



Cook

Greek

in America

Recipes with love from

**The Robot Book
Club**

Cook Greek in America

Authentic Mediterranean Flavors for the Modern Kitchen

The Robot Book Club

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Table of Contents

Proino & Dekatiano (The Morning Rhythms)

Lathera (The Weeknight Backbone)

Yiayia's Pot on the Stove (Survival and Comfort)

Nistisima (The Fasting Table & Everyday Vegan)

To Kiriakatiko Trapezi (The Sunday Supper & Sto Fournos)

Meze & Kefi (The Front Porch Spread)

Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Greek.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

The smell hits you first. Not the theatrical sizzle of flaming cheese, nor the heavy, Americanized portions of a late-night diner. Forget the Hollywood clichés, the blue-and-white caricatures. That's a different story for a different book. This, here, is the quiet truth. This is the scent of a hundred thousand American homes, from Astoria stoops to suburban Ohio kitchens, where olive oil and garlic simmered low, lemon brightened everything, and oregano wasn't a spice, it was a memory.

This is the Greek food that doesn't advertise itself, the one whispered across generations, cooked by hands that understood necessity long before they knew comfort. These are the practical secrets, patiently passed down, of making something truly profound from the humble: a perfect *Avgolemono* from mere broth, a hearty *Fasolada* born of immigrant ingenuity. This isn't the public-facing Greek diner fare, engineered for American tastes. This is the private, deeply guarded home cooking of the *yiayia*, often born of poverty in forgotten corners of Astoria, Queens. These were survival foods, yes, but through resilience and love, they became the bedrock of a culture.

For the first-generation Greek-American, these aren't just recipes; they are anchors. They are the undeniable connection to a past, a defiant echo against assimilation, a way to tell your children who they are, one soulful bite at a time. This isn't about exotic ingredients you'll never find or techniques demanding a full-time culinary staff. This is about real food, for real life, in real American kitchens. It's the simple power of slow-cooked vegetables in oil, the comfort of healing soups, the communal joy of *To Kiriakatiko Trapezi*.

This book won't talk down to you, nor will it embellish. It simply lays bare the unvarnished heart of Greek home cooking: the rhythms of the day, the seasons, the fasting table, the feasting table. It's the kind of food that understands you, even when you don't quite understand yourself. So, tie on your apron. The stories are told, one pot at a time. The work begins now.



Proino & Dekatiano (The Morning Rhythms)

Bridging the ancestral habit of a mid-morning coffee-and-a-bite with modern schedules.

In Greece, the morning doesn't start with a sprawling, bacon-greased diner breakfast. It begins with a jolt. A harsh, ice-rattled coffee and something hard, honest, and starchy to drag through the foam. The dekatiano—that mid-morning bite—is less a meal than a necessary punctuation mark in the day, a working-class rhythm that hums from the isolated villages to the chaotic streets of Athens.

It's the twice-baked paximadia your grandmother kept in a battered tin, the sesame-shattered koulouri grabbed on the run, or a sharp, salty cheese pie pulled from the oven before the real heat sets in. These aren't the glorified brunch platters sold to tourists. These are the quiet, sturdy rituals of a true Greek morning, engineered to get you out the door and keep you moving.





Strapatsada / Kagianas

Στραπατοάδα / Καγιανός

stra-pa-TSA-tha / ka-ya-NAS

This isn't the heavy, neon-lit Greek food of American diners; it's survival food, garden food, genius food. It's humble eggs scrambled into a rich, sweet, olive-oil-slicked tomato reduction. The secret to making it taste like the old country? Patience. You let the tomatoes cook down in a dry pan until their water entirely evaporates before introducing the oil or the eggs. It concentrates the flavor, ensuring the curds stay soft and pillowy, never weeping into a watery, tragic mess. It's what a resourceful grandmother feeds her family when time is short, and it's a brilliant weeknight salvation you can easily pull off in an American kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	large ripe beefsteak tomatoes <i>halved</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	1/4 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1/2 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	4 oz	block feta cheese in brine <i>crumbled by hand</i>
1/2 med	Anaheim or Cubanelle pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	dried Greek oregano
6 large	large eggs	1 loaf	crusty bread <i>sliced and toasted</i>

PREPARATION

- **Grate the tomatoes.**

Hold each tomato half by the skin side and grate the flesh on the large holes of a box grater directly into a bowl. Discard the skins left in your palm.

- **Lightly fork the eggs.**

Crack the eggs into a bowl and gently break the yolks with a fork; do not whisk them into a uniform froth. You want visible streaks of white and yellow.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Evaporate the tomato water in a dry pan.**

Place a large, un-oiled skillet over medium-high heat. Pour in the grated tomatoes and cook until all the natural water evaporates and the pan looks thick and dry, about 10 to 15 minutes.

- 2. Build the savory base.**

Lower the heat to medium, pour in the olive oil, and add the diced onion and pepper. Sauté for 4 to 5 minutes until soft and the oil takes on a deep reddish-orange hue, then season with the salt and pepper.

1. Gently scramble the eggs.

Reduce the heat to medium-low, pour the eggs over the simmering tomato sauce, and let sit undisturbed for 15 seconds. Use a wooden spoon to gently push and fold the mixture, letting uncooked egg run to the bottom.

2. Fold in the feta and kill the heat.

Just as the eggs form soft, pillowy curds but still look slightly wet, fold in half of the crumbled feta and immediately remove the skillet from the heat. The residual heat will finish the cooking perfectly.

3. Garnish and serve.

Scatter the remaining feta over the top, drizzle with a little more olive oil, dust with the dried oregano, and serve straight from the pan with crusty bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Winter Tomato Hack.**

If it's the dead of winter and beefsteak tomatoes are mealy, substitute 2 pints of halved cherry tomatoes. Blister them in the dry pan until they burst, then stir in 1 tablespoon of tomato paste and a splash of water, cooking until thick, before adding the olive oil.

● **Keep the garlic out of it.**

Westernized recipes often add heavy doses of garlic, but that pushes the flavor profile toward an Italian marinara. Authentic native versions rely strictly on sweet onions and peppers so the delicate eggs can shine.



Tiganites

Τηγανίτες

tee-ghah-NEE-tes

These are not heavy diner pancakes smothered in artificial syrup. Tiganites are an artifact of the Greek olive harvest, a frugal, sustaining morning meal meant to fry in the peppery green oil of the season. Made from little more than flour, water, and time, they rely on the magic of yeast and a grandmother's practiced eye to achieve a puffed, slightly tangy center with an audibly crisp shell. It is the taste of rural resourcefulness, built for a modern weeknight but steeped in centuries of survival.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	unbleached all-purpose flour <i>sifted</i>	1 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp	instant yeast	1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>for frying</i>
1 tbsp	granulated sugar	4 tbsp	honey
1/2 tsp	fine sea salt	1/4 cup	walnuts <i>finely crushed</i>
1 1/2 cup	lukewarm water	1 tsp	ground cinnamon

PREPARATION

- **Sift the flour.**

Greek grandmothers insist that sifting the all-purpose flour is the non-negotiable secret to ensuring the pancakes become exceptionally fluffy and light.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Activate the yeast and hydrate the batter.**

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the lukewarm water, yeast, and sugar. Add the sifted flour, salt, and one tablespoon of olive oil, beating vigorously with a wire whisk until absolutely smooth and reminiscent of thick cake batter.

- 2. Let the batter rest and ferment.**

Cover the bowl with a clean towel and let it sit in a warm spot for 15 to 20 minutes to develop the crucial, nostalgic tang that distinguishes a true tiganita.

- 3. Heat the frying oil.**

Heat a half-inch depth of olive oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat until a tiny bead of batter dropped into the pan immediately sizzles and floats to the top.

1. Drop the batter into the hot oil.

Using a standard tablespoon, carefully drop spoonfuls of the batter into the pan, waiting about 10 seconds between each addition so the cold batter does not crash the oil temperature.

2. Fry until deeply golden.

Allow the tiganites to fry undisturbed for about 2 minutes on the first side until the edges turn brown, then flip and fry for another minute or two until evenly crisp.

3. Drain and garnish.

Transfer briefly to a paper towel-lined plate to drain, then move to a serving platter and drench with honey, ground cinnamon, and crushed walnuts while still piping hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The baking powder shortcut.**

If 15 minutes of resting time is impossible on a busy morning, omit the yeast entirely and substitute with one and a half teaspoons of baking powder. Whisk and fry immediately for an exceptionally crispy, if slightly less puffy, traditional pancake.

● **Make it savory.**

Tiganites are not strictly a dessert. Omit the sugar and fold a half cup of crumbled feta cheese and a pinch of dried oregano directly into the batter before frying.

● **Embrace the petimezi.**

For the absolute zenith of rural Greek nostalgia, drizzle the finished pancakes with petimezi, a dark grape molasses, instead of honey.



Tyropitakia Kourou

Τυροπιτάκια Κουρού

tee-ro-pee-TAH-kyā koo-ROO

If you grew up in a Greek household, the smell of these baking on a Saturday morning is permanently etched into your memory. This is not the labor-intensive, paper-thin phyllo you see in restaurants. Kourou dough is the ultimate grandmother's secret for weeknight baking—an unleavened, crumbly, rich yogurt-based crust that shatters like a savory biscuit. It encases a sharply salty, unapologetically simple feta filling. There is no stretchy mozzarella here, because we aren't making pizza pockets. This is the real, unadulterated taste of the homeland, pulled off with zero kneading and ingredients you can find in any American grocery store.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	full-fat plain Greek yogurt <i>strained and thick, do not use runny regular yogurt</i>	9 oz	Greek feta cheese <i>purchased as a solid block in brine, drained</i>
3/4 cup	unsalted butter <i>melted and allowed to cool slightly</i>	1 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>finely grated</i>
3/4 cup	sunflower oil or canola oil	1 large	large egg
1 large	large egg	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
3 3/4 cup	all-purpose flour	1/2 tsp	dried mint
4 tsp	baking powder	1 large	egg yolk <i>beaten with 1 tablespoon of milk or water</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	2 tbsp	white sesame seeds

PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven.**

Preheat your oven to 350°F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Emulsify the liquid base.**

Whisk the Greek yogurt, cooled melted butter, oil, and one egg in a large bowl until it forms a smooth, creamy liquid.

- 2. Combine the dry ingredients.**

Whisk the all-purpose flour, baking powder, and kosher salt in a separate bowl, then pour the dry ingredients directly into your wet emulsion.

- 3. Fold gently until just combined.**

Use your hands to gently fold the mixture until the flour barely disappears. Stop touching it immediately; if you knead it like bread, the oils will separate and leave you with a tough, greasy rock.

1. Rest the dough.

Cover the bowl with a towel and let it sit on the counter for 15 to 20 minutes so the flour hydrates and the fats firm up.

2. Mix the canonical filling.

Violently crumble the drained feta into a bowl using a fork, then mash in the grated Pecorino Romano, the remaining egg, black pepper, and dried mint until it forms a cohesive, chunky paste.

3. Shape the pies.

Pinch off a piece of dough the size of a golf ball, flatten it to a quarter-inch thick circle on the counter, and place a heaped teaspoon of filling in the center.

4. Crimp and seal.

Fold the top half over to create a half-moon shape, then press down firmly along the curved edge with the tines of a fork to seal.

5. Glaze and bake.

Transfer the pies to the parchment-lined baking sheets, brush generously with the egg yolk wash, sprinkle heavily with sesame seeds, and bake on the middle racks for 25 to 30 minutes until deeply golden brown.

6. Let the crust set.

They will feel alarmingly soft when pulled from the oven, but do not panic. Let them rest on the tray for at least 15 minutes; the crust will harden into its famous crumbly texture as the butter and oil matrix cools.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use the right feta.**

Pre-crumbled feta sold in American supermarkets is coated in cellulose to prevent caking, which means it will refuse to melt or bind with the egg. Always buy a solid block submerged in brine.

- **Do not substitute the yogurt.**

The dough relies on a delicate moisture balance. You must use thick, strained, full-fat Greek yogurt to provide the correct acidity and low moisture; runny American-style yogurt will result in a sticky, unworkable dough.



Trahanas me Feta

Τραχανάς με Φέτα

tra-ha-NAS me FEH-ta

In the mountain villages of Greece, long before the era of boxed cereal and commercial bakeries, breakfast meant survival. Trahanas—often called the world's oldest comfort food—was a grandmother's ingenious way to preserve summer's fermented dairy and cracked wheat for the bitter winters. For the diaspora, the smell of this earthy, tangy grain simmering on the stove is a direct portal back to the old country. It demands no restaurant flourishes or Hollywood clichés. Just a brief toasting of the grains in good butter, a slow, continuous stir to coax out a creamy, risotto-like starchiness the Greeks call *chiloma*, and a generous handful of sheep's milk feta folded in right at the end.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp European-style butter

1 small yellow onion
very finely minced

1 cup sour trahanas

3 cup hot water

1 cup whole milk

5 oz Greek feta cheese in brine
coarsely crumbled by hand

to taste sea salt

to taste black pepper
freshly ground

PREPARATION

- **Crumble the feta by hand.**

Break the brined feta into coarse chunks right before you start cooking; don't chop it with a knife, as the jagged, uneven edges melt far better into the hot soup.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic base.**

Melt the butter in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium-low heat, then add the minced onion and sauté for 4 to 5 minutes until soft and translucent, being careful not to let it brown.

- 2. Toast the trahanas.**

Increase the heat to medium, add the dry trahanas to the pot, and stir continuously with a wooden spoon for 1 to 2 minutes to coat every grain in butter and prevent clumping when the liquid hits.

- 3. Hydrate the grain.**

Carefully pour in the hot water and whole milk, stir thoroughly, and bring the mixture to a gentle, rolling boil before immediately reducing the heat to medium-low.

1. Coax out the chiloma.

Simmer uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently and scraping the bottom of the pot to prevent scorching, until the starches release and the soup thickens into a velvety, creamy consistency.

2. Fold in the feta and rest.

Remove the pot entirely from the heat, fold in the crumbled feta and a generous grating of black pepper, then stir gently just until the cheese begins to soften and melt into the porridge.

3. Serve immediately.

Ladle the hot soup into bowls right away, as the trahanas will continue to absorb liquid and thicken the longer it sits in the pot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the cheese.**

Pre-crumbled, dry feta in a plastic tub is coated in cellulose to prevent caking, which means it will never melt properly into the broth. Always buy a block stored in brine to achieve the correct texture.

● **Adjusting consistency.**

If you prefer a thinner, more traditional soup rather than a hearty porridge, simply add an extra cup of hot water during the hydration step.



Tahinopsomo

Ταχινόψωμο

tah-hee-NOP-so-mo

For anyone raised in the Greek diaspora, the scent of baking tahinopsomo is the ultimate morning alarm. Eaten largely during the strict fasting days of Sarakosti, this isn't just bread with a careless smear of sesame paste—it is an engineering marvel of rustic lamination. The secret to its profound, pull-apart flakiness isn't butter, but a relentless stretch-and-twist technique passed down by village grandmothers, trapping microscopic layers of cinnamon-laced tahini inside the dough. To make this realistic for a busy weeknight, the dough simply sleeps in the fridge overnight. No Hollywood shortcuts, just honest mechanics fitted to a modern kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup	bread flour	1/2 cup	water <i>lukewarm</i>
1 1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	1/2 cup	orange juice <i>room temperature</i>
2 1/4 tsp	instant yeast	1/4 cup	olive oil
3 tbsp	granulated sugar	1 1/2 cup	tahini <i>well-stirred</i>
1/2 tsp	fine sea salt	1 cup	granulated sugar
1/2 tsp	mastic tears <i>ground in a mortar and pestle with a pinch of sugar</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp	ground mahleb	1/3 cup	water
		1/3 cup	granulated sugar

PREPARATION

- **Plan for an overnight cold-ferment.**

To fit this heavily laminated bread into a realistic modern weeknight, mix the dough the evening before. Retarding the dough in the refrigerator slows yeast activity, developing profound flavor while drastically cutting the active prep time the next day.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the dough the night before.**

In a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, whisk the bread flour, all-purpose flour, instant yeast, three tablespoons of sugar, salt, mastic, and mahleb. Make a well and pour in the lukewarm water, orange juice, and olive oil, mixing on medium-low for 7 to 8 minutes until it forms a soft, slightly tacky ball. Transfer to an oiled bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight.

