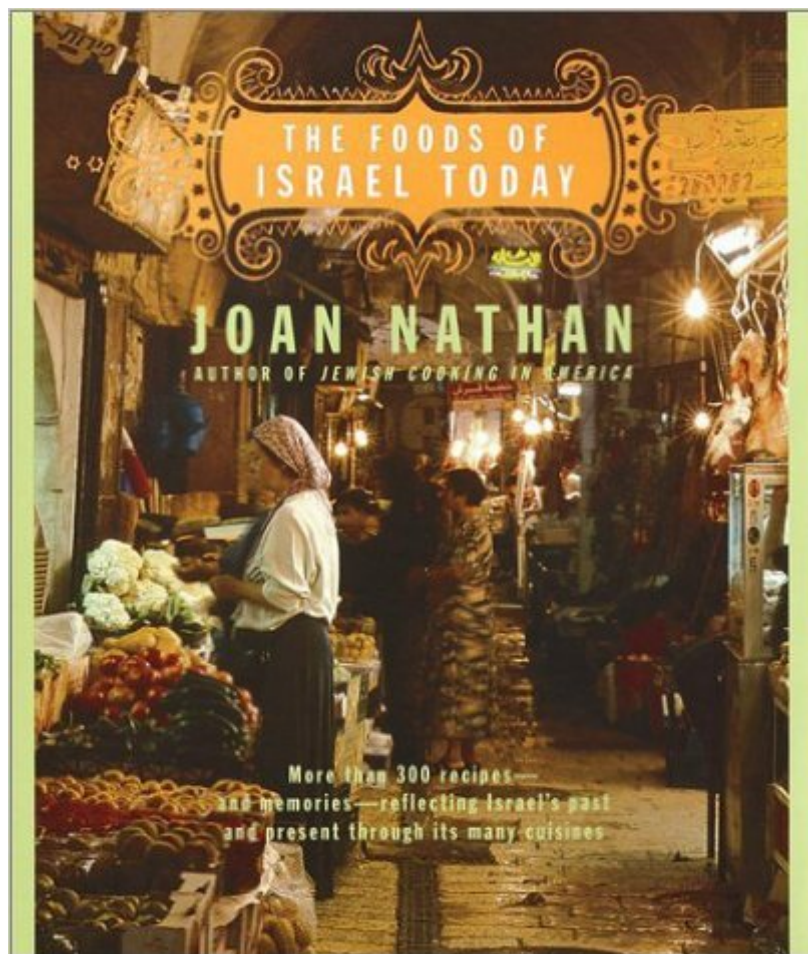


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The Foods Of Israel Today: More Than 300 Recipes--and Memories--Reflecting Israel's Past And Present Through Its Many Cuisines



Synopsis

"Joan Nathan has created a masterful blend of food and culture. She takes her reader on an extraordinary journey through the history of the land of Israel and the development of modern Israeli food. I was delighted to visit all the different ethnic communities that have contributed to Israeli cuisine, and my mouth watered just imagining the feast that Joan Nathan describes."--Teddy Kollek, former mayor of Jerusalem

In this richly evocative book, Joan Nathan captures the spirit of Israel today by exploring its multifaceted cuisine. She delves into the histories of the people already settled in this nearly barren land, as well as those who immigrated and helped to quickly transform it into a country bursting with new produce. It is a dramatic and moving saga, interlarded with more than two hundred wonderful recipes that represent all the varied ethnic backgrounds. Every recipe has a story, and through these tales the story of Israel emerges. Nathan shows how a typical Israeli menu today might include Middle Eastern hummus, a European schnitzel (made with native-raised turkey) accompanied by a Turkish eggplant salad and a Persian rice dish, with, perhaps, Jaffa Orange Delight for dessert. On Friday nights she visits with home cooks who may be preparing a traditional Libyan, Moroccan, Italian, or German meal for their families, the Sabbath being the focal point of the week throughout Israel (all her recipes are accordingly kosher). And she takes us to markets overflowing with vegetables, fruits, herbs, and spices. To gather the recipes and the stories, Nathan has been traveling the length and breadth of Israel for many years--to a Syrian Alawite village on the northern border for a vegetarian kubbeh and to Bet She'an for potato burekas; to the Red Sea for farmed sea bream and to the Sea of Galilee for St. Peter's fish; to Jerusalem's Bukharan Quarter for Iraqi pita bread baked in a wood-fired clay oven, to the Nahlaot neighborhood for Yemenite fried pancake-like bread, and to a Druse village for paper-thin lavash; to a tiny restaurant in Haifa for Turkish coconut cake and to a wedding at Kibbutz May'ayan Baruch in the upper Galilee for Moroccan sweet couscous; and to many, many other places. All the while, she seeks out biblical connections between ancient herbs and vegetables and their modern counterparts, between Esau's mess of pottage and today's popular tabouleh, and she delights us with tales of all she encounters. Throughout, Joan Nathan shows us how food in this politically turbulent land can be a way of breaking down barriers between Jews, Moslems, and Christians. Generously illustrated with colorful photographs, this enormously engaging book is one to treasure, not only as a splendid cookbook but also as a unique record of life in Israel.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

