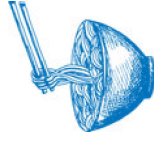


TASTES FROM HOME

Recipes from the Refugee Community



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



PREFACE

In writing the articles for this cookbook, I had the privilege and pleasure of speaking with refugees from all over the world who now call Canada home. Sometimes we had the good fortune of meeting in person, but because this project originated during the 2020 pandemic, often we spoke over the phone or through a video call, each of us holed up in our homes.

They shared their stories, and they shared their recipes. From one foodie to another, the excitement and pride each person felt about their recipes was palpable. For many, the recipes hold a personal connection to a family member or to a memory, and the food is an indisputable connection to their culture.

Each person has a unique story, with different outlooks, challenges, and rewards, but I was struck by one thing they all had in common—a desire to give back to Canada.

From the Mexican restaurant owner who plans to employ dozens of Canadians, to the Syrian entrepreneur who donated the proceeds from his chocolate factory to Canadians impacted by wildfires, to the former Governor General who became a figurehead for the country, each person expressed profound gratitude and an eagerness to help the country that took them in.

We often hear about refugees in abstract faraway terms, through statistics about the number of people fleeing from one country to another, but in speaking with these 14 people those statistics became humanized and the abstract became real experiences.

Their stories are captivating, their recipes are mouthwatering, and I hope you enjoy both in the following pages.

—Aileen Doyle, *Writer*

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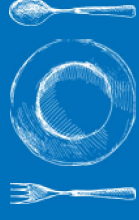
INGREDIENT LIST

Recipes in this cookbook were sourced from all around the world, bringing with them flavours that are unique and rich in culture. The following ingredients may require a visit to your local international grocery store.

- '5 spices' (cinnamon, fennel seeds, star anise, Sichuan pepper/corn and cloves)
- ADJA spice cubes for seasoning
- Ancho chilies
- Banana leaves
- Barley flour
- Beef consommé powder
- Cal Mexicana or "pickling lime"
- Cashew apples or cashew fruit juice (*jugo de marañón*)
- Ceylon cinnamon
- Dry whole yellow corn "maize"
- Epazote sprig
- Extra broad egg noodles
- Fenugreek seeds
- Fine bulgur
- Fish sauce
- Fresh nixtamal masa
- Fumbwa
- Ghee
- Greek Mistika
- Ground cassava leaves
- Ground mahlab
- Guajillo chilies
- Jamaican allspice berries
- Lemongrass
- Orange blossom water
- Orange flower water
- Oyster sauce
- Palm oil
- Pepper paste
- Pomegranate molasses
- Pondu Maggi
- Pondu Onga
- Pork butt
- Rayco
- Rice flour
- Rose water
- Schmaltz
- Semolina
- Sodium glutamate
- Sumac
- Sweet black pepper
- Swordfish steaks
- Teff flour
- Teriyaki sauce
- Vermouth or Chinese wine
- Wheat flour

“Seven decades on, forced human displacement remains a global concern. The context is different, but the complexity remains immense. Today’s refugee crises are part of a growing flow of human mobility, driven by many overlapping elements.”

—**Filippo Grandi**, UN High Commissioner for Refugees



INTRODUCTION



Signature of the 1951 Refugee Convention in Geneva, Switzerland. (Seated left to right) John Humphrey, Director of the Human Rights Division; Knud Larsen (Denmark) President of the Conference; Gerrit van Heuven Goedhart, High Commissioner for Refugees.

Food has a way of connecting us all. The sharing of food, “breaking bread together” is the story of human interactions. But these interactions have not always been easy amongst us.

Seventy years ago, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) was brought into existence after the tumultuous Second World War left millions searching for a home. Today, there are almost 80 million people who are globally displaced due to violence, conflict and persecution, making UNHCR’s work as vital as ever.

UNHCR Canada’s 70th anniversary cookbook project is an effort to help bring awareness and to celebrate the resilient individuals from across the globe who left their country of origin to make a home in Canada. *Tastes From Home: Recipes from the Refugee Community* offers an opportunity for us all to experience the rich

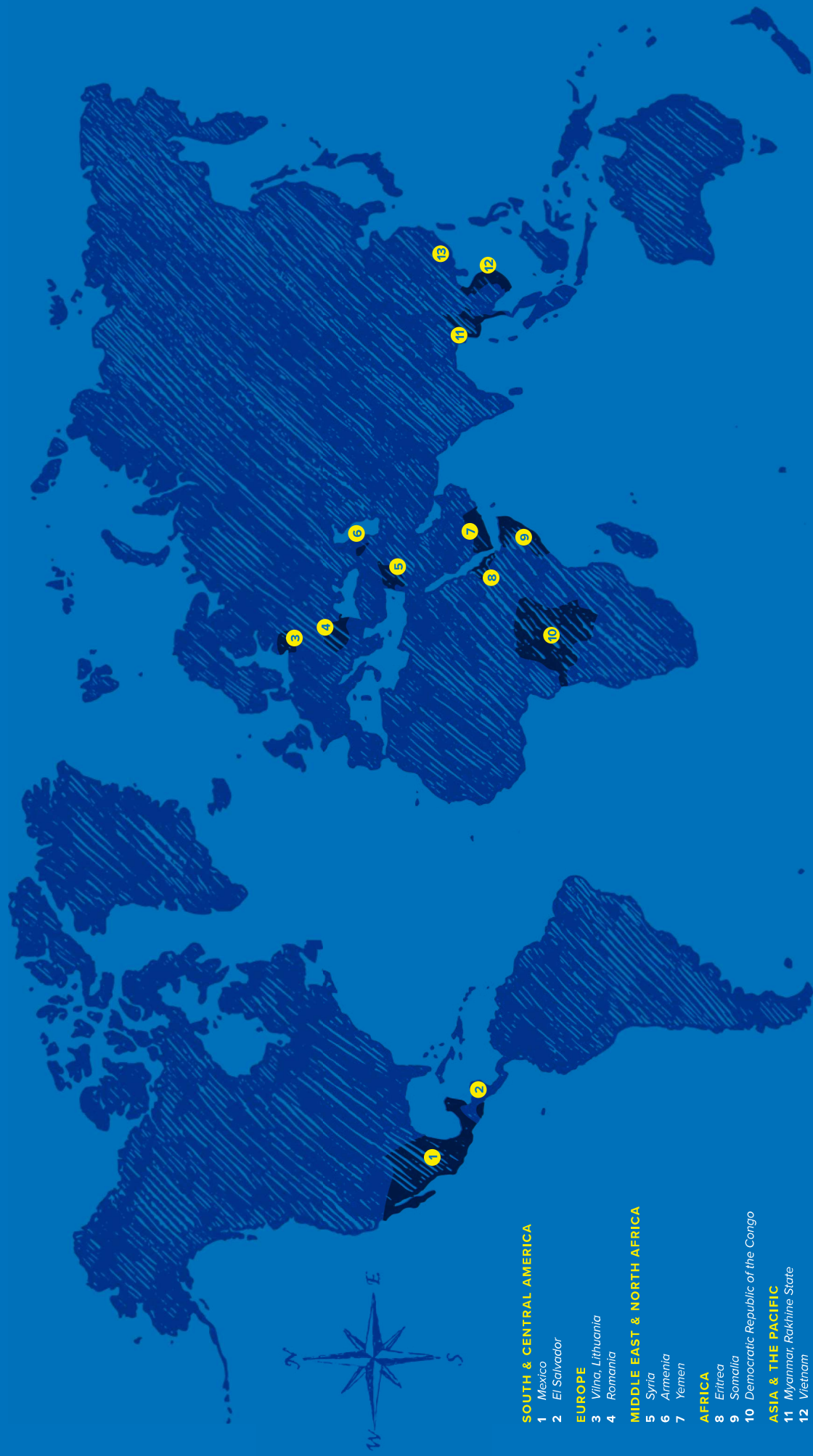
cultural backgrounds of former refugees through the food that has special and significant meaning to their lives.