1. Prepare the tahini filling.

In a medium bowl, vigorously stir the tahini until smooth, then mix in one cup of sugar and the cinnamon to form a thick, spreadable paste. If the mixture turns crumbly due to dry tahini, add a teaspoon of neutral oil or water until it resembles peanut butter.

2. Divide and roll the cold dough.

Remove the dough from the fridge the next day, punch it down, and divide it into eight equal pieces, keeping them covered so they don't dry out. On a clean, unfloured counter—the slight friction helps stretch the gluten—roll one piece into a 12-by-5-inch rectangle.

3. Spread the filling and encase it.

Dollop two to three tablespoons of the tahini paste down the center and spread it evenly, leaving a half-inch border along the edges. Starting from the long edge, roll the dough tightly into a log, trapping the tahini inside, and pinch the seam shut.

4. Execute the grandmother's stretch and twist.

Place your hands on both ends of the log, and gently bounce and pull it against the counter until it reaches one and a half times its original length. Twist the ends in opposite directions to form a tensioned rope, then coil it tightly into a snail shell shape, tucking the final end underneath.

5. Flatten and proof the pastries.

Place the coiled snail on a parchment-lined baking sheet and gently press it with the palm of your hand into a four-inch disc. Repeat with the remaining dough, cover loosely with a damp towel, and let rest in a warm spot for 30 to 40 minutes until slightly puffed.

6. Bake until deeply golden.

Bake in a 350°F oven for 25 to 30 minutes. While the pastries bake, simmer the remaining third-cup of water and third-cup of sugar in a small saucepan for 3 minutes to create a simple finishing syrup.

1. **Glaze the hot pastries.**

The precise moment the tahinopsoma emerge from the oven, use a pastry brush to generously dab them with the room-temperature syrup. The hot dough will immediately absorb the liquid, leaving the authentic, sticky, bakery-style finish.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the aromatics.**

Mastic and mahleb are entirely non-negotiable for recreating the true, nostalgic flavor profile of the homeland. Find them online or at Middle Eastern markets. The pastry will technically function without them, but it will lose its soul.



Fetes me Psomi kai Avgo

Αυγόφρετες

ahv-GHO-feh-tes

Forget the hyper-sweet, custard-logged brioche of the American diner. This is survival food turned nostalgic masterpiece—stale village bread resurrected in eggs and hot olive oil. The real secret here is utilitarian brilliance: skip the milk. A splash of water thins the wash perfectly and prevents dairy proteins from scorching in the pan, ensuring a flawless, crispy, golden-blond crust. Eat it topped with a slab of sharp feta or dusted heavily with cinnamon and sugar; either way, it is the unmistakable, unpretentious taste of a Greek morning.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	large eggs	1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil
2 tbsp	water	4 oz	feta cheese <i>crumbled or sliced</i>
1/4 tsp	kosher salt	2 tbsp	granulated sugar
6 slices	rustic bread <i>left on the counter overnight to stale</i>	1 tsp	ground cinnamon

PREPARATION

- **Stale the bread.**

Fresh bread absorbs too much moisture. Leave your slices out overnight to ensure they have the structural integrity to withstand the quick dip and the hot oil.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the wash until completely homogeneous.**

Beat the eggs, water, and salt in a wide, shallow bowl until no streaks of white remain. The water thins the egg to coat the bread evenly without weighing it down, and prevents the rapid burning associated with milk.

- 2. Heat the olive oil in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat.**

You want a shallow pool of oil that is hot but not smoking. Test the heat by dropping in a tiny crumb of bread; it should immediately sizzle and dance.

- 3. Briefly dip the bread into the egg mixture.**

Do not let it soak. Submerge the bread for merely 3 to 4 seconds per side, letting any excess egg drip back into the bowl. Over-soaking will cause the bread to disintegrate and absorb too much oil.

- 4. Fry the coated bread until golden-brown.**

Carefully lay the slices into the hot oil. Fry for 2 to 3 minutes until the bottom is a perfect golden-blonde, then flip and fry for another 2 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain.

1. Dress and serve immediately.

For a savory breakfast, serve warm with feta cheese. For a sweet version, mix the sugar and cinnamon, then dust generously over the bread while it is still hot so the sugar slightly melts into the crust.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sandwich bread is an acceptable substitute.**

Countless diaspora mothers utilized standard supermarket sandwich bread for this dish. Just dip it much faster—about one second per side—so it doesn't disintegrate.

- **Do not skip the olive oil.**

While you can add a knob of butter to the pan for richness, frying in olive oil provides the essential savory Mediterranean baseline that triggers true nostalgia.



Lathera (The Weeknight Backbone)

The unapologetic, slow-cooked vegetable dishes that carry Greek families through the week.

Forget the flaming cheese and the seaside taverna clichés. When a Greek family goes home on a wet Tuesday, they survive on lathera. The word literally translates to 'oiled.' It is an unapologetic, slow-cooked bath of heavy, fruity extra virgin olive oil, sweet tomatoes, and whatever vegetables happen to be in season. These aren't the dishes rolled out to impress company; this is the quiet, working-class backbone of the weeknight kitchen.

They are braised until the ingredients surrender their rigidness, collapsing into a rich, savory stew meant to be mopped up with a tearing of crusty bread. It is what mothers make when they are tired—and ironically, it is the exact flavor you spend the rest of your life trying to get back to.





Fasolakia Lathera

Φασολάκια Λαδερά

fah-so-LAH-kya lah-theh-RAH

This is the undisputed king of the Greek summer table and the ultimate proof that you don't need meat to make a meal that satisfies the soul. 'Lathera' translates to 'the ones with the oil,' and that is the secret here: the olive oil isn't just for cooking; it is the sauce. Generations of grandmothers perfected this dish out of necessity, relying on a brilliant technique of sautéing the green beans in the oil first to lock in their crunch, then simmering them low and slow with potatoes until the starchy water and olive oil emulsify into a rich,

velvety hug. Leave the wooden spoon in the drawer—you will only shake this pot—and serve it warm, not piping hot, with a giant slab of feta cheese and enough crusty bread to mop up every last drop.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	green beans <i>fresh with ends trimmed, or high-quality frozen left unthawed</i>	14 oz	crushed tomatoes <i>or 1 1/2 cups freshly grated ripe tomatoes</i>
3 med	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled and cut into thick 1.5-inch wedges</i>	1/2 cup	hot water
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 tsp	granulated sugar
4 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
3/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1/4 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 tbsp	tomato paste	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
		8 oz	feta cheese <i>left in large blocks for serving</i>
		1 med	crusty artisan bread <i>sliced for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Trim the beans.**

If using fresh Romano or string beans, snap off the tough stem ends before cooking.

- **Prep the potatoes like quinces.**

Peel the Yukon Gold potatoes and cut them into thick, 1.5-inch 'kydonates' (quince-like) wedges so they are robust enough to absorb the sauce without disintegrating into mash.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Build the aromatic base.**

Place a wide, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium heat and pour in about one-third of a cup of the olive oil. Add the diced onions and sauté for 5 minutes until soft, translucent, and deeply fragrant, then add the minced garlic and cook for 30 seconds more.

2. **Sauté the potatoes and beans in the hot oil to lock in their structure.**

Add the potatoes and toss to coat, cooking for 3 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the green beans, gently tossing them in the hot oil for 8 to 10 minutes. Do not skip this step; the hot oil sears the exterior of the green beans, ensuring they remain intact and crisp rather than turning to mush when the liquids are added.

3. **Toast the tomato paste.**

Push the vegetables to the edges of the pot to expose the center. Drop the tomato paste directly onto the hot surface, letting it sizzle and darken for 1 minute before stirring it through the vegetables to release its deep, aromatic sugars.

4. **Introduce the liquids and bring to a simmer.**

Pour in the crushed tomatoes and the hot water. Add the sugar, salt, and black pepper. The liquid should only come about halfway up the vegetables; do not drown them. Bring the pot to a gentle, rolling boil.

5. **Simmer gently, shaking the pot instead of stirring.**

Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover tightly, and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes. Put away your wooden spoon, as stirring will violently crush the tender potatoes and shred the beans. Every 10 minutes, grab the pot handles and give it a vigorous, circular shake to redistribute the juices.

1. Emulsify the sauce with the remaining olive oil and fresh parsley.

After 35 minutes, check that the potatoes are fork-tender and the beans are soft but holding their shape. Remove the lid, pour the remaining raw olive oil over the top of the stew, and sprinkle in the fresh parsley. Simmer uncovered for 5 to 10 minutes so the starchy potato water, reducing tomato juices, and fresh oil bind into a thick, velvety sauce.

2. Let the dish rest before serving.

Remove the pot from the heat and let it sit uncovered for at least 15 minutes. As it cools to a warm room temperature, the flavors will deepen and the sauce will thicken further. Serve in shallow bowls with a large slice of feta cheese and bread to mop up the remaining oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not reduce the olive oil.**

In traditional Greek cooking, the olive oil isn't just a cooking fat; it provides the caloric anchor and the lush, emulsified sauce. Cutting the oil yields a watery, acidic, and unauthentic stew that lacks the comforting hug of a grandmother's cooking.

- **Frozen beans are a completely authentic weeknight shortcut.**

Even in Greece, native home cooks rely on frozen fasolakia when fresh ones are out of season. The secret is to add them straight from the freezer to the hot oil without thawing, which prevents them from becoming waterlogged.

- **Skip the generic Greek spice blends.**

Authentic flavor relies on a few key aromatics and a generous hit of fresh parsley at the end. Drowning the pot in dried oregano, cumin, or lemon juice completely clashes with the traditional red sauce flavor profile.



Arakas Latheros

Αρακάς λαδερός

ah-rah-KAS lah-the-ROS

If you grew up in a Greek household, peas were never some sad, butter-drenched afterthought pushed around the edge of a plate. In the pantheon of Greek home cooking, Arakas Latheros is the undisputed star. It belongs to the sacred tradition of lathera—vegetables slowly braised in a completely unapologetic amount of olive oil. It is a hearty, deeply nostalgic stew meant to be eaten as a main course alongside a slab of real feta and enough crusty bread to mop up the seasoned oil. Unpretentious and fiercely authentic, it relies on a handful of grandmotherly secrets to transform a humble bag of frozen peas into the pure, comforting scent of the homeland on a Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	2 med	Yukon gold potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	2 med	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch thick coins</i>
3 med	scallions <i>chopped, white and green parts</i>	1 cup	canned crushed tomatoes
1 large	clove garlic <i>minced</i>	1 1/2 cup	hot water
1 tbsp	all-purpose flour	1/2 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped</i>
1 tsp	sugar	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	tomato paste	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
1 lb	frozen sweet peas <i>do not thaw</i>		

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Build the flavor base.

In a wide, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat 1/4 cup of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the diced yellow onion and scallions, sautéing for about 5 to 7 minutes until they are soft, translucent, and sweet. Stir in the minced garlic and cook for 30 seconds until fragrant.

2. Execute the thickening trick.

Sprinkle the flour and sugar directly over the onions and stir constantly for 1 minute. It will look like a messy paste, but this secret roux guarantees a velvety sauce. Add the tomato paste and fry it in the oil for another minute until it darkens in color and smells deeply toasted.

3. Coat the vegetables.

Add the frozen peas, potato chunks, and carrots to the pot. Stir gently for about 2 minutes so all the vegetables are coated in the red, seasoned oil.

1. Braise the stew.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, salt, pepper, and just enough hot water to half-cover the vegetables (do not drown them). Bring the pot to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low, cover with a lid, and let it simmer undisturbed for 20 minutes.

2. Let it remain with its oil.

Remove the lid and pour in the remaining 1/4 cup of raw olive oil and the fresh dill. Do not stir with a spoon, or you will mash the soft potatoes. Instead, grab the handles of the pot and gently shake it in a circular motion. Simmer uncovered for another 10 to 15 minutes until the watery liquid evaporates completely and the peas look like they are gently frying in the olive oil.

3. Rest and serve.

Remove the pot from the heat and walk away. Let it sit uncovered for at least 15 to 20 minutes to cool to a warm room temperature, allowing the potato starch to lock the sauce into a perfect glaze. Serve in shallow bowls alongside a hunk of feta cheese and crusty bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Thickening Trick.**

A pinch of sugar highlights the peas' natural sweetness, while a tablespoon of flour stirred into the onions creates a subtle roux so you get a rich sauce rather than a watery broth.

● **Na meinei me to ladi tou.**

This essential Greek cooking phrase means "let it remain with its oil." You must simmer this dish until the water evaporates and the vegetables sizzle exclusively in the tomato and olive oil.

● **The Split-Oil Technique.**

We use half the olive oil to sauté, and gently swirl the rest in at the very end. This keeps the oil's fresh, grassy, and peppery polyphenols alive.



Tourlou Katsarolas

Τουρλού Κατσαρόλας

toor-LOO kat-sah-RO-las

In Greece, this is the absolute backbone of a weeknight. Borrowed from an old Ottoman word meaning 'all mixed up,' tourlou forces a wild, seemingly disparate garden of vegetables to get along perfectly in one pot. This is a lathera dish, meaning it's braised heavily in olive oil until the produce melts into a sweet, velvety submission. Forget the modern American habit of keeping vegetables crisp-tender; the secret here is time, unapologetic amounts of good olive oil, and letting the vegetables release their own juices to form a rich, jammy sauce. Serve it warm—never boiling hot—with a massive block of sharp feta and half a loaf of crusty bread.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1 med	red bell pepper <i>cored and cut into large chunks</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>chopped into large chunks</i>	1 tbsp	tomato paste
4 med	garlic cloves <i>thinly sliced</i>	15 oz	crushed tomatoes
1 large	Yukon Gold potato <i>peeled and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 med	Italian eggplant <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	1 tsp	sea salt
2 med	zucchini <i>cut into thick half-moons</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 med	green bell pepper <i>cored and cut into large chunks</i>	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
		1/4 cup	fresh mint leaves <i>finely chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Select foolproof produce.**

Seek out Italian or Japanese eggplants to avoid bitterness, and rely on Yukon Gold potatoes instead of Russets because they hold their shape beautifully in a long braise.

- **Size matters.**

Ensure all vegetables are cut to roughly the same size (about 1 1/2 inches). If diced too small, they will dissolve into a porridge over the 40-minute simmer.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic foundation.**

Place a wide Dutch oven or braiser over medium heat and pour in about 1/3 cup of the olive oil. Once shimmering, sauté the onions for 4 to 5 minutes until softened and sweet. Toss in the sliced garlic and cook for 1 minute more until fragrant.

1. Coat the sponges.

Add the potatoes, eggplant, zucchini, and bell peppers to the pot. Stir gently for 3 to 4 minutes. The eggplant acts like a sponge and will absorb the oil, which is exactly what you want to build a luxurious texture.

2. Burn the paste.

Clear a tiny space in the middle of the pot and drop in the tomato paste. Let it sizzle on the bare metal for 30 seconds to release its deep umami flavor, then stir it into the vegetables.

3. Begin the braise.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, sugar, salt, and black pepper. Do not drown the pot in water; add just 1/4 cup of hot water to get things moving. The vegetables will release their own juices as they cook.

4. Simmer and submit.

Turn the heat down to low and cover the pot tightly. Let it simmer gently for 40 to 45 minutes. Resist the urge to stir vigorously with a spoon, which will mash the tender vegetables. Instead, grab the pot by the handles and give it a gentle shake every 15 minutes.

5. Finish with emulsification.

The dish is done when a fork slides through the potato and eggplant with zero resistance, and the juices have reduced to a thick, oil-rich glaze. Turn off the heat. Scatter the fresh parsley and mint over the top and drizzle with the remaining olive oil.

6. Let it rest.

Give the pot one last shake. Leave the lid on and let the pot sit on the warm stove for at least 20 minutes before serving. This drop in temperature allows the flavors to settle perfectly.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Winter Tomato Fix.**

Authentic tourlou relies on the deep sweetness of sun-ripened summer tomatoes. If you're cooking this in November with canned tomatoes, add a tiny splash of red wine vinegar alongside the sugar to mimic that fresh summer brightness.