With 300 recipes, two pages of suggested Israeli restaurants, two web sources for ingredients, and nine suggested menus, Nathan shows the diverse cuisines of Israel's sabras and immigrants. THIS IS ISRAELI CUISINE that is being eaten in Israel. Includes turkey schnitzel, quick kibbutz apple cake, eggplant salad, and halvah chocolate cake. Includes Transylvania Green Bean Soup, a dessert salami (made of cookies) and the Chocolate Cake recipe from the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem. It includes over a dozen poultry recipes, including Doro Wat, a spicy chicken of Ethiopian Jews; and Hamim, an overnight chicken dish with cloves, spaghetti, cumin, cinnamon, and cardamom. Ms Nathan felt compelled to write this 400 page book on the night Itzhak Rabin was assassinated (Nov 4, 1995). Three decades ago, she lived in Israel for three years and worked in Jerusalem for Mayor Teddy Kollek for over two years (where Nathan co-wrote her first cookbook). The book is in the style of her earlier American Jewish Cooking book, namely, each recipe is preceded by an oral history, and there are histories, classic photos, and stories between the recipes. For example, to complement the recipe for Shakshuka, the reader learns about the Doktor Shakshuka Restaurant in old Jaffa and its owners. For the burekas recipe, we read about eating burekas at Jerusalem's city hall in the Seventies. While discussing the Friedman's farm in Rosh Pina, we get lots of farm recipes. A recipe for Kaiserschmarrn is coupled with an old picture of Beit Ha'Pancake's roadside gas station and a story about the search for the dish's Viennese roots. In addition to salad, tahina, and hummus recipes, Nathan lists 19 of the best places for hummus from Jerusalem to Akko to Haifa. Plus 12 happening places for falafel.

I tend to stick to the classic cookbooks (Claudia Roden for Middle Eastern food, for example), but I know I will be cooking from "The foods of Israel Today" for a long time. There are some terrific recipes in here. I do have a few problems with the book, though. One is its references to obscure ingredients, usually spices, with little help on where to get them or what substitutions might work. For example, what do you do if you don't happen to have ground sumac? Some recipes call for 'baharat', with no reference to what it is. The index points to Jaffa Orange-Ginger Chicken with Baharat, which offers a rather vague definition of a spice mixture that "varies from cook to cook." What to do? Another problem is the pictures, or lack of them. There are lots of somewhat murky black-and-white historical snapshots, some of them pretty interesting. But this food is out-of-the-ordinary for most cooks, and I'd like to see pictures of it. How to cut a potato in half and then get the stuffing to stay between the layers or cut a casserole into diamond shapes? Instead of a picture of the dish, there's a guy on a camel. Line drawings would be a big help for some of the techniques. The three 8-page tip-ins of color pictures are a strange selection, and to me, they don't capture the color and variety of Israeli food. They also make Israel look more third-world and primitive than it is. Another matter is whether everything can actually be made as it's described. For example, those stuffed vegetables. You are supposed to cut the top off tomatoes and onions, stuff them with a meat filling, and then brown them on all sides? I envision a mess, with most of the filling falling out into the frying oil. Wouldn't they brown sufficiently in the oven?

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