With tens of millions of people in need of refuge—and the number of those displaced only growing—UNHCR’s work is immense and the need remains great. We are on the ground in more than 130 countries in some of the most isolated, volatile, and challenging places in the world, helping those who need it most.

UNHCR finds solutions to help refugees rebuild their lives—assisting in resettlement and finding new homes—like Canada.

Canada has welcomed more than one million refugees since 1980. Canada has been widely regarded as a haven for displaced people since the aftermath of the Second World War, from providing refuge to those fleeing from Socialism, Nazism, Communism and Soviet occupation in the 1950s, to welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015.

With the help of our supporters, UNHCR is enabled to reach those most in need of our help, like a displaced child who is in search of an education, an elderly refugee grandparent who hopes for a better life for their families, and the refugees who contributed recipes to this cookbook. It is for these inspiring people—those who fled their homes in search of safety and a better future—that this cookbook is for: to build support for UNHCR and its critical mission of safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees. «



SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

- 1 Mexico
- 2 El Salvador

EUROPE

- 3 Vilna, Lithuania
- 4 Romania

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

- 5 Syria
- 6 Armenia
- 7 Yemen

AFRICA

- 8 Eritrea
- 9 Somalia
- 10 Democratic Republic of the Congo

ASIA & THE PACIFIC

- 11 Myanmar, Rakhine State
- 12 Vietnam
- 13 Hong Kong



ANUARITE MANYOHA
Democratic Republic of the Congo

14 Pondou
(*Cassava leaf soup*)

This Congolese soup is best for sharing. A popular staple in the Congo, this dish is tasty, salty, and filling.

16 Fish Liboke
(*BBQ fish in foil paper*)

With your choice of fish, this recipe is unique in that your meal is cooked using banana leaves!

18 Fumbwa
(*Congolese spinach stew*)

Fumbwa—the Congolese word for wild spinach—is a creamy stew made with fish.



AMINA ABDULRAHIM
Eritrea

22 Injera Bread

This sour-fermented flatbread has a spongy texture and is best served alongside stews (*like Zigni!*)

24 Zigni
(*Chicken stew*)

This traditional Eritrean stew is made with chicken and tomatoes. It's best enjoyed with a side of injera bread.

26 Juice of Fenugreek

This simple beverage is made using fenugreek seed and citrus fruits. It can be served as is, or you can make it sweeter by using honey or sugar.



HON. AHMED HUSSEN
Somalia

30 Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce and Basil

Italian influence on Somali cuisine can only mean one thing: pasta!

32 Grilled Swordfish

Growing up on a coastal city in Somalia, seafood was a staple in Minister Hussen's home—especially this delicious grilled swordfish.

34 Garlic-Butter Scallops

Minister Hussen's childhood favourite. Pan seared with a delicious buttery garlic herb sauce, these garlic-butter scallops make for an unforgettable dinner.



AFRICA

More than a quarter of the world's refugee population lives in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the number of refugees having almost tripled over the course of a decade. More than 26.4 million people in Africa have been displaced, increasing significantly in recent years because of civil conflicts in the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, South Sudan, and Burundi.

In addition to civil conflicts, Sub-Saharan Africa is plagued with drought, high levels of food insecurity, cholera outbreaks, and other troubles. Heavy rains in West and Central Africa have also led to added displacement because of landslides and flooding.

UNHCR continues to work tirelessly to help displaced people access services like health care, food, clean water, education, and legal assistance in the region. Still, there is considerably more that can be done to provide support to families in need.

As varied as the challenges many people in Sub-Saharan Africa face, so are its countries. The region is rich in culture, with customs that are as diverse as the many communities living there.

There are more than 1,000 local dialects and languages, and the food is colourful, full of flavours, and is as varied as the region. Stews are common, as are grilled meats like beef, lamb, and fish, and plantains are also often eaten as a side dish. Popular dishes include injera, a flatbread eaten with different stews, and fufu, a dough made from cassava flour.

Over the years, as people from countries throughout Africa have resettled and made Canada their home, we have seen the resiliency and drive to shape not only their own lives but future generations in Canada as well. The vibrant cultures and communities are aptly shown in the following stories of a grandmother, a personal support worker, and a Member of Parliament. «



ANUARITE MANYOHA / Democratic Republic of the Congo

“There was sugar in everything!”

Anuarite Manyoha bursts out laughing as she describes her first experience with Canadian food. She is on a break from work as a personal support worker at a long-term care home in Ottawa. The 22-year-old’s laughter is loud and infectious.

“They would serve us chicken, but they put honey in it. Whatever food you had to taste, there was sugar in it, and back home we don’t really use sugar.”