- **Respect the Oil.**

Do not flinch at the amount of olive oil. In lathera cooking, the oil isn't just grease; it emulsifies with the tomato pectin and vegetable juices to create the actual sauce. Skimping on oil results in sad, boiled vegetables.

- **Use the Right Pot.**

You need a wide Dutch oven, a deep sauté pan with a lid, or a braiser. If you use a tall, narrow soup pot, the vegetables at the bottom will turn to mush while the ones on top merely steam.



Bamies Latheres me Domata

Μπάμιες λαδερές με ντομάτα

báhm-yes lah-the-rés meh doh-mah-tah

If you grew up in a Greek-American household, you know the truth about okra. Treated with respect, it becomes sweet, tender, and melts into a luxurious pool of olive oil and tomato. Forget the Hollywood notion of Greek food; this is Lathera, the weeknight backbone of the homeland. The secret to avoiding the dreaded slime on a weeknight isn't a long sunbath like your grandmother used to do—it's buying commercially frozen baby okra and dumping it straight into the pot. Drown it in good olive oil, leave the lid off, and whatever you do, don't stir the damn pot.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil	3 tbsp	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tbsp	red wine vinegar
2 large	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	tomato paste	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 lb	frozen whole baby okra <i>kept completely frozen, do not thaw</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
2 med	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1.5-inch chunks</i>	1 large	block Greek feta cheese <i>for serving</i>
1 cup	tomato passata	1 large	loaf crusty bread <i>for serving</i>
1 1/2 cup	water		

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Build the flavor base.

Heat the olive oil in a wide Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the diced onion and sauté for 5 to 7 minutes until soft and just caramelizing around the edges, stirring in the minced garlic for the final minute.

2. Caramelize the tomato paste.

Push the onions aside and drop the tomato paste into the center of the oil. Cook constantly for about 2 minutes until it turns a deep rusty red, which cooks out the raw tin flavor.

3. Combine the braising liquid.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, water, red wine vinegar, fresh parsley, sugar, salt, and pepper. Stir to combine and bring the liquid to a gentle boil.

4. Submerge the vegetables.

Carefully drop in the quartered potatoes and the rock-hard, completely frozen baby okra. Ensure they are mostly submerged in the tomato liquid, adding a splash of water if necessary, and wait for it to return to a simmer.

1. Simmer and shake, but do not stir.

Reduce the heat to medium-low and leave the lid off (or just slightly ajar) to prevent trapping steam. Simmer for 35 to 40 minutes. From the moment the okra goes in, do not put a spoon in the pot, as breaking the pods releases slime; simply grab the pot handles and gently shake it back and forth every 10 minutes.

2. Rest and serve.

Remove the pot from the heat once the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork and the water has evaporated to leave a separated layer of red-tinted oil. Let it rest for 15 minutes before serving with a generous slab of feta and crusty bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Fresh Okra Adaptation.**

If you find beautiful, fresh baby okra at the farmer's market, trim the tough caps off in a conical shape without puncturing the pod. Toss with 3 tablespoons of red wine vinegar and plenty of kosher salt, then bake on a parchment-lined sheet at 300°F for 30 minutes to dehydrate and neutralize the slime before adding to the stew.



Prasorizo

Πρασόρυζο

pra-SO-ri-zo

Prasorizo is the unsung hero of the Greek winter kitchen, a masterclass in elevating humble vegetables through time, patience, and a genuinely unapologetic amount of olive oil. Belonging to the cherished category of lathera, this weeknight staple transforms leeks and medium-grain rice into a velvety, vegan risotto that tastes exactly like a grandmother's kitchen on a cold afternoon. The secret lies not in complex spices, but in sweating the leeks without browning, adding a single grated carrot to balance the sharp tang of fresh lemon, and respecting the mandatory off-heat rest to achieve that perfect, creamy texture.

INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup	extra virgin olive oil	3 cup	hot water or low-sodium vegetable broth
2 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil <i>reserved for finishing</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
2 lb	leeks <i>white and light green parts only, cut into 1/2-inch thick half-moons</i>	1 large	large lemon <i>zested and juiced</i>
1 med	medium carrot <i>grated or finely diced</i>	1/4 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped</i>
2 large	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>	8 oz	Feta cheese <i>crumbled into large chunks, for serving</i>
1 cup	Arborio rice	1 med	crusty bread loaf <i>sliced, for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Wash the leeks using the float method.**

Place the sliced leeks in a large bowl of cold water, swish vigorously to loosen grit, then use your hands to lift them out into a colander. Pouring the bowl directly into the colander will just dump the sunken dirt back onto the leeks.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sweat the aromatics in olive oil.**

Heat one-third cup of the olive oil in a wide pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and a pinch of salt, sautéing for 3 to 4 minutes until softened.

- 2. Soften the leeks without browning them.**

Add the drained leeks, carrot, and scallions. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the leeks collapse and release their sweet aroma, ensuring the heat is low enough that they do not take on any color.

1. Toast the rice.

Stir the Arborio rice into the vegetables and cook for 1 to 2 minutes to coat the grains in oil and lightly toast their starches, which helps them retain structure during the braise.

2. Braise the pilaf.

Pour in the hot water or broth, then add the remaining salt and a generous amount of black pepper. Bring to a gentle boil, reduce the heat to medium-low, and half-cover the pot, simmering gently for 15 to 20 minutes with occasional stirring until the rice is tender.

3. Finish the dish.

When most of the liquid is absorbed but the mixture remains wet and creamy, remove the pot from the heat. Stir in the fresh dill, lemon zest, lemon juice, and the remaining two tablespoons of olive oil.

4. Steam under a towel.

Place a clean kitchen towel flat across the top of the pot and press the lid snugly over it. Let the dish rest undisturbed for 10 to 15 minutes so the rice plumps up and absorbs the remaining juices, creating a velvety, cohesive sauce.

5. Serve warm.

Serve at room temperature or warm, but never boiling hot, accompanied by generous chunks of feta cheese and crusty bread to mop up the olive oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The sauce is the oil.**

In lathera dishes, olive oil acts as the primary flavor extractor and satiating backbone, so do not reduce the amount of oil or the dish will turn into a watery, disappointing pilaf.

● **Respect the rice.**

Long-grain or brown rice will fail to deliver the signature chilomeno, or creamy, texture. Stick strictly to Arborio or a standard medium-grain white rice.

- **Save the dark green leek tops.**

Stash the fibrous, dark green leek tops in the freezer to add deep, savory depth to your next batch of homemade vegetable or chicken stock.



Aginares a la Polita

Αγκινάρες αλά πολίτα

ah-gee-NAH-res ah-lah poh-LEE-tah

The secret to traditional Greek home cooking isn't romantic suffering; it's unpretentious practicality. When a grandmother wants the sophisticated taste of Constantinople on a Tuesday night, she bypasses the knuckle-scraping work of cleaning fresh artichokes and heads straight for the freezer aisle. This dish is the crown jewel of the lathera tradition—humble vegetables slowly stewed in a generous slick of olive oil until they collapse into something luxurious. By utilizing flash-frozen artichokes, starchy potatoes, and a quick lemon-flour slurry, the oil and broth emulsify into a silky, savory glaze known as the meloma. It is a one-pot weeknight miracle that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 large	yellow onion <i>medium dice</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
5 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced, white and light green parts only</i>	2 cup	boiling water
3 large	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch thick rounds</i>	1 cup	frozen sweet peas <i>kept frozen</i>
4 med	yellow potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1.5-inch chunks</i>	1/3 cup	fresh lemon juice
1 lb	frozen artichoke bottoms <i>kept frozen</i>	1 tbsp	all-purpose flour
		1/2 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped, stems removed</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Build the aromatic base.

Heat the olive oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium heat, then sauté the yellow onion and scallions until soft and translucent, about 5 to 7 minutes.

2. Coat the root vegetables.

Toss in the potatoes and carrots, stirring well to fry their exteriors in the aromatic oil for another 5 minutes.

3. Introduce the artichokes.

Nestle the frozen artichoke bottoms straight into the pot among the vegetables and season generously with the salt and pepper.

4. Simmer the stew.

Pour in just enough boiling water to come three-quarters of the way up the vegetables, cover tightly with a lid, and simmer gently on medium-low for 30 minutes.

1. Add the peas.

Once a fork easily pierces a potato, stir in the frozen peas and simmer uncovered for another 10 to 15 minutes to concentrate the broth.

2. Create the emulsion.

Vigorously whisk the fresh lemon juice and flour in a small bowl until entirely smooth, then temper the slurry by whisking in a half-cup of the hot cooking liquid from the pot.

3. Bind the sauce.

Pour the tempered lemon mixture back into the stew and gently shake the pot in a circular motion to distribute the slurry without crushing the tender vegetables.

4. Rest and serve.

Turn off the heat entirely, stir in the fresh dill, and let the pot sit undisturbed for at least 15 minutes so the sauce can fully set into a velvety glaze before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the artichokes**

Seek out bags of frozen artichoke bottoms at Middle Eastern markets, or frozen hearts at premium grocers. Never use jarred marinated artichokes, as their acidic brine and mushy texture will completely ruin the stew's delicate balance.

● **Respect the rest**

Do not rush to serve this boiling hot. The mandatory fifteen-minute rest off the heat is what allows the starches and oil to marry into the signature glossy emulsion that coats the vegetables.

● **Gluten-free thickening**

If cooking for a gluten-free household, substitute the all-purpose flour with an equal amount of cornstarch; it works flawlessly to achieve the same silky texture.



Lahatorizo

Λαχανόρυζο

la-ha-NO-ri-zo

Forget the Hollywood fantasy of Greek food; you won't find this in a tourist taverna in Mykonos. This is what you eat on a rainy Tuesday in a Thessaloniki suburb. It belongs to the Lathera—the "oiled ones"—where humble vegetables stew slowly in copious amounts of high-quality olive oil until they collapse into sweet, melt-in-your-mouth perfection. The magic here is the chyloma, a resting technique where starchy rice and olive oil emulsify into a rich, velvety texture without a single drop of dairy. It requires cheap ingredients and minimal effort, yielding deeply nostalgic comfort food that somehow tastes even better the next day.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1/2 cup	Arborio rice <i>rinsed well</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1	bay leaf
1 large	leek <i>white and light green parts only, washed well and sliced into thin half- moons</i>	3	whole allspice berries
1 med	carrot <i>cut into thin rounds</i>	1 1/2 tsp	black pepper
1 1/2 lb	green cabbage <i>core removed, chopped into coarse 1- inch squares</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
2 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	2 1/2 cup	hot water
2 tbsp	tomato paste	1/2 cup	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1/2 cup	canned crushed tomatoes	1 large	lemon <i>juiced</i>
		1 block	feta cheese <i>for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Cut the cabbage into coarse chunks, not shreds.**

Do not thinly shred the cabbage as you would for coleslaw. Cut it into coarse 1-inch squares to ensure it provides texture and doesn't melt entirely into mush during the long cook time.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sweat the aromatics in a generous pour of oil.**

Place a wide, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat and add the olive oil. Add the onion, leek, and carrot, sautéing for 8 to 10 minutes until deeply softened and practically melting into the oil.

1. Execute the deep wilt.

Add the chopped cabbage. It will look like too much, but keep turning it in the oil for a full 10 to 12 minutes. You want the cabbage to wilt drastically, shrink in volume, and begin releasing its natural sugars. Do not rush this; it kills the bitter sulfur smell and builds the authentic sweet base.

2. Build the tomato broth.

Clear a small space in the center of the pot and drop in the tomato paste and garlic. Let them sizzle for 1 minute until the paste darkens, then stir everything together. Add the crushed tomatoes, bay leaf, allspice berries, salt, and pepper.

3. Simmer the rice completely undisturbed.

Pour in the rinsed Arborio rice and stir well so the grains are coated. Pour in 2 cups of the hot water, bringing it to a gentle boil before immediately dropping the heat to the lowest setting. Cover the pot and walk away. Do not stir it like a risotto. Let it simmer gently for 15 to 20 minutes until the rice is tender. If it looks bone-dry before the rice is done, add the remaining 1/2 cup of hot water.

4. Perform the magic rest, or chyloma.

Turn off the heat while there is still a slightly loose, saucy liquid bubbling around the edges. Stir in the parsley and lemon juice. Place a clean, dry dish towel entirely over the top of the open pot, then press the lid down tightly over the towel. Let it sit undisturbed for 10 minutes to allow the rice to swell and absorb the emulsified broth.

5. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Ladle the warm Lahanorizo into shallow bowls, topping with a generous crumbling of feta cheese, an extra squeeze of lemon, and a final drizzle of raw olive oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Why use Arborio rice?**

Native Greek sources mandate Carolina or Glasse rice, which are highly starchy regional varieties. Arborio or Californian medium-grain rice perfectly replicates their texture in American kitchens, ensuring you achieve the exact creamy emulsion intended by the dish's creators. Long-grain rices like basmati will remain too separate and dry, ruining the texture.

- **The Lemonato variation.**

If you want the lighter, green version of this dish, simply omit the tomato paste, crushed tomatoes, and allspice. Swap the parsley for an entire bunch of fresh dill and proceed exactly as written.



Spanakorizo

Σπανακόρυζο

spah-nah-KO-ree-zoh

If you want to understand how a Greek grandmother turns a humble vegetable into a feast, you master Spanakorizo. This isn't the heavy, garlic-laden Hollywood caricature of Greek food. It is an exercise in restraint—a proud pillar of *Lathera*, the olive oil-braised dishes that form the true weeknight backbone of the homeland. It relies entirely on the magic trinity of sweet onions, fragrant dill, and a heavy hand with bright lemon. Toasting the rice in good oil seals the starch, but the real alchemy happens off the heat. Letting the pot rest under a kitchen towel coaxes the grains into a perfectly creamy, deeply comforting finish that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1/2 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1 1/2 cup	warm water
1 med	leek <i>white and light green parts only, halved and thinly sliced</i>	1 large	lemon <i>juiced</i>
5 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 cup	medium-grain white rice <i>rinsed well and drained</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
1 1/2 lb	fresh baby spinach <i>roughly chopped</i>	1/2 lb	feta cheese <i>crumbled, for serving</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Build the aromatic base.

Heat 1/4 cup of the olive oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Sauté the onion and leek until they are soft, translucent, and beginning to release their sweetness, about 5 to 7 minutes, then stir in the scallions for 1 minute more.

2. Toast the rice to seal the starch.

Add the rinsed rice and stir continuously for 2 minutes. This crucial trick coats the grains in oil and seals the exterior, ensuring the rice remains distinct rather than turning to paste as it cooks.

3. Wilt the spinach.

Add the spinach in large handfuls. It will seem like far too much, but use tongs to toss it with the hot rice and onions until it wilts down to make room for the next handful. Season generously with the salt and pepper.

4. Add the liquid and simmer.

Stir in the fresh dill and the warm water. Bring the liquid to a gentle boil, then immediately reduce the heat to low and cover the pot tightly.

1. Cook the rice undisturbed.

Let the pot simmer for 15 to 18 minutes, or until the rice is tender and has absorbed most of the liquid. The spinach will release a massive amount of its own moisture, so trust the minimal water ratio.

2. Apply the lemon and let it rest.

Remove the pot from the heat, uncover, and quickly stir in the lemon juice and the remaining 1/4 cup of raw olive oil. Place a clean kitchen towel flat across the top of the pot and press the lid down over it. Let the pot sit undisturbed for 15 minutes. The towel traps the steam and absorbs excess moisture, thickening the sauce into a luxurious, creamy consistency.

3. Fluff and serve.

Gently fluff the spanakorizo, tasting for any needed extra salt or lemon juice. Serve warm or at room temperature alongside a block of feta and some crusty bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use Arborio rice if you can't find Greek Carolina.**

Do not use long-grain or aromatic rices like Jasmine or Basmati. Arborio mimics the exact starch-release profile of the traditional Greek medium-grain Carolina rice, providing a creamy texture without turning to mush.

● **Frozen spinach is an acceptable substitute.**

If you don't have time to chop fresh spinach, use 1 pound of high-quality frozen chopped spinach. Thaw it completely and squeeze it slightly before adding, but note you may need to add a splash more water since it won't release as much moisture as fresh.



