (see page 13).

In a large sauté pan set over medium heat, add the butter, cloves, and cinnamon sticks, and cook until the butter has melted. Drain the rice well and add it to the pan, stirring to coat each grain in the fat. Add 3 cups of boiling water and 1 teaspoon of salt, and bring to a boil. Cover tightly, turn the heat down to its lowest setting, and cook, undisturbed, for 15 minutes. Turn off the heat, leave the pan

covered, and let rice sit off the heat for another 15 minutes.

While the rice cooks, make the garnish. Add the raisins, barberries, and apple cider vinegar to a bowl, and set aside to plump up for at least 15 minutes. Add the butter to a medium frying pan set over medium-high heat and allow to melt. Add the almonds and a small pinch of salt, and cook, stirring often, until golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove from the heat, and stir in the raisin mixture, cilantro, and parsley.

Uncover the rice and add the saffron threads and their soaking liquid. Stir very gently so that the saffron stains some but not all of the rice yellow.

Transfer the lamb and two-thirds of the sauce to a large bowl. Use two forks to roughly shred the meat into large pieces, removing the bones. Whisk the yogurt, parsley, and extra cilantro into the remaining sauce in the pan, and transfer to a medium bowl.

Spoon half of the rice mixture onto a large serving platter and top with half of the lamb mixture. Repeat with the remaining rice and lamb, then spoon the nut garnish all over. Serve with any extra yogurt gravy alongside.



"I'd love for you to cook with new ingredients, and make vegetables that taste and look really sexy. So go get creative, play with your vegetables, and get experimental in the kitchen." -Yotam