Food was one of many things Anuarite had to get used to when she came to Canada as a refugee. She, along with her parents and 10 siblings, arrived in the thick of winter in January of 2014. They landed at Pearson airport in Toronto from Uganda after fleeing their home country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

“They gave us boots, they gave us winter jackets, gloves, stuff to protect our ears. But when we first looked at them—the boots, they looked really funny ‘cause we had never seen such huge boots!”

Anuarite is the eldest of the siblings. She was 16 when she arrived in Canada. She explains that back in the DRC her father was part of a group that used to rescue child soldiers from rebels.

“I don’t know how they would do it, but they would steal the kids back from the rebels, and bring them back to their parents,” she explains.

When the rebels caught wind of what her father was doing, he went into hiding. But the rebels targeted her mother instead and shot her in the jaw and hand. She survived, and the entire family fled to Uganda. They spent the next five years there before eventually claiming refugee status in Canada.

Anuarite and her family settled in Ottawa. An aunt and uncle who lived there helped them navigate their new lives, cooking up their favourite dishes from the DRC while they

adjusted to the new (reportedly sweet!) taste of food in North America.

She now cooks dishes from the DRC herself. Pondo soup is one of her favourites. The dish uses the leaves of cassava—a root vegetable and a staple in the DRC—as a base. Anuarite explains that the soup is served with fufu, a type of dumpling.

She says the flavours remind her of family get-togethers, with her parents and siblings gathered around the table, sharing the same dish. “We all share one plate of soup,” she says with a grin. “It will be one plate of soup for four people. You just put it in the middle and surround the table.”

“Food back home is another way of bonding,” says Anuarite. “Back home, even here, we all eat as a family.”

While there were challenges adjusting to her new life in North America, Anuarite says she is eternally grateful for the security she feels here, and for the people she has met.

“I’ve had so many opportunities here in Canada. I’ve met people I don’t think I would have ever met if I’d stayed in Congo.”

Nowadays, she lives on her own in an apartment in the west end of Ottawa. It is a quiet contrast to the house she and her entire family of 13 lived in when they first arrived, but she sees her family often and says they still cook and enjoy meals together. “It brings a different type of bonding in the family. That love, the connection, and you get to enjoy the time.” She smiles cheerfully. “It brings good memories.” «



Pondou of Congo / Saka-Saka

(Cassava leaf soup)

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds of meat or fish
- 2 pounds of ground cassava leaves
- 4 green peppers
- 2–3 eggplants, chopped
- 3 leek onions, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 8 garlic cloves, pounded
- 3 tablespoons of palm oil
- 2 tablespoons of Pondou Onga or all-purpose seasoning
- 2 packages of Pondou Maggi or chicken bouillon (seasoning)
- 2 packages of ADJA Spice cubes for seasoning (optional)
- A pinch of sodium glutamate (optional)
- Salt, to taste

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash and finely chop the onions, green peppers, leeks and garlic and grind them together in a blender.
 - 2 Fill a large pot with water and let it boil.
 - 3 Once the water is boiled, add the grounded cassava leaves along with blended mixture and chopped eggplant.
 - 4 For meat—add it along with the cassava leaves to ensure that the meat becomes tender.
 - 5 For fish—let the cassava leaves boil first for about 30 minutes and then add the fish.
 - 6 Add in the seasoning and let the pondou cook for 15–30 minutes before adding the palm oil.
 - 7 Mix the pondou, cover and let it simmer for another 20–45 minutes on medium heat.
- To serve, pondou goes best with fufu or rice.

TIP

- Many of the ingredients can be found in your local African stores.
- In Congolese cooking, leafy green vegetables are boiled with onions and tomatoes prior to adding palm oil. It's considered a flavour enhancer.
- A good substitute for cassava leaves is chopped spinach.
- Some recipes have also added peanut butter or groundnut paste for taste.



Fish Liboké (BBQ Fish in foil paper)

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 6 filets of fish (*tilapia* or *pangasus*)
- 6 banana leaves or foil paper as a substitute
- 5 garlic gloves, chopped
- 2–3 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 inches of fresh ginger, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 celery, chopped
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 1 hot pepper, finely chopped
- 2–4 teaspoons of lemon juice
- 2 fish Maggi cubes or fish bouillon (seasoning)
- 1 tablespoon of Rayco or all-purpose seasoning

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Mix the chopped tomatoes, green pepper, celery, red onion, hot pepper, garlic, and ginger in one large bowl.
- 2 To the vegetable mixture, add a bit of water, oil, lemon juice, and seasonings.
- 3 If using banana leaves, trim off the tough sides and run the leaf quickly over the stove or in a pot of boiling water until it softens.
- 4 In the banana leaf or foil paper, place the fish and seasoned vegetable mixture together.
- 5 Fold the leaf like a burrito, making sure that the fish is well wrapped and that no steam escapes.
- 6 Place the wraps in a steamer or a large pan containing water and let it steam for 30–45 minutes on a medium-high heat.

To serve, open the banana leaf on a plate and serve with a side of fufu.

TIP

- Liboké is a traditional mode of cooking in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo.
- If you do not have a steamer, fill a pot with an inch of water and place a metal strainer or colander with enough room so that the water does not touch the strainer.



Fumbwa (Congolese Spinach Stew)

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1–2 dry fish
- 2 pounds of Fumbwa or finely chopped spinach
- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 green onion, chopped
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- 4 tablespoons of peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons of salt (seasoning)
- 2 packets of vegetable spice (seasoning)
- 2 fish cubes (seasoning)
- 2 tablespoons of vegetable or olive oil

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash your Fumbwa in very hot water to remove all the hard stems.
- 2 Chop all of your vegetables, and thoroughly wash your fish.
- 3 In a pot, boil water over medium heat and add the Fumbwa. Continue boiling for 30 to 45 minutes.
- 4 In the same pot, add your green and red onions, garlic, fish, tomatoes, green pepper, and seasonings.
- 5 Allow it to simmer for 10 minutes.
- 6 In a separate bowl, mix the peanut butter with a bit of water and add the mixture to the Fumbwa.
- 7 Add your vegetable oil and leave it to simmer for about 10 to 20 minutes.

To serve, Fumbwa is traditionally paired with fufu, rice or potatoes.

TIP

- In Congolese cooking, leafy green vegetables are boiled with onions and tomatoes prior to adding palm oil. It's considered a flavour enhancer.
- Careful with the salt and stock as the dry fish can already be quite salty.



AMINA ABDULRAHIM / Eritrea

“Cooking is a way of bringing memories alive.”