Yiayia's Pot on the Stove (Survival and Comfort)

The historic, humble comfort foods that form the deeply emotional core of the Greek-American home.

Forget the blue-domed postcard fantasies. The real Greek kitchen smells like a bruised lemon and starchy bean broth simmering in a dented pot. This is the food of survival—the peasant-born alchemy of stale bread, cheap cuts of meat, and whatever was left in the larder. It is the culinary equivalent of a grandmother's fierce, protective instinct, engineered in tenement kitchens to keep out the cold and chase away the flu.

These dishes demand patience, not cash. From a fasolada that sustained generations through lean winters to a four-ingredient avgolemono masterclass that can practically raise the dead, this is how a family is kept alive. It isn't

always pretty. But it is perfect.





Avgolemono

Κοτόσουπα Αυγολέμονο

ko-TOH-soo-pah ahv-gho-LEH-mo-no

This is the ultimate survival food—the cure for a common cold, a broken heart, or a freezing Tuesday night in Ohio. The magic of real avgolemono doesn't come from a heavy-handed spice rack; it comes from absolute restraint. There is no sautéing here, no garlic, no dill. Just a pristine, boiled chicken broth, starchy rice, and the alchemical grandmother's secret of the marenga: whipping the egg whites to a soft peak before tempering. It is a masterclass in texture that tastes vividly, unquestionably, of home.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken pieces	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
8 cup	water	1/4 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>peeled and halved</i>	1/2 cup	Arborio rice <i>rinsed well</i>
2 large	carrot <i>peeled and cut into thick thirds</i>	3 large	eggs <i>separated and cold</i>
1 large	celery stalk <i>left whole</i>	1/3 cup	lemon juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
		1 tsp	cornstarch

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil the chicken and skim the scum.

Place the chicken in a heavy Dutch oven or large pot and cover with the water. Bring to a rolling boil over medium-high heat. For the first 10 minutes, stand there with a slotted spoon and meticulously skim away the grey foam that rises to the top—do not skip this, as it guarantees a clean broth.

2. Simmer the aromatics.

Once the broth is clear, drop in the halved onion, carrots, celery, salt, and pepper. Lower the heat, partially cover the pot, and simmer for 40 to 45 minutes until the chicken is falling off the bone. Remember, no sautéing beforehand; we want unadulterated chicken flavor.

3. Strain the broth and shred the meat.

Remove the pot from the heat. Pull the chicken and vegetables out and transfer them to a platter. Strain the broth through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl to ensure absolute clarity, discarding the boiled vegetables. Return the clear liquid to the pot. Discard the chicken skin and bones, shred the meat, and set it aside.

1. Cook the rice.

Bring the clear broth back to a gentle simmer. Stir in the rinsed Arborio rice and cook uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. You want the rice tender and the broth slightly cloudy from the released starch. Remove the pot from the heat entirely—the broth must stop boiling before the next step. Stir the shredded chicken back in.

2. Whip the marenga.

This is the grandmother's secret for a cloud-like texture. In an impeccably clean glass or metal bowl, whisk the cold egg whites vigorously until they form a thick, frothy foam of soft peaks. Whisk the yolks into the whites. Dissolve the cornstarch into your fresh lemon juice, then slowly drizzle the lemon mixture into the fluffy eggs while whisking constantly.

3. Temper the eggs and finish the soup.

Using a ladle, scoop about half a cup of the hot broth from the pot. While whisking the egg-lemon mixture frantically with one hand, slowly drizzle the hot broth into the bowl in a thin thread. Repeat with two more ladles of broth until the bowl feels warm to the touch. Pour this tempered mixture back into the main pot. Gently swirl the pot or stir for one minute. The soup will instantly transform into a velvety emulsion. Serve immediately, and never let it boil again.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Weeknight Shortcut.**

If you only have 30 minutes, skip boiling the raw chicken. Bring 8 cups of high-quality boxed chicken broth to a boil, add the rice, and cook for 15 minutes. Toss in 2 cups of shredded supermarket rotisserie chicken, then proceed straight to whipping the eggs. Using the authentic marenga technique elevates store-bought ingredients to taste exactly like home.

- **Reheating Rules.**

Avgolemono is notorious for separating if you disrespect it in the microwave. To warm leftovers, heat them gently on the stove over medium-low heat, stirring frequently. Do not let the pot come to a boil, or you will end up with scrambled eggs.

- **No Garlic Allowed.**

You may see garlic or heavy herbs like dill in American-Greek restaurant soups. Ignore them. Traditional kotosoupa relies entirely on the interplay of rich chicken fat, starchy rice, and bright citrus. Keep it simple and trust the tradition.



Fasolada

Φασολάδα

fa-so-LA-da

Fasolada is the undisputed mother of all Greek comfort food, the culinary manifestation of peasant survival and ingenuity. For generations of first-generation Americans, this thick, tomato-stained broth simmering on a snowy midwestern Tuesday is the exact definition of home. The secret your grandmother knew wasn't chicken stock or fancy herbs; it was coaxing the umami out of cheap tomato paste and violently emulsifying the starchy bean water with an unapologetic pour of heavy, peppery olive oil at the very end. It relies on nothing more than accessible pantry staples and the alchemy of time to elevate humble ingredients to the sublime.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	dried Great Northern or Cannellini beans <i>rinsed and picked over</i>	2 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	2 tbsp	tomato paste
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1 cup	crushed canned tomatoes
3 med	carrots <i>cut into 1/4-inch rounds or half-moons</i>	1 large	bay leaf
3 med	celery stalks and leafy inner tops <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	red pepper flakes
		1 tbsp	kosher salt
		1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		6 cup	boiling water

PREPARATION

- **Keep a kettle of boiling water nearby.**

You will need it to cover the parboiled beans without dropping the temperature of the pot and shockingly halting the cooking process.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the dried beans vigorously for 35 to 40 minutes to completely bypass the overnight soak.**

Place the rinsed beans in a heavy-bottomed pot, cover with at least 3 inches of cold water, and bring to a rapid boil. Cook until semi-soft, then drain and discard the murky liquid to remove the indigestible sugars that cause bloating.

- 2. Sauté the aromatics in a small portion of the olive oil until softened.**

Wipe out the pot, set it over medium heat, and add 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Cook the onion, carrots, and celery for 6 to 8 minutes until translucent, then stir in the garlic for 1 minute until fragrant.

1. Fry the tomato paste directly on the bottom of the pot to unlock its deeply roasted umami.

Clear a space in the center, drop in the paste, and rub it against the hot surface with a wooden spoon for 1 to 2 minutes. This crucial homeland trick neutralizes the tinny, metallic canned flavor and builds the soup's nostalgic depth.

2. Simmer the beans, vegetables, and tomatoes in boiling water until entirely tender.

Return the parboiled beans to the pot along with the crushed tomatoes, bay leaf, and red pepper flakes. Pour in enough boiling water to cover everything by 2 inches. Simmer partially covered on medium-low for 30 to 40 minutes.

3. Vigorously boil the soup with the remaining olive oil to emulsify the broth into a velvety sauce.

Once the beans are buttery and soft, season generously with salt and pepper. Pour in the remaining olive oil and boil uncovered for 10 minutes. The agitation forces the raw oil and bean starches to chemically bind into a thick, glossy state the Greeks call chilomeni. For an even thicker broth, mash a ladleful of beans against the pot and stir them back in.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Substitute canned beans if you find yourself in a weeknight emergency.**

Use three 15-ounce cans of thoroughly rinsed Cannellini beans. Build the flavor base and caramelize the tomato paste exactly as instructed, add the rinsed beans with only 4 cups of water, and simmer for 15 minutes before executing the final olive oil emulsification step.

● **Do not salt the beans until the very end of the cooking process.**

Salting legumes early in the boil toughens their skins and prevents them from ever softening properly.



Youvarlakia

Γιουβαρλάκια

yoo-var-LAK-ya

What chicken noodle soup is to the American Midwest, youvarlakia is to the Mediterranean. Deriving from the Turkish word for round, these hearty rice-studded meatballs simmer slowly into a savory broth before being transformed by the alchemy of avgolemono—a technique that whips eggs and lemon juice into a rich, velvety cream without a single drop of dairy. It is the ultimate expression of frugality turned into high comfort, a grandmother's weeknight secret that requires nothing more than cheap ground chuck, a handful of fresh herbs, and the patience to let a pot simmer quietly on the stove.

INGREDIENTS

6 cup	low-sodium chicken broth	1/4 cup	fresh Italian flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
2 cup	water	1	large egg
3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	2 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
1	med carrot <i>finely diced</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1	bay leaf	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 1/2 lb	ground beef chuck (85% lean)	1/4 cup	all-purpose flour
1/3 cup	Arborio rice <i>rinsed well</i>	2	large eggs <i>room temperature</i>
1	med yellow onion <i>grated on a box grater, all juices retained</i>	1/3 cup	lemon juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
1/4 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped</i>	1 tbsp	cornstarch

PREPARATION

- **Grate the onion rather than chopping it.**

You need the pulverized pulp and all the resulting juices to properly hydrate and flavor the meat mixture.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the meatball ingredients and knead vigorously for five minutes.**

In a large mixing bowl, mix the ground beef, rice, grated onion and its juices, dill, parsley, the single egg, two tablespoons of olive oil, salt, and pepper. Knead until the meat turns pale and sticky; this mechanical action releases proteins that act as glue, ensuring the meatballs survive the boil.

- 1. Form the mixture into golf-ball-sized spheres and dredge lightly in flour.**
Spread the flour on a wide plate. Pinch off pieces of the meat mixture and roll them into spheres, then toss them in the all-purpose flour, tapping off any excess. The flour creates a microscopic crust that seals the meat and later helps thicken the broth.
- 2. Bring the chicken broth, water, olive oil, carrot, and bay leaf to a rolling boil.**
Combine these ingredients in a large Dutch oven or wide, heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat.
- 3. Lower the heat to a gentle simmer and carefully drop the meatballs into the pot.**
Drop the meatballs in one by one, ensuring you do not stir vigorously or you will break them apart.
- 4. Cover with the lid slightly ajar and poach undisturbed for 40 minutes.**
The gentle simmer allows the meatballs to cook through and the rice inside to puff up beautifully.
- 5. Whisk the cornstarch, lemon juice, and two eggs in a medium bowl until frothy.**
Dissolve the cornstarch into the lemon juice first to prevent lumps, then add the eggs. The cornstarch is a modern grandmother's trick to stabilize the emulsion and prevent the soup from curdling if you need to reheat it the next day.
- 6. Temper the egg mixture by slowly streaming in three ladles of hot broth while whisking constantly.**
Remove the Dutch oven from the heat entirely. While whisking the egg mixture constantly with one hand, use your other hand to slowly stream in the hot broth to gradually raise the temperature of the eggs without scrambling them.
- 7. Pour the tempered sauce back into the pot and gently swirl the entire vessel to thicken the soup.**
Do not stir with a spoon. Instead, grab the handles of the pot and gently shake it back and forth until the broth transforms into a silky, opaque cream. Serve immediately with a dusting of black pepper.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip or shorten the five minute kneading process.**

Treating this like a delicate hamburger patty will result in a pot of disintegrated meat. The matrix needs to be thoroughly worked and sticky to hold the swelling rice together.

- **Avoid long-grain or basmati rice.**

They lack the necessary amylopectin starch. Medium-grain Arborio mimics the traditional Greek Carolina rice, thickening both the structure of the meatball and the soup itself.



Tomatosoupa me Horiatiko Psomi

Ντοματόσουπα με Χωριάτικο Ψωμί

do-ma-TO-sou-pa me ho-ri-A-ti-ko pso-MI

If you grew up in a Greek-American household, the sharp, sweet aroma of onions and tomato paste frying in a heavy pour of olive oil signaled winter comfort. This isn't the smooth, cream-laden bisque of American diners, but rather peasant cooking at its absolute finest—a deeply savory survival food built from the pantry to feed a family on a rainy weeknight. The magic lies in how the starch from the orzo naturally thickens the broth, meant to be mopped up with jagged slabs of crusty bread and finished with a heavy crumble of tangy, sheep's milk feta.

INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup	extra virgin olive oil	1/2 cup	orzo
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1 tsp	dried Greek oregano <i>crushed between your palms</i>
3 med	garlic clove <i>smashed and minced</i>	1 pinch	kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper
2 tbsp	tomato paste	1 large	sheep's milk feta in brine
28 oz	canned crushed tomatoes	block	
4 cup	water or low-sodium vegetable broth	1 large	crusty artisan bread <i>thickly sliced</i>
1/2 tsp	sugar	loaf	
		4 large	eggs

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Build the aromatic base.

Place a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, pour in the olive oil, and sauté the chopped onion for 6 to 8 minutes until soft and sweet, stirring in the garlic for a final minute.

2. Bloom the tomato paste.

Push the onions to the edges and drop the tomato paste directly into the hot center, frying it for 2 to 3 minutes until it darkens from bright red to a deep, rusty brick color.

3. Create the broth.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes and let them bubble for 5 minutes, then add the sugar, salt, pepper, oregano, and water, bringing the entire pot to a rolling boil.

4. Cook the pasta.

Stir in the orzo, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, and cook uncovered for 12 to 15 minutes, stirring frequently so the pasta doesn't stick to the bottom while it releases its starches.

1. Poach the eggs.

If you want a heavier meal, crack the raw eggs directly into the gently simmering soup during the last 4 minutes of cooking, covering the pot until the whites are set.

2. Garnish and serve.

Turn off the heat and let the soup settle for 5 minutes before ladling into deep bowls, finishing each with a ribbon of raw olive oil, a heavy crumble of feta, and thick slices of bread to drag through the bottom.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The secret to the sauce.**

Frying the tomato paste in olive oil before adding liquids caramelizes its sugars, entirely eliminating that raw, metallic tin flavor that plagues weeknight cooking.

● **Choosing your cheese.**

Look for authentic sheep's milk feta packed in brine; pre-crumbled cow's milk versions contain anti-caking agents that prevent it from melting properly into the hot broth.

● **The bread substitute.**

Authentic yellow-flour village bread takes twenty-four hours to make, but a good bakery sourdough or semolina loaf perfectly mimics its necessary crunch and chew on a busy Tuesday.



Fakes Soup

Φακές Σούπα

fah-keh-s

If there is one dish that defines the soul of the Greek-American kitchen on a cold Tuesday night, it is Fakes. This is peasant food in its most glorious, comforting form—a survival meal made entirely from pantry staples, rejecting the feta-draped, lemon-drenched clichés of Hollywood Mediterranean cooking. The magic lies not in rare ingredients, but in the technique of *xiloma*, coaxing starches out of brown lentils to create a thick, velvety broth without a speck of flour. Finished with raw olive oil and a sharp hit of red wine vinegar, it is the exact, unembellished taste of a grandmother's stove.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	standard brown lentils <i>rinsed and picked over for stones</i>	2 tbsp	tomato paste
1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	2 med	dried bay leaves
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1 tsp	dried Greek oregano
2 med	medium carrots <i>finely grated</i>	6 cup	hot water or low-sodium vegetable broth
1 med	celery stalk <i>very finely chopped</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
4 large	garlic cloves <i>minced or thinly sliced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
		3 tbsp	red wine vinegar

PREPARATION

- **Blanch the lentils to remove impurities.**

Place the rinsed lentils in a pot, cover with a few inches of cold water, and bring to a rapid boil for exactly 5 minutes. Drain and discard this dark, muddy water, then wipe the pot clean—this grandmother's trick prevents the gastrointestinal bloating often associated with legumes.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic foundation.**

Return the clean, dry pot to medium heat and add just 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Sauté the onion, carrots, and celery for 5 to 7 minutes until softened, then stir in the garlic for 1 minute until fragrant.

- 2. Caramelize the tomato paste.**

Clear a small space in the center of the pot, add the tomato paste, and let it fry against the bottom for about 60 seconds until it darkens to a deep brick color, unlocking a massive hit of umami.

1. Simmer and coax the lentils.

Toss the blanched lentils into the vegetable mixture, drop in the bay leaves, and pour in the hot water or broth. Bring to a gentle boil, then immediately drop the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes until tender.