Amina Abdulrahim says she felt at ease the minute she landed in Canada. “I felt very comfortable.” She smiles kindly. She is sitting on a couch in the living room of her 14th floor apartment in Toronto’s east end. She speaks in Arabic, and her friend and teacher Kholoud Khafaja translates for her.

“Because she was facing challenges back home, the moment she reached Canada, she felt that the comfort was here,” explains Kholoud. The two women met through the Arab Community Centre of Toronto, where Kholoud was teaching part of a program called the Wallima Arab Kitchen, which empowers newcomer Canadians to learn English and life skills while cooking together.

“If I told her—Here, we have a newcomer. Would you mind coming with me so we can help them?”—she is ready to tell her experience,” adds Kholoud. Amina chuckles bashfully.

Amina is used to new beginnings. She fled her home of Eritrea in the 1980s when she was 20 years old, during a decades-long fight for independence from Ethiopia. “We faced a very critical situation,” Amina explains. “Including torture, killing, arrests.”

She moved to Saudi Arabia, where she lived for 30 years. She met her husband there, and they started a family. But when the government introduced a new policy that prioritized jobs for Saudi nationals, her husband, who is also Eritrean, lost his job.

She arrived in Toronto in December 2016 with two of her sons and was greeted by her daughter, who had relocated to the city three years earlier. Amina’s daughter cooked for her and helped show her where to find ingredients to make Eritrean meals. “Everything was settled for me,” Amina says with a smile. She loves to cook, and despite leaving her native country more than 30 years ago she still cooks Eritrean food regularly.

“When I start cooking, all of the nice and happy memories come into my mind,” she explains, her face lighting up. Zigni is a dish she particularly enjoys. The traditional chicken stew is typically made for large groups during festive occasions, and was served at her daughter’s wedding in Saudi Arabia.

Kholoud chimes in. “She doesn’t feel happy if she eats by herself. She has to invite friends. She has to call me and tell me ‘Kholoud, I cooked this, I want you to taste it.’ She’s very generous.” Amina blushes at the praise.

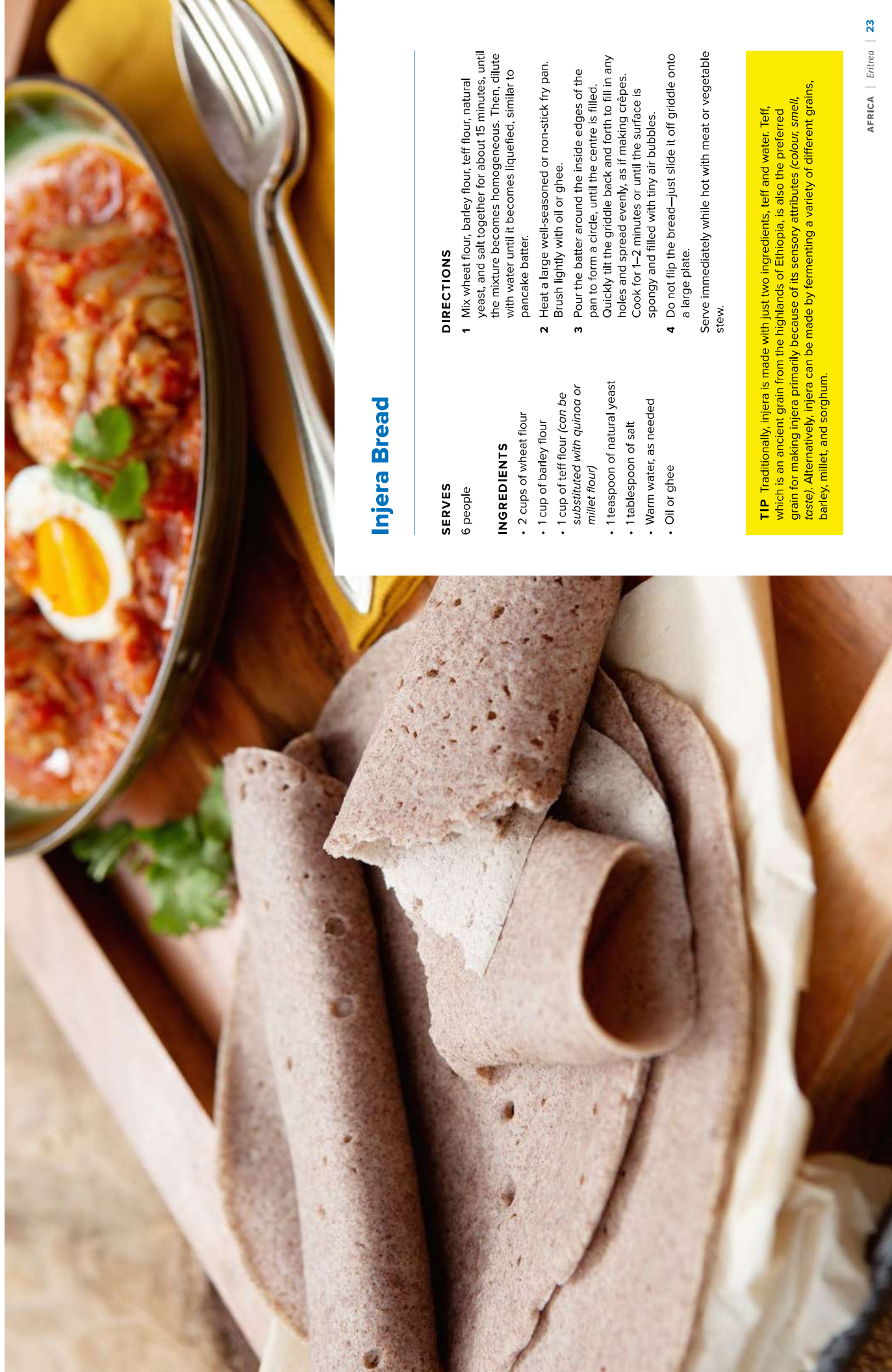
“When I start cooking, all of the nice and happy memories come into my mind.”

Amina says the transition to Canada has been relatively smooth, and she enjoys the freedom she has here. “In Eritrea, the situation was very difficult, as the conflict was at its peak, and in Saudi Arabia, social life was not available there.” She pauses. “Here in Canada, I feel like it is more comfortable because I can do whatever I like to do in a peaceful way.”

Amina now spends her time taking English as a Second Language classes and taking part in activities through the Arab Community Centre.

“When she goes to join any of our activities, she has to bring something in hand,” says Kholoud. “She has to prepare something. ‘Please taste our food.’ That is Amina.”

With a gentle smile, Amina explains that sharing food is very important in her culture. “I remember when my mom cooked for me at my wedding. I remember when I cooked for my daughter at her graduation parties. Cooking is a way of bringing memories alive.” But also, she acknowledges, a way of creating new ones too. «



Injera Bread

SERVES

6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups of wheat flour
- 1 cup of barley flour
- 1 cup of teff flour (*can be substituted with quinoa or millet flour*)
- 1 teaspoon of natural yeast
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- Warm water, as needed
- Oil or ghee

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Mix wheat flour, barley flour, teff flour, natural yeast, and salt together for about 15 minutes, until the mixture becomes homogeneous. Then, dilute with water until it becomes liquefied, similar to pancake batter.
 - 2 Heat a large well-seasoned or non-stick fry pan. Brush lightly with oil or ghee.
 - 3 Pour the batter around the inside edges of the pan to form a circle, until the centre is filled. Quickly tilt the griddle back and forth to fill in any holes and spread evenly, as if making crêpes. Cook for 1–2 minutes or until the surface is spongy and filled with tiny air bubbles.
 - 4 Do not flip the bread—just slide it off griddle onto a large plate.
- Serve immediately while hot with meat or vegetable stew.

TIP Traditionally, injera is made with just two ingredients, teff and water. Teff, which is an ancient grain from the highlands of Ethiopia, is also the preferred grain for making injera primarily because of its sensory attributes (*colour, smell, taste*). Alternatively, injera can be made by fermenting a variety of different grains, barley, millet, and sorghum.



Zigni (Chicken Stew)

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds of chicken
- 4 big tomatoes, crushed
- 6–8 eggs, hardboiled
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tablespoons of ghee or vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons of pepper paste
- 2 tablespoons of ghee or vegetable oil
- $\frac{2}{3}$ teaspoon of ginger, grated
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of black pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a large pot, heat the oil and add the onions. Fry until it is golden, then add garlic and pepper paste.
 - 2 Add the crushed tomato and cook for 20 minutes.
 - 3 Cut chicken into pieces. Wash it well with cold water.
 - 4 Add the chicken to the large pot and continue cooking for another 20 minutes.
 - 5 Add ghee, ginger, black pepper and keep cooking for another 10 minutes.
 - 6 In a separate pot, boil the eggs. Next, peel the eggs and add them to the cooked stew.
- To serve, accompany with injera bread.

TIP If you want to ensure that the meat is tender, simmer gently for 60 to 90 minutes.



Juice of Fenugreek

SERVES

6 to 8 people

INGREDIENTS

- 8 cups of water
- 1 cup of fenugreek seeds
- 1 orange
- 1 lime
- 1 teaspoon of sugar
- Warm water

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Soak the fenugreek in warm water for 3–4 hours to minimize bitterness.
- 2 Strain, then mix the fenugreek in a blender with 1 teaspoon of sugar.
- 3 Set aside for 30 minutes and mix again.
- 4 Add 8 cups of water at room temperature and set it aside for two days.
- 5 Cut the orange and lime into four pieces and add it to the juice.
- 6 Cover and close tightly with no air for two days.
- 7 Strain the liquid.
To serve, add some sugar or honey. Keep refrigerated.



THE HONOURABLE AHMED HUSSEN / Somalia

“I got a lot of help from Canadians.”

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen never planned to be a politician, and certainly not at the federal level. “I never wanted to run, and I was never going to run,” he explains from his office in Toronto. It is a Sunday, and yet the Member of Parliament and cabinet minister has a packed agenda of phone calls, meetings, and other obligations. “I never envisioned myself as a big-letter politician, as opposed to a community activist,” he adds, as he leans forward in his chair. But when he saw services that helped him as a young refugee getting cut or scaled back, he changed his mind.

“Community libraries were being attacked and slashed,” he says. “I printed my first resume in my neighbourhood library. I didn’t have a printer at the time. So, it’s as simple as that. Or housing, or transit,” he adds.

Hussen arrived in Canada when he was 16 years old, after fleeing war-torn Somalia where he was born. He grew up by the Indian Ocean, in the country’s capital of Mogadishu, and had a pleasant childhood—filled with memories of time spent on the coast, seafood dinners with family, or visits to the cinema. Then conflict crept into his city.

“Slowly but surely, the troubles in the regions started to come closer and closer to Mogadishu,” he explains. “We had to flee, collectively as a family.” He pauses. “I’m pretty sure that if we had stayed behind, there would be a very high likelihood that we would have been killed.”

Hussen and his family fled to Kenya, where he stayed for about a year until his parents bought him a plane ticket to Toronto, where two of his brothers and several cousins lived.

He remembers the day he arrived, vividly. “I came on February 27th, 1993, at 2:30 pm,” he recalls. “It was the storm of the century.” He chuckles. “I remember walking out of the airport with a very light leather jacket, and the wind and the cold hit my face, and I just couldn’t believe just how severely cold it was.” He laughs.

After completing high school in Hamilton, Ontario, he returned to Toronto for university and began volunteering in the community.

“I felt I had to give back to this wonderful country that not only gave me sanctuary but also helped me along the way to develop as a person,” he explains. “I got a lot of help from Canadians,” he reveals. “Whether it was my high school track and field coach, whether it was my teachers in high school, my professors in university, my neighbours, my first employers, and so on. All of those people helped me.”

Volunteering led to community activism. He lobbied for funds to clean up Regent Park, a low-income neighborhood in Toronto where he once lived, and helped secure 500 million dollars to revitalize the area for the 15,000 residents living there. He went on to become a lawyer specializing in immigration and refugee law, criminal defence, and human rights, and in 2015, the first-time politician swept to victory in his Toronto riding of York South-Weston. Two years later, he was appointed Minister of Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees of Canada.

Hussen says his background has given him a unique perspective and has also allowed him to break down stereotypes. “As Minister of Immigration, I was able to communicate to Canadians constantly, that refugees also make a contribution to Canada. That refugees want to contribute.”

He shares that he once sat next to a minister from Europe at a United Nations meeting, who was insulting refugees. “Saying they don’t have skills, they don’t add anything,” Hussen says.