2. Execute the xiloma to thicken the soup.

Remove the lid, season generously with salt and pepper, and pour in the remaining raw olive oil. Turn the heat up slightly and stir consistently with a wooden spoon for 5 to 10 minutes; this emulsifies the oil with the released lentil starches, transforming thin broth into a creamy, velvety stew.

3. Finish with acid and herbs.

Turn off the heat, stir in the oregano and red wine vinegar, and discard the bay leaves before ladling into bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Vinegar is non-negotiable.**

Resist the urge to squeeze lemon over this soup; red wine vinegar is the canonical Greek acid for Fakes and was traditionally used to maximize the body's absorption of iron.

● **Avoid French or red lentils.**

Standard brown lentils are required here; French green hold their shape too stubbornly to thicken the broth, and red lentils will dissolve entirely into mush.

● **Serve with the essentials.**

Place an extra bottle of red wine vinegar on the table, alongside a block of feta, Kalamata olives, and crusty bread.



Manestra

Μανέστρα

mah-NESS-tra

Forget the heavy, meat-laden braises masquerading as manestra in the diaspora. Ask a Greek grandmother, and she'll point to a frugal, soul-warming pot on the stove. Born of post-war necessity and elevated by sheer technique, true manestra is essentially a stovetop orzo risotto. There are no expensive cuts of meat here, no hours spent waiting on the oven. The magic is in the method—blooming tomato paste in rich olive oil, toasting the dry pasta, and letting a whisper of cinnamon and allspice fill the kitchen with the unmistakable scent of the old country. The pasta's own starches naturally thicken the broth into a velvety, luxurious stew in under thirty minutes. It is survival food, perfected.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	3 1/2 cup	chicken or vegetable broth <i>heated</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	3	whole allspice berries
2 med cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 small	cinnamon stick
2 tbsp	tomato paste	to taste	kosher salt
1 cup	medium orzo pasta	to taste	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
15 oz	crushed tomatoes	1/2 cup	feta cheese <i>crumbled</i>

PREPARATION

- **Warm the broth.**

Heat the broth in a small saucepan or the microwave before you begin. Adding cold liquid to the hot toasted pasta will interrupt the starch release.

- **Prep your aromatics first.**

Chop the onion and mince the garlic before turning on the stove, as the toasting steps move quickly and require your full attention.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the aromatic foundation.**

In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and sauté until softened and just beginning to caramelize at the edges, about 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in the minced garlic and cook for 1 minute more until fragrant.

1. Toast the paste and pasta.

Push the onions to the side and drop the tomato paste directly onto the hot surface of the pot. Fry the paste for about 2 minutes, stirring constantly, until it darkens to a rusty brick color. Pour in the dry orzo, stirring well to coat every grain in the red oil, and toast for 1 to 2 minutes.

2. Simmer and season.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes. To capture every last drop of flavor, pour your hot broth into the empty tomato can, swirl it around, and add it to the pot. Drop in the allspice berries, cinnamon stick, salt, and pepper, then stir thoroughly.

3. Stir like a risotto.

Bring the pot to a gentle boil, then immediately reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer uncovered, using a flat wooden spoon to stir frequently and scrape the bottom of the pot for 15 to 20 minutes. The pasta will release its starches and want to stick, so do not walk away.

4. Let it rest off the heat.

When the orzo is al dente and the sauce has thickened but still looks a bit too wet or soupy, immediately remove the pot from the heat. Cover with a lid and let it rest for 5 to 10 minutes. The pasta will absorb the remaining liquid, resulting in a perfectly creamy, velvety texture.

5. Garnish and serve.

Remove the cinnamon stick and allspice berries. Ladle the hot manestra into shallow bowls and top generously with crumbled feta, a drizzle of fresh olive oil, and black pepper.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The carryover rest is non-negotiable.**

If you cook manestra until it looks completely dry in the pot, it will turn into a solid brick of pasta by the time it hits the bowl. Pull it off the heat while it is still loose and soupy.

- **Do not skimp on the oil.**

This dish contains no butter or heavy cream; the luxurious, creamy mouthfeel comes entirely from the generous pour of high-quality olive oil emulsifying with the pasta's starch.

- **Fish out the spices.**

Biting into a whole allspice berry is an aggressive experience. Count the three berries as they go in, and make sure three come out before serving.



Nistisima (The Fasting Table & Everyday Vegan)

Naturally vegan dishes driven by the Orthodox calendar, using olive oil, time, and pantry staples to build deep, uncompromised flavors.

Deprivation is a reliable mother of invention. For nearly half the year, the Orthodox calendar demands a strict departure from meat and dairy—a forced fast that, over centuries, quietly birthed some of the most ingenious cooking in the Mediterranean. Nistisima isn't some modern, lifestyle-branded veganism. It's the unapologetic food of the village, engineered by cooks who learned long ago how to coax staggering depth from the dirt and the pantry using nothing but heavy pours of olive oil, sharp hits of lemon, and the slow, transformative mercy of time.

This is the food that sustained generations through war, poverty, and religious duty. It's the bubbling clay pot of Revithada left to simmer overnight, the sweet, herbaceous submission of artichokes in Aginares a la Polita, and the sticky, oil-rich crumble of a Melomakarono. You don't cook these dishes as a compromise. You cook them because, when stripped of the easy luxuries of butter and meat, the true, unvarnished soul of the Greek kitchen finally shows itself.





Gigantes Plaki

Γίγαντες Πλάκι

yee-GAHN-tes plah-KEE

If there is a single scent that drags a first-generation Greek kid back to their grandmother's kitchen, it is the smell of gigantes plaki caramelizing in a hot oven. Plaki isn't an ingredient; it's an ancient, brilliant technique of slow-baking food in a wide pan drowning in olive oil and tomatoes until the sauce hits a rich, honeyed consistency. The secret to recreating this magic on a weeknight without resorting to the absolute tragedy of canned beans is modular cooking. You boil the dried beans on a Sunday, save their starchy broth like liquid gold, and on a Wednesday night, you whip up a quick sauce and let the oven do the heavy lifting.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	dried Greek gigantes, Royal Corona, or large dried lima beans <i>rinsed and picked over</i>	2 tbsp	tomato paste
		28 oz	crushed tomatoes
		1 tsp	granulated sugar
1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1/4 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped</i>
4 large	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	1 tsp	dried oregano
2 med	carrots <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
2 med	celery stalks with leafy tops <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

PREPARATION

- **Soak the dried beans overnight.**

Place the dried beans in a large bowl, pick out any debris, cover with at least 3 inches of cold water, and leave them on the counter for 12 to 24 hours until they double in size.

- **Boil the beans gently until tender.**

Drain the soaked beans, cover with 2 inches of fresh cold water in a heavy pot, and bring to a boil. Skim off any white foam, drop the heat to a lazy simmer, and cook uncovered for 45 to 60 minutes until tender but perfectly intact. Do not add salt during this phase, as it hardens the skins.

- **Reserve the starchy bean broth.**

When the beans are tender, drain them but save at least 1 1/2 cups of the cooking liquid, known as the zoumi. If doing this days ahead, store the beans in the fridge submerged in this liquid.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.

2. Build the sofrito base in a wide skillet.

Heat 1/4 cup of the olive oil over medium heat, add the onion, and cook for about 8 to 10 minutes until sweet and completely translucent. Stir in the carrots and celery to soften for 5 minutes, then add the garlic and tomato paste, cooking for 1 minute until the paste darkens and smells deeply savory.

3. Simmer the tomato sauce.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, sugar, oregano, salt, and black pepper. Let it bubble low for 10 minutes to marry the flavors, then turn off the heat and stir in the fresh parsley and dill.

4. Assemble the plaki in a baking dish.

Pour your boiled beans into a 9x13 inch ceramic or glass baking dish, cover them evenly with the hot tomato sauce, and add 1 cup of the reserved starchy bean broth and the remaining 1/4 cup of olive oil. Gently toss everything together so the beans are fully bathing in the liquid.

5. Bake until honeyed and caramelized.

Bake uncovered on the middle rack for 45 to 60 minutes, gently stirring halfway through to prevent the top beans from drying out. The dish is ready when the liquid reduces to a thick, glistening sauce and the beans take on deeply browned, crusty edges. Let it rest for at least 15 minutes before serving with a block of feta and crusty peasant bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the olive oil.**

This is a ladera dish, meaning it is meant to be cooked generously in oil. Do not skimp on it; the oil is a primary flavoring agent meant to emulsify the sauce and pool beautifully at the edges for bread dipping.

- **Need a weeknight shortcut? Use a pressure cooker.**

If you forgot to soak the beans the night before, cover unsoaked beans with 2 inches of water in an electric pressure cooker and cook on high pressure for 30 to 35 minutes, followed by a natural release. Drain, save the broth, and proceed right to the sauce.



Revithada Sifnou

Ρεβιθάδα Σίφνου

reh-vee-THA-tha SEEF-noo

On the Cycladic island of Sifnos, grandmothers traditionally sealed clay pots of chickpeas, onions, and olive oil with dough, leaving them in the village bakery oven to slow-roast overnight. The secret for a Wednesday night in Ohio? That ancient clay pot was really just a primitive pressure cooker. By using a modern electric pressure cooker and mashing a handful of the cooked beans at the very end, you force the olive oil to emulsify with the starches, recreating that profoundly rich, honeyed Sunday morning stew in under an hour without sacrificing an ounce of its soul.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	dried chickpeas	1 tbsp	kosher salt
1 tsp	baking soda	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
3 large	yellow onions <i>roughly chopped</i>	5 cup	water
3/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	2 med	lemons <i>cut into wedges</i>
2 large	dried bay leaves		

PREPARATION

- **Soak the chickpeas.**

Place the dried chickpeas in a large bowl, cover with at least three inches of cold water, and stir in the baking soda. Leave them on the counter for 8 to 12 hours before cooking.

- **Rinse and slip the skins.**

Drain the soaked chickpeas and rinse them thoroughly under cold water, rubbing them roughly between your hands to slip off and discard the translucent outer skins.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the onions to kickstart their sweetness.**

Set your electric pressure cooker to the sauté function. Add 1/4 cup of the olive oil and the chopped onions, cooking for 5 to 7 minutes until soft and translucent.

- 2. Set the stew to pressure cook.**

Turn off the sauté function and add the rinsed chickpeas, the remaining 1/2 cup of olive oil, bay leaves, salt, pepper, and water. Secure the lid, seal the valve, and cook on high pressure for 45 minutes.

1. Depressurize the pot.

When the timer goes off, allow the pressure to release naturally for 15 minutes before manually venting any remaining steam.

2. Thicken the broth with the smash-and-stir technique.

Scoop out about 1/2 cup of the cooked chickpeas and broth, smash them into a paste with a fork, and stir the paste back into the pot. Watch the watery broth instantly transform into a thick, velvety stew.

3. Serve immediately with a heavy dose of fresh lemon.

Ladle the hot stew into wide bowls, serve with crusty bread to mop up the olive oil, and squeeze fresh lemon juice over the top to cut through the richness.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Never use canned chickpeas.**

Canned beans will completely disintegrate under pressure and fail to absorb the olive oil properly. Dried beans are non-negotiable to achieve the right texture.

● **Resist the urge to add extra ingredients.**

Do not add chicken broth, carrots, celery, or garlic. The authentic Sifniot magic relies entirely on how the humble onion and chickpea meld together in the olive oil.



Fakorizo

Φακόρυζο

fah-KOH-ree-zoh

To the uninitiated, it's just lentils and rice. But to a Greek family, the smell of slowly caramelizing onions, garlic, and bay leaves means one thing: the deep, nostalgic comfort of fakorizo. Born of the Mediterranean tradition of *cucina povera*, this humble, everyday staple sustained agricultural families through the long meatless fasting periods of Lent. It is a masterclass in how a few inexpensive pantry ingredients, treated with uncompromising respect, transform into something profoundly savory. The secret to making it taste exactly like

a yiayia's kitchen isn't complicated: boil the bitter tannins out of the lentils first, take your sweet time with the onions, and never apologize for the olive oil. It is the backbone of the dish.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	brown lentils <i>picked over and rinsed</i>	2	dried bay leaves
1/2 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	dried oregano
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1 cup	medium-grain white rice
1 med	carrot <i>finely diced</i>	3 cup	hot water
3 med	garlic cloves <i>thinly sliced</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	tomato paste	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1/2 cup	crushed tomatoes	2 tbsp	fresh parsley <i>chopped</i>
		1 med	lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>

PREPARATION

- **Pick through the lentils.**

Spread the brown lentils on a light-colored plate or baking sheet to quickly pick out any small stones or debris before rinsing.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Parboil the lentils to remove their bitterness.**

Place the rinsed lentils in a pot with two inches of cold water, bring to a rapid boil over high heat for ten minutes, then drain and discard the murky, tannin-rich water.

1. Build the flavor base slowly.

Wipe the pot dry, add a third of a cup of the olive oil over medium heat, and sauté the onion and carrot until deeply softened, translucent, and starting to turn golden brown, which should take about twelve minutes.

2. Bloom the aromatics.

Stir in the garlic and tomato paste, cooking for one minute until the paste darkens slightly and the oil smells intensely sweet and savory.

3. Simmer the lentils.

Return the drained lentils to the pot along with the crushed tomatoes, bay leaves, oregano, and three cups of hot water, then cover and simmer on low for fifteen minutes until the lentils are semi-tender but still hold their shape.

4. Cook the rice.

Stir in the rice, kosher salt, and black pepper, cover the pot again, and simmer on low for another fifteen to twenty minutes until the liquid is absorbed and the grains are tender.

5. Let the pilaf rest.

Remove the pot from the heat and let it sit entirely undisturbed with the lid securely on for ten to fifteen minutes, allowing the starches to settle and the rice to fluff into a creamy, cohesive pilaf.

6. Garnish and serve.

Discard the bay leaves, drizzle the remaining olive oil over the top for a fresh, grassy finish, gently fold in the parsley, and serve warm with generous squeezes of fresh lemon.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Trust the olive oil.**

Half a cup might seem like a lot for a simple pot of lentils and rice, but in Greek peasant cooking, oil is a primary flavoring ingredient that creates the dish's signature velvety emulsion. Do not skimp on it.

- **The second-day hack.**

If you ever find yourself with leftover Greek lentil soup (fakes) in the fridge, simply bring four cups of it to a simmer, add a cup of rinsed rice, and cook until tender to create an instant fakorizo.

- **Serve with acidity.**

The starchy, olive oil-rich nature of this dish demands the sharp bite of acid to cut through the richness; don't skip the lemon wedges, and consider a side of Kalamata olives or pickled peppers.



Halvas

Χαλβάς Σιμιγδαλένιος

hal-VAS see-meeg-dah-LE-nee-os

It's the quintessential scent of a Greek childhood—semolina roasting in oil, fragrant with cinnamon and citrus peel. Halvas is a masterpiece of working-class ingenuity and the ultimate grandmother dessert, born of the strict fasting rules of Great Lent. Relying on an ancient, unyielding ratio of 1:2:3:4—one part oil, two parts semolina, three parts sugar, and four parts water—it requires no dairy, no eggs, and no oven. The only secret here is standing at the stove; respect the ritual of slowly toasting the grains to a deep, sandy gold, and you'll conjure the exact, unfiltered taste of the homeland on a random Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	granulated white sugar	1 cup	light olive oil
4 cup	water	1 cup	coarse durum wheat semolina
1	cinnamon stick	1 cup	fine durum wheat semolina
3	whole cloves	1/2 cup	blanched almonds
1	orange peel <i>cut into a wide strip, pith removed</i>	1/4 cup	raisins
1	lemon peel <i>cut into a wide strip, pith removed</i>	1 tsp	ground cinnamon

PREPARATION

- **Have your mold ready.**

The hot halva sets quickly, so ensure your Bundt pan or mold is nearby before you begin hydrating the semolina.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the aromatic syrup.**

In a medium saucepan, combine the sugar, water, cinnamon stick, cloves, orange peel, and lemon peel over medium-high heat until the sugar dissolves. Let it boil gently for exactly two to three minutes, then drop the heat to the lowest setting to keep it hot without reducing.

- 2. Toast the semolina and almonds.**

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, then add the coarse semolina, fine semolina, and almonds.

- 3. Stir constantly to develop the color.**

With a wooden spoon, continuously toast the grains for 8 to 10 minutes until they shift from pale yellow to a deep, rich, sandy brown. Toward the very end, stir in the ground cinnamon and raisins.

1. Hydrate the halva carefully.

Pull the pot entirely off the heat, discard the whole spices and peels from the syrup, and stand back as you slowly ladle the hot liquid into the semolina. It will hiss, sputter, and release a volcanic cloud of steam, so stir confidently but keep your distance.

2. Thicken the mixture.

Return the pot to medium-low heat, stirring constantly for 2 to 4 minutes until the semolina absorbs the liquid, thickens dramatically, and pulls away cleanly from the sides of the pot like a heavy dough.

3. Mold and set.

Spoon the hot mixture into a Bundt pan or silicone mold, pressing it down firmly to remove air pockets, and let it rest on the counter for about an hour.

4. Invert and serve.

Turn the halva out onto a plate, dust generously with additional ground cinnamon, and serve at room temperature.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Stick strictly to the 1:2:3:4 ratio.**

This ancient formula (oil, semolina, sugar, water) is non-negotiable and scales perfectly whether you use a standard measuring cup or a coffee mug.

● **Do not use robust extra virgin olive oil.**

A strong, peppery oil will overpower the delicate semolina; stick to a light-tasting olive oil or a 50/50 blend with a neutral seed oil.

● **Don't over-reduce the syrup.**

If the syrup boils for too long, the liquid volume drops, and the starch won't have enough moisture to hydrate properly, leaving you with a dry, crumbly cake.



Melomakarona

Μελομακάρονα

meh-lo-mah-KAH-ro-nah

For the first-generation kid in an Ohio suburb, the smell of cinnamon, clove, and orange zest means the holidays have finally arrived. Melomakarona are the undisputed kings of the Greek Christmas table. Born of the Orthodox fast, these unpretentious vegan cookies rely entirely on the Mediterranean trinity of olive oil, wheat, and honey. The magic lies in an impossible texture: a crisp, sandy exterior yielding to a core entirely saturated with sweet syrup. Achieving this isn't about fancy equipment; it's about obeying the unyielding laws of the Greek grandmother: never, ever knead the dough, and always plunge piping hot cookies straight into ice-cold syrup.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	granulated sugar	1 tsp	baking soda
2 cup	water	2 large	orange <i>zested</i>
2 cup	honey	6 1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1 large	cinnamon stick	1 cup	fine semolina
3 small	clove	2 tsp	baking powder
1/2 med	orange <i>peeled, avoiding the bitter white pith</i>	2 tsp	ground cinnamon
1 sprig	fresh thyme	1 tsp	ground clove
1 cup	light extra virgin olive oil	1/2 tsp	ground nutmeg
1 cup	neutral oil	1 1/2 cup	walnuts <i>finely chopped</i>
3/4 cup	fresh orange juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>	1 tsp	ground cinnamon
1/4 cup	cognac	1/2 tsp	ground clove
1 cup	granulated sugar		

PREPARATION

- **Make the syrup ahead of time.**

The cardinal rule of syrugging is that hot cookies must meet cold syrup. Make the syrup at least three hours before you plan to bake, or leave it in the fridge overnight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the syrup base.**

Combine the water, 2 cups of sugar, cinnamon stick, whole cloves, orange peel, and fresh thyme in a saucepan and bring to a rolling boil over medium-high heat for exactly 3 to 5 minutes to dissolve the sugar.

1. Stir in the honey and cool completely.

Remove the pan from the heat, gently stir in the honey until it melts seamlessly into the liquid, and allow the syrup to cool entirely to room temperature or colder.

2. Whisk the dry ingredients.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the all-purpose flour, fine semolina, baking powder, 2 teaspoons of ground cinnamon, 1 teaspoon of ground clove, and nutmeg.

3. Whisk the wet ingredients.

In a separate large bowl, vigorously whisk the olive oil, neutral oil, cognac, 1 cup of sugar, and orange zest for about a minute until the sugar begins to dissolve.

4. Activate the baking soda.

Hold the freshly squeezed orange juice over the wet bowl, add the baking soda to the juice, and stir quickly until it foams up. Pour the foam into the oil mixture and gently whisk to combine.

5. Fold the wet and dry mixtures without kneading.

Dump the dry bowl into the wet bowl and use a flexible spatula to gently fold the mixture together with broad, sweeping motions just until the flour is absorbed. This should take no more than 15 seconds; kneading will build gluten, force out the oil, and leave you with dense rocks.

6. Rest the dough.

Cover the bowl with a kitchen towel and let it sit for 20 minutes to allow the semolina to properly hydrate.

7. Shape and score the cookies.

Preheat the oven to 350°F and pinch off small pieces of dough, rolling them into smooth, slightly flattened ovals. Place them an inch apart on parchment-lined baking sheets and gently press the tines of a fork onto the top of each to create a crosshatch pattern.

8. Bake until deeply golden.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes until thoroughly browned. A pale cookie will turn to mush when it hits the syrup.

1. Plunge the hot cookies into the cold syrup.

The moment you pull a tray from the oven, drop the piping hot cookies directly into the cold syrup for 15 to 20 seconds, flipping once so both sides drink the liquid.

2. Drain and garnish with spiced walnuts.

Remove the cookies with a slotted spoon to a wire rack, and while they are still sticky, sprinkle generously with the finely chopped walnuts mixed with the remaining ground cinnamon and clove.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Weigh your ingredients.**

Volume measurements work, but for the absolute perfect texture every time without fail, you should really weigh your flour, oils, and liquids on a kitchen scale.

● **Storage is your friend.**

Because these contain no dairy or eggs, the honey acts as a natural preservative. They will keep perfectly in an airtight container at room temperature for up to a month, and actually taste better on day three.



To Kiriakatiko Trapezi (The Sunday Supper & Sto Forno)

Labor-of-love dishes and slow-roasted oven marvels for the extended weekend family gathering.

Sunday isn't a day of rest; it's a low-and-slow endurance sport. It starts early, the air heavy with roasting garlic, oregano, and the rendered fat of a leg of lamb doing its quiet time sto forno. This is the anchor of the week. It's the day to

tackle the formidable architecture of moussaka or a towering pastitsio, engineering layers of pasta, eggplant, and impossibly thick béchamel designed to feed a loud, sprawling family.

There are no shortcuts here, and you wouldn't want any. From a bubbling pan of giouvetsi to lemon potatoes aggressively soaking up the pan drippings of a roasted chicken, these are the heavy hitters. This is unapologetic, labor-of-love cooking that reminds you exactly who you are, and exactly where you came from.





Pastitsio tis Katsarolas

Πασιτίσιο της κατσαρόλας

pas-TEET-see-oh tees kat-sah-ROH-las

Pastitsio is the undisputed king of the Greek Sunday table, a towering architecture of tubular pasta, warmly spiced meat, and an impossibly thick crown of nutmeg-laced béchamel. But when you crave that exact, soul-warming flavor on a rainy Tuesday, you don't have three hours to dirty every pot in the house. Enter the pot pastitsio: a pragmatic, unsung domestic secret where pasta cooks directly in a cinnamon-spiked meat broth, releasing its starches before a quick milk and cornstarch slurry creates a velvety faux-béchamel that coats every single noodle. No layering, no baking, no Hollywood clichés—just the pure, nostalgic taste of home in thirty minutes.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 lb	lean ground beef	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	4 cup	water or low-sodium beef broth
2 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 lb	ziti or penne pasta
2 tbsp	tomato paste	1 cup	whole milk <i>cold</i>
1/2 cup	dry red wine	2 tbsp	cornstarch
1 tsp	ground cinnamon	1/2 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated</i>
1/4 tsp	ground nutmeg	1 tbsp	unsalted butter
1/8 tsp	ground cloves		

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the olive oil and brown the beef.

Place a large Dutch oven or wide skillet over medium-high heat, add the oil and ground beef, and cook until deeply browned and no longer pink, about 5 to 7 minutes.

2. Soften the aromatics.

Stir the finely diced onion and minced garlic into the beef, sautéing for another 3 to 4 minutes until the onions are translucent.

3. Bloom the tomato paste and spices.

Push the meat to the edges and drop the tomato paste into the center to toast for a minute, then stir in the wine, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, salt, and pepper, scraping the bottom of the pan until the liquid evaporates.

4. Cook the pasta directly in the broth.

Pour in the water or broth, bring to a rolling boil, stir in the uncooked pasta, then reduce the heat to medium, cover tightly, and cook for 10 to 12 minutes.

1. Whisk the milk and cornstarch slurry.

While the pasta simmers, vigorously whisk the cold milk and cornstarch together in a small bowl until completely dissolved.

2. Emulsify the faux-béchamel.

Once the pasta has absorbed most of the liquid but remains starchy, pour the slurry into the pot and stir constantly over medium-low heat for 1 to 2 minutes until it transforms into a glossy, creamy sauce.

3. Finish with cheese and serve.

Remove the pot from the heat, stir in the Pecorino Romano and butter, adjust the seasoning to taste, and serve immediately in wide bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Pasta Substitution.**

Authentic baked pastitsio uses long, thick, hollow spaghetti, but for a stovetop dish, ziti is the perfect supermarket alternative because its hollow center acts as a trap for the creamy, meaty sauce.

● **The Cheese Substitution.**

If you cannot find Greek Kefalotyri at a specialty market, Pecorino Romano is the closest match in the standard American dairy aisle due to its sharp, salty, sheep's milk profile. Do not use pre-grated parmesan; the anti-caking agents will ruin the creamy finish.



Moussakas tis Tembelas

Μουσακάς της τεμπέλας

moo-sah-KAHS tees tem-BEH-lahs

Traditional moussaka is a grueling, all-day affair involving scorched pans, aerosolized grease, and the endless whisking of a temperamental roux. This is not that. This is the domestic reality, a generationally sanctioned shortcut known as the lazy woman's moussaka. By aggressively roasting the vegetables on sheet pans and crowning the casserole with a foolproof, tangy emulsion of Greek yogurt and salty cheese, you get the absolute soul of Sunday supper without the debilitating labor. It's practical, brilliant, and tastes exactly like the homeland.

INGREDIENTS

2 large	American Globe eggplants <i>ends trimmed, sliced crosswise into 1/3-inch thick rounds</i>	1 tbsp	tomato paste
3 med	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled, sliced crosswise into 1/3-inch thick rounds</i>	1/3 cup	dry red wine <i>optional</i>
1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil <i>for roasting</i>	15 oz	crushed tomatoes <i>high quality</i>
2 1/2 tsp	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	1 med	cinnamon stick
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground, divided</i>	1/8 tsp	ground allspice
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil <i>for the meat sauce</i>	1 med	dried bay leaf
1 1/2 lb	ground beef <i>80/20 blend</i>	3 cup	plain whole milk Greek yogurt <i>must be 5% fat</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely chopped or grated</i>	3 large	eggs
2 med clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 1/2 cup	Pecorino Romano or Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>grated, divided</i>
		1/4 tsp	nutmeg <i>freshly grated</i>

PREPARATION

- **Slice the vegetables uniformly.**

Consistency is key when roasting; ensure your potatoes and eggplants are cut to an even 1/3-inch thickness so they cook at the exact same rate.

- **Grate the onion.**

For a meat sauce that perfectly melts together, grate your yellow onion on the large holes of a box grater instead of chopping it.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 400°F and prepare your sheet pans.

Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper or heavy-duty aluminum foil. Arrange the potato slices in a single layer on one baking sheet, and the eggplant slices on the other.

2. Roast the vegetables to bypass the tyranny of the frying pan.

Using a pastry brush, generously dab both sides of the vegetables with the 1/4 cup of olive oil. Season evenly with 1 teaspoon of the kosher salt and 1/2 teaspoon of the black pepper, then roast for 20 to 25 minutes until the potatoes are fork-tender and the eggplants are lightly browned.

3. Build the kimas, the aromatic meat sauce that is the soul of the dish.

While the vegetables roast, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the ground beef and cook, breaking it apart with a wooden spoon, until heavily browned and no pink remains, about 6 to 8 minutes.

4. Soften the aromatics and bloom the tomato paste.

Add the chopped or grated onion and minced garlic, sautéing until the onions are translucent. Push the meat to the edges to clear a space in the center, add the tomato paste directly to the hot surface, and cook for 1 minute until it darkens and becomes highly fragrant before stirring it into the meat.

5. Deglaze the pan and simmer the sauce.

If using red wine, pour it in to deglaze the pan, scraping up any browned bits. Once the alcohol evaporates, add the crushed tomatoes, cinnamon stick, allspice, bay leaf, 1 teaspoon of salt, and 1/2 teaspoon of pepper. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and let it simmer for 15 to 20 minutes so the sauce thickens, then discard the cinnamon stick and bay leaf.

1. Whip up the giaourtokomma, the foolproof lazy woman's béchamel.

In a medium bowl, vigorously whisk the whole milk Greek yogurt, eggs, 1 cup of the grated cheese, the freshly grated nutmeg, and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt until the mixture is completely smooth and pale yellow.

2. Assemble the layers of the casserole.

Reduce the oven to 375°F and lightly grease a 9x13-inch rectangular baking dish. Layer the roasted potato slices across the bottom, follow with half of the roasted eggplant slices, pour the entirety of the thickened meat sauce over the top, and finish with the remaining eggplant.

3. Seal the dish with the yogurt crown and bake.

Pour the yogurt emulsion over the top, spreading it edge-to-edge to seal the casserole, and sprinkle with the reserved 1/2 cup of grated cheese. Bake uncovered for 35 to 45 minutes until the topping is puffed, set, and has formed a beautiful golden-brown crust.

4. Walk away and let the moussaka rest.

Do not cut into the casserole immediately. It must rest at room temperature for at least 30 to 45 minutes to allow the juices to absorb and the structural integrity to set, ensuring perfect, distinct layers when sliced.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Low-fat yogurt will ruin this dish.**

You must use a 5% full-fat strained Greek yogurt; anything less will break and weep under the oven's heat, leaving you with a watery mess instead of a luxurious topping.

● **Leverage the timeline to your advantage.**

Moussaka chemically improves overnight as the flavors harmonize. Prep the meat sauce or roast the vegetables a day in advance, or assemble the entire tray and freeze it unbaked for a future Sunday supper.

- **The ultimate Athenian weeknight shortcut.**

If you have absolutely no time to slice and roast vegetables, skip them entirely. Line the bottom of your pan with a layer of crustless white sandwich bread to act as a sponge for the savory meat sauce drippings before baking.



Kotopoulo Lemonato sto Tigani

Κοτόπουλο λεμονάτο στο τηγάνι

koh-TOH-poo-loh leh-moh-NAH-toh stoh tee-GHAH-nee

You remember that glorious, slow-roasted Sunday chicken your mother made, the one radiating olive oil, bright lemon, and wild oregano? This is how you steal that exact memory for a frantic Tuesday night. We trade the whole bird for bone-in thighs and the oven for a wide skillet, condensing hours of slow-cooked magic into a thirty-five-minute stovetop sprint. The secret isn't some fussy culinary school technique, it is simply patience. You let the skin render its fat undisturbed, you

hold back your fresh lemon until the final act so it stays sharp, and whatever you do, you do not leave a single drop of that golden, garlicky pan sauce behind.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs <i>patted completely dry</i>	1 cup	chicken broth
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1 med	lemon <i>zested</i>
1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	1/4 cup	lemon juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
2 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	1 tsp	Dijon mustard
4 large cloves	garlic <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>	1 tsp	honey
		1 tbsp	dried Greek oregano
		2 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>very cold and cut into cubes</i>

PREPARATION

- **Dry the chicken completely before searing.**

Moisture is the ultimate enemy of crispy skin. Do not skip patting the chicken thighs bone-dry with paper towels before you season them.

- **Keep the butter ice cold.**

The temperature of the butter is the grandmother's secret to a perfect emulsion. Cold butter melts slowly into the reduced broth, binding the chicken fat and acidic lemon juice together into a velvety sauce that clings to the meat.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the chicken thighs undisturbed to build the foundation of the dish.

Season the dried chicken generously on both sides with kosher salt and black pepper. Place a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat and add the olive oil. When the oil shimmers and lightly smokes, lay the chicken in the pan skin-side down and leave it entirely alone for 6 to 8 minutes. Let the skin deeply brown and release its fat, then flip and cook for 3 more minutes on the meat side before removing the thighs to a plate.