“He didn’t realize I was a former refugee from Canada.” Hussen tilts his head to the side. “Just my mere presence was a rebuttal to everything he was claiming. And when I spoke, it was a good rebuttal to the falsehoods that he was trying to get across.”

Hussen won his second election in 2019 and is now the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. He says it is important for him to use his experience to communicate to Canadians, and the world, about the plight of refugees. He leans on his desk, a display of degrees visible on the wall behind him. “But also, what can happen when refugees are given an opportunity to restart their lives in a new land.” «



Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce and Basil

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound of spaghetti
- 3 tomatoes, finely chopped
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons of basil, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place tomatoes and onion in a large saucepan and cook over low to medium heat for 30 to 90 minutes, stirring often until it reaches a consistency you like. A longer cooking time will result in a thicker sauce.
- 2 Place the spaghetti into a pot with boiling water and cook for 12 to 15 minutes.
- 3 Once the tomato sauce is ready, add the fresh basil and salt and pepper to taste.
- 4 To serve, strain the cooked spaghetti and mix thoroughly with the cooked tomato sauce and olive oil.

TIP

- Italian influence on Somali cuisine has meant a lot of dishes from Mogadishu are pasta based.
- To cook a quicker pasta sauce, you can use canned diced tomatoes.



Grilled Swordfish

SERVES

6 to 8 people

INGREDIENTS

- 4 swordfish steaks, about 5 to 6 ounces each
- 6–12 fresh garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- ½ cup of extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon of coriander
- ¾ teaspoon of cumin
- ½ to 1 teaspoon of sweet paprika
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- Fresh parsley (optional)
- Crushed red pepper or red pepper flakes (optional)

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Mix all the seasoning and spices in a blender (*garlic cloves, olive oil, coriander, cumin, paprika, salt and pepper*) until it becomes a smooth marinade.
- 2 Dry the swordfish steaks by patting down with a paper napkin.
- 3 Mix the swordfish and marinade inside a freezer bag and set it aside in the fridge for one hour.
- 4 Grill the marinated swordfish steak 3 or 4 minutes on each side until it starts to flake.
- 5 Serve with your favourite side such as rice or salad.

To serve, splash with fresh lemon juice. Garnish with fresh parsley and red pepper flakes.

TIP This swordfish recipe takes on Mediterranean influence.



Garlic-Butter Scallops

SERVES

3 to 4 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound of large sea scallops
- 2 tablespoons of butter
- 1 tablespoon of minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon of fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- ¼ teaspoon of pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Rinse the scallops with cold water then pat them dry.
- 2** Season the scallops with the salt and pepper.
- 3** In a non-stick pan, heat the butter over medium high heat and add the scallops.
- 4** After 1–2 minutes, add the minced garlic and let the scallops cook until golden brown and opaque in the middle.
- 5** To serve, transfer the scallops to a bowl or serving plate and drizzle the lemon juice over the cooked scallops.

TIP Seafood dishes are very popular in Mogadishu due to location on the coast. For best taste, use fresh garlic and lemon juice.



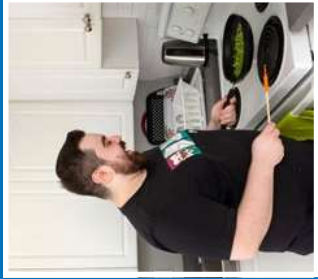
TAREQ HADHAD
Syria

40 Nightingale's Nest
(*'Ish El Bulbul*)

Made with delicious filo pastry, pistachio nuts and hints of citrus, this is a wonderfully sweet dessert.

42 Chocolate Wrap

Chocolate, hazelnuts and caramel wrapped up in a crêpe? It's an easy and quick dessert that everyone will love.



DIKRAN K. TOUMAS
Armenia/Syria

46 Armenian Manti

These traditional dumplings are filled with beef and served with a tangy yogurt-garlic sauce.

48 Kofta (*Stuffed meatballs*)

Stuffed meatballs don't get better than this. Often served with pita and salad, Kofta has an indistinguishable flavour.



ZEKRAH AMEEN
Yemen

52 Zurbian

(*Rice, potato, lamb dish*)

A traditional meal, often reserved for special occasions, made from lamb and potatoes.

54 Bint Al-Shan
(*Sweet Honey Cake*)

This delectable dessert from Yemen is made from dough and sweet honey.



AYA WADI Syria

58 Ma'amoul Cookies

These sweet little cookies can be filled with nuts or dates—either way, it's a delicious treat. They also make for a perfect pairing with Arabic coffee and chocolate.

60 Ouzi

This unique dinner dish features golden-brown pastry filled with rice, vegetables and chicken or beef.

62 Muhammara with Walnut

This roasted red pepper dip has a sweet and slightly smoky flavor. With just a hint of spice, it goes well with warm pita bread or crackers.

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



In recent years, an increasing number of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have found a new home in Canada. In 2015, the Canadian government completed a seven-year commitment of welcoming more than 23,000 refugees from Iraq, and made a new commitment to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in just 100 days.

There are some 15 million displaced people in the region. Most have been uprooted due to conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen—three of the largest and most violent displacement crises in the world.

Across the region, UNHCR staff continue to deliver life-saving assistance to the millions of people who have been driven from their homes.

The situation in Syria has caused the world's largest refugee crisis, and the need for humanitarian aid and protection continues as the war rages on. Millions

of Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries, many risking their lives to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea.

While many refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have recently made Canada their home, they have been settling in Canada for decades, from the Palestinian Arabs fleeing the Israel-Arab war in the 1950s to the significant number of Iranian refugees arriving in the late 1970s.

Whether they arrived in the 1950s or in recent years, refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have made a marked impact on Canada. In the following stories, you will hear from three Syrian refugees, who, after fleeing to Turkey and Lebanon, have now found safety and a home in Canada and have brought with them their favourite recipes.

Middle Eastern and North African cuisine is varied and has increased in popularity in North America in recent years. Common ingredients include olives, honey, dates, sesame seeds, chickpeas, and mint, and popular dishes include kebabs, baklava, and falafel. In the following recipes, refugees from Syria, Yemen and Armenia share the dishes that are unique to where they are from, and the flavours that make them special. «



TAREQ HADHAD / Syria

"What we call challenges in life are blessings." **Tareq Hadhad** smiles warmly. His optimism is far from common, but his overwhelming ability to look on the bright side may also be what has propelled the refugee and young CEO to international success.