2. Soften the garlic in the rendered chicken fat.

Lower the heat to medium-low. Toss the sliced garlic into the remaining chicken fat and olive oil in the skillet. Stir continuously for just 30 to 60 seconds until fragrant and barely golden, taking care not to let it brown and turn bitter.

3. Deglaze the pan and braise the chicken until tender.

Pour the chicken broth into the skillet, immediately using a wooden spoon to scrape up all the caramelized brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Stir in the lemon zest, then return the chicken to the skillet skin-side up, along with any juices from the resting plate. Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer, cover loosely with a lid or foil, and cook for 15 to 20 minutes until the chicken registers 165°F internally.

4. Whisk together the lemon emulsion.

Transfer the cooked chicken back to the resting plate. In a small bowl, whisk together the fresh lemon juice, mustard, honey, and dried oregano, then pour this mixture into the bubbling skillet. Raise the heat slightly to medium and let the liquid reduce by about a third, concentrating the flavors for 3 to 4 minutes.

5. Mount the sauce with cold butter.

Remove the skillet completely from the heat and drop in the cold butter cubes. Gently and continuously swirl the pan until the butter melts entirely, forcing the pan drippings and lemon juice to bind into a thick, glossy, opaque sauce.

1. Finish the dish and serve immediately.

Nestle the chicken back into the skillet, spooning a little of the luxurious sauce over the meat while keeping the top skin crispy. Serve straight from the pan alongside a massive hunk of crusty bread to mop up every last drop.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Seek out air-chilled chicken.**

Standard American supermarket chickens are predominantly water-chilled, leaving them bloated with excess water that leeches out in the pan and ruins your sear. Look for air-chilled chicken thighs for a drier skin that crisps perfectly in the hot olive oil.

● **Buy actual Mediterranean oregano.**

The standard oregano sold in the American spice aisle is often Mexican oregano, which belongs to the verbena family and carries floral notes meant for tacos, not tavernas. You must seek out bottles explicitly labeled Mediterranean or Greek oregano for that sharp, savory homeland punch.

● **Watch your lemons.**

Standard Eureka lemons are exactly what you want here. Meyer lemons, while trendy, are a hybrid with oranges and run far too sweet for this savory sauce. If you must use them, omit the honey entirely to maintain the proper acidic balance.



Soutzoukakia Smyrneika

Σουτζουκάκια Σμυρναίικα

soo-tzoo-KAH-kyā smeer-NAY-ka

These aren't your standard Greek meatballs. Brought over by the refugees of Asia Minor in the 1920s, true soutzoukakia demand an audacious hand with cumin and absolutely no onions in the meat. Using Ruby Port as a stand-in for traditional Mavrodaphne wine gives the panade its deep, sweet resonance. Take the extra ten minutes to shallow-fry them; it creates a structural crust that seals in the juices and leaves a dusting of flour to naturally thicken the rich, cinnamon-laced tomato sauce. Serve it piping hot over a bed of buttery puréed potatoes.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	80/20 ground beef	3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
3 large	stale white bread <i>crusts removed</i>	1 large	yellow onion <i>finely grated</i>
1/3 cup	Ruby Port or sweet red wine	2 med	garlic <i>smashed</i>
3 large	garlic	1 clove	
1 clove	<i>minced into a paste</i>	1 tbsp	tomato paste
1 large	egg	1/4 cup	dry red wine
1 1/2 tbsp	ground cumin	28 oz	crushed tomatoes
2 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	1 cup	water or beef broth
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1 med	cinnamon stick
1/2 tsp	black pepper	1 med	bay leaf
1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	3 small	whole allspice berries
1/4 cup	neutral oil	1 tsp	sugar

PREPARATION

- **Set aside wine for shaping.**

Keep a small bowl with a splash of sweet wine at your workstation. Dipping your fingers while rolling the meat adds a final layer of sugar that caramelizes beautifully in the pan.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Prepare the sweet wine panade.**

Tear the crustless bread into chunks, pour the Ruby Port over it, and let it sit for five minutes before wringing out the excess liquid with your hands.

1. Knead and rest the meat.

Combine the soaked bread with the ground beef, minced garlic, egg, cumin, 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt, and pepper, vigorously kneading for several minutes to mimic a traditional double-grind. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to hydrate the bread and marry the flavors.

2. Shape the soutzoukakia.

Dip your fingers lightly into a small bowl of sweet wine and roll the meat into oblong, cigar-like cylinders about the length of a finger.

3. Dust and sear for a structural crust.

Roll each meatball lightly in flour, shaking off the excess, and shallow-fry in hot oil for a minute or two per side just to brown the exterior without cooking them through. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate.

4. Build the aromatic sauce.

In a wide pot, sauté the grated onion in 3 tablespoons of olive oil until sweet. Stir in the smashed garlic and tomato paste until toasted, then deglaze with the dry red wine. Add the crushed tomatoes, broth, cinnamon, bay leaf, allspice, and sugar to simmer.

5. Braise gently without stirring.

Nestle the seared meatballs into the simmering sauce and gently shake the pot in a circular motion to coat them. Never stir with a wooden spoon or they will break. Cover partially and simmer on low for 25 to 30 minutes.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The golden rule of onions.**

Authentic Smyrna meatballs never contain onion in the meat mixture—only copious amounts of garlic. The onion belongs strictly in the sauce to differentiate them from standard keftedes.

● **Ditch the dry breadcrumbs.**

Breadcrumbs make for a dense meatball. A panade of stale white bread soaked in sweet wine ensures the canonical melt-in-the-mouth, aerated texture.

- **Do not stir the pot.**

Once the delicate meatballs are nestled in the sauce, put the wooden spoon away.

Grasp the handles and gently shake the pot to prevent breaking the meat.



Moschari Giouvetsi sto Tigani

Μοσχάρι Γιουβέτσι στο Τηγάνι

mos-chá-ri giou-vét-si sto ti-gá-ni

If there is a scent that universally defines a Greek-American childhood, it is the unapologetic perfume of cinnamon, allspice, and beef simmering down into a heavy tomato sauce on a Sunday afternoon. Giouvetsi is the ultimate expression of Aegean comfort, but the truth is, you don't need a wood-fired village oven or a clay pot to do it right. By moving the braise to the stovetop and treating the orzo like a risotto, a busy cook gains absolute control over the starch and the meat. It's highly practical, it demands no Hollywood clichés, and it delivers the visceral, exact taste of home.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	boneless beef chuck roast <i>trimmed of excess hard fat and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	14 1/2 oz	crushed tomatoes
1 tsp	Kosher salt	1 med	cinnamon stick
1/2 tsp	freshly cracked black pepper	5 small	whole allspice berries
1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil	2 med	dried bay leaves
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
2 large	garlic <i>minced</i>	2 cup	beef broth
cloves		1 1/2 cup	dry orzo pasta
2 tbsp	tomato paste	3 cup	boiling water
1/2 cup	dry red wine	1 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>finely grated</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the beef in batches to build the foundation of the dish.

Pat the beef cubes completely dry, season generously with salt and pepper, and sear them in two tablespoons of the olive oil over medium-high heat until a deep brown crust forms. Remove the meat to a plate, leaving the fat in the pan.

2. Build the aromatic base in the rendered beef fat.

Lower the heat to medium, add the finely diced onion, and sauté for five to seven minutes until soft and translucent, scraping up any browned bits before stirring in the minced garlic.

3. Fry the tomato paste and deglaze with red wine.

Push the aromatics to the edges, drop the tomato paste into the center, and fry it for two minutes to cook out its raw, metallic edge before pouring in the wine to rapidly reduce.

- 1. Simmer the beef with the tomatoes and whole spices until meltingly tender.**
Return the beef to the skillet along with the crushed tomatoes, beef broth, sugar, cinnamon stick, allspice berries, and bay leaves; cover the pot, drop the heat to low, and simmer for an hour and a half.
- 2. Toast the dry orzo in olive oil to protect its structure.**
During the final ten minutes of the braise, toast the raw orzo in a separate pan with the remaining two tablespoons of olive oil until golden and nutty; this lipid barrier delays starch release and prevents a gummy dinner.
- 3. Marry the toasted pasta with the bubbling stew.**
Uncover the beef, fish out and discard the whole spices, pour the toasted orzo and boiling water directly into the stew, and season with an extra pinch of salt.
- 4. Simmer uncovered and stir frequently to manage the heavy starch.**
Cook for fifteen to eighteen minutes at a lively simmer, continuously scraping the bottom of the skillet so the heavy pasta doesn't sink and scorch.
- 5. Kill the heat and let the pot rest for ten minutes.**
Take it off the stove while the orzo still looks a bit soupy; the pasta will drink up the rest of the liquid as it sits, swelling into a perfectly cohesive, creamy masterpiece.
- 6. Serve immediately under a heavy drift of sharp cheese.**
Portion the giouvetsi into wide, shallow bowls and blanket heavily with the grated Pecorino Romano.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the whole spice.**
American palates often relegate cinnamon strictly to baking. In the Aegean, a whole cinnamon stick imparts an elegant, savory background warmth without turning the tomato sauce muddy.

- **The cheese translation.**

Traditional Giouvetsi relies on aged Kefalotyri. A sharp, salty Pecorino Romano from any standard supermarket is the perfect structural and flavor analog.



Meze & Kefi (The Front Porch Spread)

A masterclass in effortless assembly over active cooking. Casual, scalable small plates meant to balance flavors, encourage lingering conversation, and fuel communal high spirits.

In Greece, the best meals rarely happen at a dining table. They happen on a cracked concrete patio, leaning over a crowded, mismatched assortment of small plates while the ice melts in your glass. This is the realm of meze—a masterclass in doing very little to achieve a whole hell of a lot. It's not about plating or fussy technique; it's about endurance. You drag a torn hunk of bread through fiery tirokafteri, spear a cold dolma, and chase a blistered, pan-fried meatball with something strong, pacing yourself for the long haul of a summer evening.

There is an unspoken art to this kind of grazing. It demands a deliberate balance of the sharp, the rich, the fresh, and the unabashedly store-bought, assembled without sweat or ceremony. These are the dips, the bites, and the fried saviors that keep the conversation loud, the glasses full, and the spirits exactly where they belong.





Melitzanosalata

Μελιτζανοσαλάτα

meh-leet-zah-no-sah-LAH-tah

There's a hard line between a true Greek meze and a sad supermarket dip, and that line is drawn with fire. To capture the soul of this Mount Athos staple, you have to aggressively char the eggplant over an open flame until it gives up the ghost. Whatever you do, do not insult a Greek grandmother by tossing it into a food processor. The secret is patience—draining away the bitter nightshade waters—and the satisfying rhythm of hand-chopping the flesh so it keeps its meaty, smoky character. Give it a heavy pour of good olive oil, and it tastes exactly like the homeland.

INGREDIENTS

3 large	Globe eggplants	2 tbsp	red wine vinegar
1 cup	jarred roasted red peppers <i>drained, patted completely dry, and finely chopped</i>	3 tbsp	flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
2 large	garlic cloves <i>smashed and minced into a fine paste</i>	1/4 cup	red onion <i>finely minced</i>
4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
		1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

PREPARATION

- **Inspect for lingering burnt skin.**

When peeling the steamed eggplants, ensure no black, papery flakes of skin remain stuck to the flesh, as they will impart an acrid, ashy flavor to the final dip.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Char the eggplants over an open flame until completely collapsed.**

Prick the eggplants a few times with a fork and place them directly on a medium-high gas burner, turning with tongs until entirely blackened and blistered, about 15 to 20 minutes. If you lack a gas stove, blast them on a foil-lined baking sheet right under the highest setting of your broiler.

- 2. Steam the charred eggplants to loosen their skins.**

Transfer the hot, blackened vegetables to a bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap for 15 minutes. The trapped residual heat makes separating the bitter, ashen skin from the sweet flesh completely effortless.

- 3. Drain the exposed flesh to remove bitter, excess water.**

Peel and discard the skin, slice off the stems, and place the eggplant into a mesh strainer set over a bowl. Walk away for 20 minutes. Skipping this drain guarantees a sad, watery dip instead of a luxurious spread.

1. Chop the eggplant entirely by hand.

Move the drained flesh to a large cutting board and aggressively chop it in all directions with a chef's knife until it forms a rustic, chunky mash. Resist the urge to use a machine; this coarse, hand-hewn texture is the hallmark of the dish.

2. Mix the aromatics and marinate.

Transfer the chopped eggplant to a bowl and stir in the red peppers, garlic paste, red wine vinegar, three tablespoons of olive oil, parsley, and red onion. Season aggressively with the salt and pepper, then let it rest in the fridge for an hour so the acid can cut through the smoke.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Bring to room temperature before serving.**

Melitzanosalata served straight from the fridge mutes the smoky flavors; give it time to take the chill off and finish with a heavy pour of the remaining quality olive oil and some warm pita.



Feta Psiti

Μπουγιουρντί

boo-your-DEE

If you sit down at a raucous taverna in Thessaloniki and ask for Bouyiourdi, this is what hits the table: a bubbling, aromatic block of feta melting into sweet tomatoes and fiery peppers, swimming in golden olive oil. The name is an old Ottoman joke meaning 'tax bill', because the spicy kick hits you like a sudden penalty. The secret here is non-negotiable: buy a real block of feta sitting in brine. Pre-crumbled feta is coated in anti-caking dust and will bake into a dry eraser. Wrap the good stuff in a foil packet to trap the steam, and serve it hot with enough crusty bread to mop up the wreckage.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz	Greek Feta cheese in brine <i>drained and kept as a whole block</i>	4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
1 med	ripe tomato <i>thinly sliced</i>	1 tsp	dried Greek oregano
1/2 med	sweet green bell pepper <i>thinly sliced into rings</i>	1 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes
1/4 med	red onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	1/4 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		1 loaf	crusty bread <i>torn into chunks for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 400°F.**
- **Tear off a 12-inch sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil and top it with a slightly smaller sheet of parchment paper.**

The parchment barrier is vital; it stops the acidic tomatoes and cheese from reacting with the foil and leaching a metallic taste into your food.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Place the block of feta directly in the center of the parchment paper.**
Drizzle a spoonful of the olive oil over the cheese to keep it from sticking, then scatter the sliced tomatoes, green peppers, and red onions evenly over and around the block.
- 2. Pour the remaining olive oil generously over the vegetables and cheese.**
Don't hold back here; this oil mixes with the tomato juices to create an incredible dipping sauce. Sprinkle the dried oregano, red pepper flakes, and black pepper evenly over the top.
- 3. Bring the edges of the parchment and foil together tightly to create a sealed packet.**
Fold the top over itself like an envelope, ensuring there are no gaps where steam can escape. Place the sealed packet on a small baking sheet.

- 1. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until the cheese is heavily softened and the vegetables have released their juices.**

For slightly charred edges, you can carefully open the top of the foil packet at the 20-minute mark and switch your oven to broil for 2 to 3 minutes until bubbling.

- 2. Carefully transfer the entire foil packet to a serving plate and open the top.**

Watch out for the rush of hot, aromatic steam. Use a fork to slightly mash the soft feta into the roasted tomatoes and oil, and serve immediately with crusty bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never use pre-crumbled feta.**

Crumbled feta contains anti-caking agents that ruin the texture when baked. You need a solid block stored in brine to achieve that luxurious, spreadable creaminess.

- **Trust the chili flakes.**

The tangy, rich dairy mellows the heat significantly. You can handle more spice here than you think, and it is essential for cutting through the richness.



The Chicago "Flaming" Saganaki

Σαγανάκι

sah-gah-NAH-kee

If you've ever set foot in a Greek-American restaurant, you know the drill: a cast-iron skillet arrives, brandy is poured, flames erupt to the ceiling, and the dining room shouts, 'Opa!' The fire is pure 1968 Chicago Greektown theater. But beneath the midwestern flash lies a brilliant, ruthless trick straight from the homeland. To pan-fry cheese without it melting into a sad, greasy puddle, a Greek grandmother relies on extreme temperature differentials, dunking the thick slab in ice water before dredging it in flour. This creates a spontaneous

structural paste that fries into an impenetrable, golden exoskeleton, keeping the molten cheese perfectly suspended inside. It's a diaspora showstopper built on an austere seaside taverna foundation.