He is sitting comfortably at his desk, in a new office in his hometown of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. He pauses. "I think, surviving a war and being fortunate to live again, to have another chance at life, makes you evaluate things differently."

Tareq grew up in Syria. His father owned a chocolate factory in Damascus, and Tareq was planning to become a doctor. But when Syria erupted into civil war following the Arab Spring in 2011, his life changed dramatically. "We didn't know what was going on because, at that time, no one really knew what war was like."

Tareq remembers the first day he saw tanks and soldiers on the streets of his city. It was a summer evening, and he and his family were eating dinner. "We started hearing explosions all around the buildings," he says. They quickly hid in the basement of their house. "We were stuck there in a little tiny room in the basement, without food, without electricity, without water, without medicine, for five days."

As bombs rained down on Damascus, Tareq and his family did their best to continue running the family business. Then one day Tareq received a call from his father at work. "He said: 'I am hearing explosions around the factory.'" Tareq urged him to leave, but his father refused. He says his father was concerned about his workers, so he made sure every one of them left before he did. "My father was the last to lock up," Tareq explains. "Ten minutes after everyone had left, the whole factory was bombed by an airstrike."

Tareq and his family fled to Lebanon, where they stayed in a refugee camp for three years until they were sponsored by a group of Canadians, who fundraised to bring a Syrian family to their small town in Nova Scotia. "I really thought that whoever applied through the government—made the sponsorship, the fundraising—should be such a kind person, because they are bringing someone they don't know from overseas to start his new life."

Tareq flew to Canada first. His parents and siblings would follow a few weeks later. He arrived in Antigonish, a town of just over 4,000 people, on December 19, 2015—just days before Christmas. He stayed with a local family for almost a week. He learned about Secret Santa, tasted his first dessert made from apples (*la pie*) and met people across the community. "I was invited to a street hockey game on Boxing Day," he says with a grin.

"It was a great time for me to connect with the community as a newcomer."

When his parents and siblings arrived in January 2016, they decided to experiment with chocolate-making in Canada. "I just felt it would benefit our community a lot if we started our own business," Tareq explains.

They began testing recipes in their kitchen. "I remember our family gathering around the stove when we were melting the first batches, and creating the first flavours, and writing down some new recipes," Tareq's face lights up as he recalls those early days of experimentation. They debated what Syrian elements to include and contemplated which flavours Canadians would like. "Would Canadians like this? Should we change the number of calories? The filling? The type of nuts? The fruit?" Tareq laughs.

The family began selling their chocolate at local farmers' markets. They moved production from the kitchen to the larger basement. As sales grew, the community chipped in to help them build a small factory outside of their house. They named their company Peace by Chocolate.

When the western Canadian community of Fort McMurray, Alberta, was ravaged by wildfires in 2016, forcing thousands of people from their homes, Tareq and his family donated their proceeds to relief efforts. Tareq's forehead creases slightly. "We said, 'We know exactly how it feels to lose everything.'"

Tareq and his family have built a bigger factory and now employ more than 50 people. Their chocolates are sold across Canada and are available for purchase online for consumers around the world. Back in his office in Antigonish, a studio space is being set up to accommodate the hundreds of speaking requests Tareq now receives a year. His story even caught the attention of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who spoke about him in a United Nations speech.

In early 2020, Tareq officially became a Canadian citizen. After the ceremony, grinning and misty-eyed, he told reporters: "I feel that I'm Canadian, I feel that I'm free. I feel that I belong."

Tareq says he feels endless gratitude towards Canada and the small community that helped give him his start and hopes his experience will show other newcomers what is possible. "We are all newcomers in a certain way," he says. "A newcomer to a job, to work, to education, to a household, it doesn't really matter. I think what matters is perspective. Life is all about perspective. So always be willing to learn more, to go out, and connect with your community." «



Nightingale's Nest ('Ish El Bulbul)

(Dessert with pistachios)

SERVES

15 to 18 pieces

INGREDIENTS

- 15 to 20 sheets of filo pastry, preferably fresh but can also be frozen
- 2 ¼ cups of sugar
- 1 cup of ground pistachio nuts (or walnuts or almonds)
- 1 cup of water
- ¾ cup of melted clarified butter
- 3 teaspoons of lemon juice
- 3 teaspoons of orange flower water

TIP For an accordion-like structure, use a thin rolling pin or the end of a long wooden spoon to roll the filo. Gently scrunch the sheet into an accordion-like shape and remove the pin.

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

- 1 Combine the pistachios and a quarter cup of sugar in a bowl. Use the food processor if needed to ground the nuts into a fine mix. Cover and set aside until the end.
 - 2 Prepare the sugary syrup by mixing the remaining 2 cups of sugar and 1 cup of water in a saucepan. Stir over a low heat until the sugar dissolves. Add 3 teaspoons of lemon juice and boil for about six minutes, until the mixture is syrupy.
 - 3 Reduce the heat and stir in 3 teaspoons of orange flower water.
 - 4 Lightly brush butter on 2 large baking sheets.
 - 5 Take a piece of filo sheet with the long side parallel to the edge of the work surface.
 - 6 Brush half of the filo sheet lengthwise with butter. Fold in half lengthwise. Brush the filo sheet with more butter.
 - 7 Sprinkle 4 teaspoons of the filling mix in a narrow ½ inch strip from the folded edge of the pastry, leaving a ½ inch border at short ends. Fold the long ½ inch border over the filling.
 - 8 Fold the short ends over filling, then roll up lengthwise, leaving 2 inches of unfilled pastry exposed. Starting from one short end, roll the pastry loosely.
 - 9 Tuck the 2-inch pastry edge under and toward the center, forming the bottom of the nest and flattening slightly.
 - 10 Place the bottom of the pastry down on the prepared baking sheet.
 - 11 Repeat the filling and rolling with remaining the filo sheets.
 - 12 Drain off any excess of butter on the baking sheet.
 - 13 Bake the pastries for about 20 minutes in the oven, until they become golden and crisp.
 - 14 Cool the pastries on a cooling rack for 5 minutes.
 - 15 Using a metal spatula, loosen the pastries from the sheets.
 - 16 Drizzle each pastry with 1 tablespoon of the syrup and cool completely.
- To serve, put the pastries on presenting plates. Sprinkle each with around 2 teaspoons of chopped pistachios. Brush or drizzle with the remaining syrup from the pan.