INGREDIENTS

6 oz	Kefalograviera or sharp provolone cheese <i>cut into a single 3/4-inch thick slab</i>	1 1/2 oz	Metaxa or 80-proof brandy
1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	1 med	lemon <i>halved</i>
1/4 cup	refined olive oil	2 med	pita bread <i>warmed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Source the right cheese.**

You need a firm, high-melting-point block. Kefalograviera is the gold standard, but a thick, rectangular slab of deli provolone or halloumi works flawlessly in an American kitchen.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Dredge through ice water.**

Set up a small bowl of water with a few ice cubes and a shallow plate holding the flour. Plunge the cheese completely into the ice water, then immediately press it firmly into the flour to coat all sides heavily, shaking off the excess.

- 2. Heat the skillet.**

Place a small cast-iron pan over medium-high heat and add the olive oil. The oil is ready when a pinch of flour dropped into it instantly sizzles.

- 3. Fry the cheese.**

Carefully lay the floured cheese into the hot oil. Fry undisturbed for two to three minutes until a deeply golden crust forms, then flip with a sturdy spatula and fry for another two minutes.

1. Prepare for the flame.

Once the cheese is soft in the center but contained by its crust, turn off the stove. Move the pan away from any overhanging cabinets or extraction hoods. Never pour the alcohol directly from the bottle.

2. Ignite and extinguish.

Pour the shot of brandy over the hot cheese and instantly ignite the fumes with a long-handled lighter. Let the blue flame burn for two seconds to toast the crust, then aggressively squeeze the lemon half over the cheese to extinguish the fire.

3. Serve immediately.

Saganaki waits for no one. Serve straight from the sizzling skillet, tearing the warm pita to scoop up the molten cheese and lemon-laced oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Skip the fire for the homeland original.**

If lighting a fire in your kitchen on a Tuesday night isn't in the cards, skip the brandy. In Greece, saganaki is rarely flamed. Just hit the crispy cheese with lemon straight off the stove.

● **The double dip for softer cheese.**

If using a softer cheese like Kasseri or Provolone instead of a hard Kefalograviera, plunge it into the ice water and flour a second time to build a thicker, more protective armor before frying.



Loukaniko "Horis Entero"

Λουκάνικο χωρίς έντερο

loo-KAH-nee-ko ho-REES EN-teh-ro

In the old villages, making sausage was a multi-day winter affair requiring specialized gear and miles of cleaned intestines. But modern Greek homemakers don't have time for that, and neither do you. Instead of surrendering the deeply nostalgic, orange-and-wine-scented pork of the Peloponnese to the whims of the supermarket meat case, they rely on a brilliant, practical workaround. By aggressively kneading ice-cold ground pork with salt and wine until it develops a sticky protein bind, then curing it tightly in plastic wrap, you achieve the exact snappy texture of a traditional stuffed link. This is real, weeknight-accessible Greek home cooking—no meat grinder required.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	ground pork <i>chilled (do not use lean)</i>	1 tsp	whole coriander seeds <i>lightly crushed</i>
2 tbsp	dry red wine <i>ice cold</i>	1 tsp	whole fennel seeds <i>lightly crushed</i>
1 tbsp	red wine vinegar <i>ice cold</i>	1 tsp	dried Greek oregano
3 large	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	dried thyme
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 tbsp	fresh orange zest	1/4 tsp	boukovo

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create a wet flavor paste to release the essential oils.

In a small bowl, use the back of a spoon to vigorously mash the minced garlic, kosher salt, orange zest, coriander, fennel, oregano, thyme, black pepper, and boukovo against the sides of the bowl for about thirty seconds until highly fragrant.

2. Extract the proteins through aggressive kneading.

Place the chilled ground pork in a mixing bowl and add the flavor paste, ice-cold wine, and ice-cold vinegar. Violently knead and squeeze the mixture by hand for three minutes until it stops looking like loose ground meat and transforms into a sticky, cohesive mass that clings to the bowl.

3. Fry a tiny portion to test the seasoning.

Before shaping, heat a drop of olive oil in a skillet and fry a dime-sized meatball of the raw mixture to ensure the salt and orange notes are balanced to your liking.

1. Shape the mixture into a tightly compressed log.

Scoop the sticky meat onto the lower third of a large sheet of plastic wrap and roughly shape it into an eight-inch cylinder. Fold the plastic over the meat and roll it forward tightly, then grab the excess wrap on either end and twist them in opposite directions to forcefully compress the sausage.

2. Let the meat rest in the refrigerator to cure and set.

Tie the twisted ends in a knot and place the log in the fridge for 12 to 24 hours. Do not skip this; it allows the salt to lightly cure the meat, the orange to penetrate the fat, and the protein structure to solidify.

3. Slice into rounds and sear.

When ready to serve, cut off the plastic ends, unroll the sausage, and slice it into half-inch rounds. Pan-fry in a lightly oiled skillet over medium heat for 3 to 4 minutes per side until a deep, caramelized crust forms.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Temperature is everything.**

If the pork fat gets too warm (above 40°F), it melts and smears, coating the proteins and preventing them from binding. Keep your meat and liquids ice cold to ensure a snappy, cohesive sausage that won't crumble in the pan.



Tirokafteri

Τυροκαυτερή

tee-ro-kaf-teh-REE

A proper Greek meze isn't just an appetizer; it's an excuse to linger over strong drinks and loud conversation. At the center of that spread sits Tirokafteri. In America, restaurants often purée this into a pale, soulless liquid, but the real version—the one your grandmother would whip up while yelling at someone to set the table—is beautifully rustic. It's thick, coarse, and aggressively flavorful, relying on the sharp bite of real block feta, the smoky sweetness of roasted peppers, and a kick of chili. Don't overthink it, and whatever you do, keep it away from the 'liquefy' button on your blender.

INGREDIENTS

10 oz	feta cheese <i>from a block stored in brine</i>	1 small	garlic <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>
2 small	jarred roasted red peppers <i>drained and patted completely dry</i>	1 clove	
1 med	red chili pepper <i>roughly chopped</i>	3 tbsp	full-fat plain Greek yogurt <i>strained</i>
		1 tbsp	red wine vinegar
		3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil

PREPARATION

- **Pat the jarred peppers completely dry.**

Moisture is the enemy of a good dip; if you don't aggressively dry the peppers with paper towels, your spread will turn into a watery soup.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pulse the flavor base into a coarse salsa.**

Place the thoroughly dried roasted red peppers, chili pepper, garlic, and red wine vinegar in a small food processor and pulse five or six times. Do not purée it; you want it chunky.

- 2. Mash the cheese by hand.**

Transfer the pepper mixture to a medium bowl and add the yogurt. Crumble the feta block directly into the bowl with your hands, then use a sturdy fork to mash it into a thick, cohesive paste that retains small, rustic chunks of cheese.

- 3. Fold in the olive oil.**

Slowly drizzle in the olive oil while gently folding the mixture with a spoon from the bottom up to create a velvety binder.

- 4. Chill for at least one hour before serving.**

This rest period is non-negotiable. As it sits in the fridge, the feta reabsorbs ambient moisture to thicken the dip, while the raw garlic and chili permeate the fats.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Buy block feta submerged in brine.**

Pre-crumbled feta is coated in anti-caking cellulose that will utterly destroy the creamy texture required for a proper dip.

- **Adjust the heat to your preference.**

Leave the seeds in the chili for a fiery kick, or remove them for a milder warmth. Half a teaspoon of crushed red pepper flakes works in a pinch.



Keftedakia

Κεφτεδάκια

kef-te-DAH-kyā

If there is one smell that universally drags a Greek-American kid straight back to their childhood kitchen, it is the sharp, herbaceous aroma of fresh mint and onions hitting hot olive oil. Keftedakia are the undisputed kings of the meze spread—small, aggressively herbaceous, and meant to be eaten with your hands. Forget the dense, sauce-drenched meatballs you throw over spaghetti, and step away from the dry breadcrumbs. The real grandmotherly magic relies on extreme kneading and chemical tenderizers: water-soaked rustic bread, the weeping juices of a grated onion, a splash of red wine vinegar, and a

hit of ouzo to break down the meat into a wildly juicy, bouncy emulsion. Make the mix in the morning, let it rest, and fry them up in minutes for an unforgettable plate of home.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	ground beef <i>80% lean</i>	1 tbsp	ouzo
3 oz	stale rustic bread or sourdough <i>crusts removed</i>	2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 cup	water or whole milk	1/3 cup	fresh spearmint <i>finely chopped</i>
1 med	yellow or red onion <i>grated on the large holes of a box grater, all juices retained</i>	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
2 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 tbsp	dried Greek oregano
1 large	egg	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 1/2 tbsp	red wine vinegar	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
		1/2 cup	olive oil

PREPARATION

- **Prepare your aromatics before you touch the meat.**

Chop the fresh herbs and grate the onion in advance, being sure to keep all the onion liquid that pools on the cutting board or in the bowl.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Soak and squeeze the stale bread.**

Place the crustless slices of stale bread in a shallow bowl and pour the water or milk over them. Let sit for 30 seconds until softened, then pick up the bread and squeeze it firmly in your fists to expel the excess liquid before crumbling it into a large mixing bowl.

1. Knead the mixture aggressively into an emulsion.

To the bowl with the bread, add the ground beef, grated onion and its juices, garlic, egg, red wine vinegar, ouzo, olive oil, mint, parsley, oregano, salt, and pepper. Roll up your sleeves and knead the mixture vigorously for five to seven minutes, mashing it together until it transforms into a pale, sticky, completely unified paste.

2. Refrigerate the meat to rest and hydrate.

Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap and place it in the refrigerator for at least one hour, or up to 24 hours. This resting period allows the bread to absorb the meat and onion juices while the vinegar and ouzo tenderize the meat proteins.

3. Shape the mixture into slightly flattened pucks.

Set up a wide, shallow plate with the flour and keep a small bowl of water nearby. Wet your fingers slightly, pinch off portions of the cold meat mixture, and roll them into one-inch balls. Gently press them between your palms to flatten them slightly; this shape ensures they fry evenly and develop a wider, crispier crust.

4. Shallow-fry the meatballs in hot olive oil.

Pour olive oil into a large, heavy-bottomed skillet until it is about a quarter-inch deep and heat over medium-high until it reaches 350°F. Working in batches, lightly dredge a few meatballs in the flour, shake off all the excess so only a microscopic dusting remains, and fry for three to four minutes per side until deeply caramelized and dark golden-brown.

5. Drain and serve immediately.

Transfer the fried keftedakia to a paper towel-lined plate to drain the excess oil. Serve hot and crispy alongside lemon wedges and cold tzatziki.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the panade.**

Using dry breadcrumbs is a distinctly Western shortcut that yields a dense, heavy meatball. Soaked and squeezed rustic bread acts as a sponge that holds onto rendered fat and onion juices as it cooks, resulting in an incredibly fluffy interior.

- **Weeknight baking alternative.**

If you want to avoid frying on a busy Tuesday, skip the flour dredge entirely. Place the naked, shaped meatballs on a lightly oiled, foil-lined baking sheet and bake in a preheated 400°F oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

- **Ouzo substitutions.**

Ouzo provides an authentic, subtle anise backbone and acts as a solvent for the herbs. If you do not have it, simply add a pinch of crushed aniseed and an extra splash of red wine vinegar.



Tzatziki tis Teibelias

Τζατζίκι της τεμπελιάς

tzah-tzee-kee tees tem-bel-yahs

In Greece, traditional tzatziki is an exercise in patience—grating cucumbers, salting them, wringing them out through a towel like a wet rag. But on a Tuesday night in an Ohio suburb, a pragmatic grandmother skips the chore. This is "lazy" tzatziki, the unspoken secret of the diaspora kitchen. Purists back in the village might scoff, but by insisting on whole-milk yogurt, sharp wine vinegar instead of the ubiquitous diner lemon juice, and punchy fresh garlic, you capture the exact, unapologetic soul of a meze spread in under three minutes. No wringing. Just pure kefi.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
must be 5% milkfat

**2 med
cloves** garlic
pressed or finely minced into a paste

1 1/2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tbsp red wine vinegar
or white wine vinegar

1 tsp dried mint
crushed gently between your fingers

1/2 tsp fine sea salt

PREPARATION

- **Acquire the right yogurt.**

The success of this lazy adaptation hinges entirely on the fat content. Do not attempt this with low-fat or non-fat yogurt; the milk fat is necessary to coat the palate and carry the garlic.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the ingredients in a medium serving bowl.**

Add the Greek yogurt, pressed garlic, extra virgin olive oil, vinegar, dried mint, and salt.

- 2. Whisk vigorously to emulsify the oil.**

Stir with a fork or small whisk until the olive oil is completely absorbed into the yogurt, leaving a smooth, glossy finish.

- 3. Rest in the refrigerator to mellow the raw garlic.**

You can serve this immediately, but giving it fifteen to thirty minutes allows the lactic acid of the yogurt to temper the harsh bite of the allium, marrying the flavors perfectly.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Mind the garlic.**

American supermarket garlic can be aggressively bitter depending on its age. If you are sensitive, dial it back to one clove, but never insult the dish with garlic powder.

- **Replace the missing cucumber.**

If you desperately miss the crunch and hydration of the traditional dip, slice a fresh cucumber into thick rounds and use them as chips to eat the sauce.



Kolokithokeftedes

Κολοκυθοκεφτέδες

ko-lo-kee-tho-kef-TEH-des

When you think of a Greek summer evening on the front porch, this is the exact smell. Authentic kolokithokeftedes aren't complicated, but they demand one non-negotiable grandmotherly secret: you must mercilessly wring the zucchini dry. Supermarket squash holds a massive amount of water, and water is the absolute enemy of a crispy fritter. There are no fake, Hollywood spice blends here—just the pure, nostalgic punch of fresh mint, dill, and salty feta held together with a clever mix of flour and breadcrumbs. Do it right, and it tastes exactly like the islands.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	green zucchini <i>ends trimmed</i>	1/4 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>finely grated</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	2 large	large eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
1/2 cup	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1/4 cup	yellow onion <i>grated and squeezed of juices</i>	1/2 tsp	baking powder
1/4 cup	fresh spearmint leaves <i>finely chopped</i>	1/4 cup	plain unseasoned breadcrumbs
1/4 cup	fresh dill <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
2 tbsp	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>	1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil
1 cup	block Greek feta cheese <i>crumbled by hand</i>	1/4 cup	neutral cooking oil

PREPARATION

- **Set up a draining station.**

Place a colander in your sink or over a large bowl to prepare for the crucial zucchini wringing.

- **Dry the feta.**

Crumble the block feta onto a plate and leave it uncovered in the fridge to dehydrate slightly, preventing a soggy batter later.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sweat and squeeze the zucchini.**

Grate the zucchini on the large holes of a box grater, toss with the kosher salt, and let it sit in the colander for 15 to 20 minutes before wringing it out mercilessly over the sink until bone dry.

1. Build the batter.

In a large bowl, thoroughly mix the squeezed zucchini, grated onion, scallions, mint, dill, parsley, and black pepper, then stir in the eggs. Fold in a pre-mixed blend of the flour, baking powder, and breadcrumbs, followed gently by the feta and Pecorino until just combined.

2. Fry the fritters.

Heat the olive and neutral oil blend in a large skillet over medium-high heat until a pinch of batter sizzles immediately. Drop tablespoons of batter into the pan, flattening them slightly, and fry in uncrowded batches for 2 to 3 minutes per side until deep, crispy golden brown.

3. Drain and serve.

Transfer the cooked fritters to a wire rack or paper towels to absorb excess oil, and serve hot or at room temperature with a generous dollop of cold tzatziki.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Adjust the binding if needed.**

If your mixture feels too wet and won't hold together when pinched, add another tablespoon of breadcrumbs to absorb the slack.

● **Don't crowd the pan.**

Frying too many fritters at once drops the oil temperature, ruining the physical barrier of steam and causing the batter to absorb grease like a sponge.

● **The oven method.**

For a lighter approach, form the fritters, coat lightly in breadcrumbs, brush with olive oil, and bake at 400°F for 20-25 minutes, flipping halfway.