Chocolate Wrap

with strawberries, hazelnuts, and caramel

SERVES

6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 18 fresh strawberries, sliced
- 6 plain round soft tortilla wraps or crêpes
- 6 slices of vanilla pound cake
- 1 Peace by Chocolate milk chocolate with hazelnut bar
- ½ cup of caramel sauce
- ¼ cup of whipped cream
- 2 tablespoons of butter

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place the tortilla or crêpe flat on a hard surface.
- 2 Place a slice of vanilla pound cake in the middle of each tortilla or crêpe.
- 3 Break up the pieces of the Peace by Chocolate milk chocolate with hazelnut bar (*should have about 24 pieces*).
- 4 Place 4 chocolate pieces on top of each pound cake.
- 5 Add the sliced strawberries (*3 sliced strawberries per wrap*).
- 6 Fold each tortilla or crêpe into a square by folding the sides into the middle then the top and bottom into the middle.
- 7 Bring a buttered frying pan to medium heat.
- 8 Place 2–3 prepared wraps together on the hot buttered frying pan and fry until lightly brown on each side and the filling has melted.
- 9 To serve, place on a serving plate and cover each of the wrap ending with some whipped cream. Drizzle with caramel sauce equally on each wrap. Enjoy!



DIKRAN K. TOUMAS / Armenia/Syria

“...sharing food is sharing culture.”

Dikran K. Toumas is the first to admit that he is a foodie. “I love to eat, I can’t lie. I love to try new food,” the 26-year-old says with a broad grin. “My friends tell me I have this little dance I do when I try something good.” He lets out a hearty laugh, and does a demonstration on the spot, shimmying his shoulders from side to side.

Dikran has a contagious sense of humour and a kind, welcoming demeanour. He is standing in his kitchen, in the apartment that he shares with his parents and brother, in north-east Toronto, slicing onions with the speed and precision of someone who has done it countless times before.

He has loved to cook his entire life. “When I was a kid, I used to go to my grandma’s house, and I used to like, mix and combine multiple, non-edible things in a small pot.” Dikran grew up in Syria, but his heritage is Armenian. He went to Armenian school and church, and the food he cooks also has a strong Armenian influence. “Armenian food is not too spicy,” he says. “They usually use a lot of fresh herbs, like rosemary.”

His love of cooking was fostered by both his mother and grandmother. His family used to spend Sundays at his grandmother’s house, where she would often prepare manti, a type of Armenian dumpling he says is a typical home-cooked meal.

When Dikran was 19, his family fled Syria because of the escalating war. He recalls food was scarce. “There was no water, no electricity,” He pauses. “Like, we were not living like humans.”

They made their escape after the border opened briefly in 2012 and caught an early morning bus to Lebanon. Dikran says the ride, which normally takes seven or eight hours, took them 21 hours, as the bus looped through small hidden roads, with the curtains closed.

They arrived in Lebanon in the nick of time. “We moved there the second day they opened

the border. The third day a bus got bombed, and they closed it the fourth day,” he says as he shakes his head. “I promised myself that day that I’m not going to cross that border again.”

His family lived in Lebanon for five years, until they applied for refugee status in Canada. When Dikran found out they were accepted, he was ecstatic. “Oh my god,” he says. “I can say that’s the happiest day of my life.” He shakes his head. “It was hard living in Lebanon. I start feeling like I’m alive in Canada.”

“It makes me happy to make them try Syrian food.”

That gratitude and zest for life is still apparent years later. He has been living in Toronto since July 2017. After he arrived, he recalls being amazed at how multicultural Toronto was, and found the diversity comforting. “In Lebanon you sometimes get scared to say you’re Syrian because people will look at you differently, but here I never felt like I’m a refugee.” He smiles. “From the first day, I was feeling like I’m Canadian.”

He is completing his graphic design program at Seneca College. His college friends have diverse backgrounds, too, and they often share each other’s traditional food. Dikran shares his fusion of Syrian and Armenian dishes.

“It makes me happy to make them try Syrian food,” he says, as he simmers the onions in a pan on the stove. “I think sharing food is sharing the culture—showing what your culture does, and what you eat at home.” He tosses the onions in the pan and adds in freshly sliced peppers. The vegetables sizzles loudly and he admits that sharing food is also like sharing a part of himself. «

Armenian Manti

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

DOUGH:

- 1 cup of all-purpose flour (*add more as needed*)
- ½ cup of warm water, or enough to make a medium soft dough
- 1 egg (*optional*)
- 1 teaspoon of olive oil
- ½ teaspoon of salt

MEAT FILLING:

- 7 ounces of ground beef
- 1 small onion, minced
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- ½ teaspoon of ground sweet black pepper
- ½ teaspoon of paprika
- ¼ teaspoon of ground black pepper

YOGURT-GARLIC SAUCE:

- 3 cups of plain yogurt
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped or crushed

FINISHING:

- 2 cups of meat broth
- 2–3 tablespoons of melted butter
- 1–2 tablespoons of tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon of red pepper paste
- Sumac or red powdered pepper seasoning, to taste
- Paprika, to taste

TIP Adding egg to the pasta dough allows the dough to stay moist, making it easier to pinch.

DIRECTIONS

DOUGH:

- 1 Combine the flour, salt and oil in the food processor. If you do not have a food processor, you can also make this by hand in a large bowl.
- 2 Add water and egg to the mixture. Knead to make a medium-soft dough.
- 3 Divide the dough into two balls.
- 4 Sprinkle flour on the bottom of a deep bowl and put the dough in it. Cover the bowl with a cloth and set aside for 30 minutes.

MEAT FILLING:

Mix the ground beef, minced onions, salt, black pepper, sweet black pepper, and paprika together. Refrigerate until needed.

MANTI:

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- 2 Roll out a large round dough on the floured table, until it is very thin, dusting the dough with flour. Alternatively, you can use a hand-cranked pasta roller.
- 3 Cut the dough and turn it into long strips 3–4 cm width, then turn the ribbons into squares.
- 4 Place the meat in the middle of each square, pinch the ends with your fingers to form a canoe-shaped dumpling.
- 5 Put enough oil on the bottom of the plate and arrange the pieces of dough next to each other. Brush the top with oil or butter.
- 6 Bake for 30–40 minutes, until golden brown.
- 7 Set aside in a plate, until the sauce is ready.

YOGURT-GARLIC SAUCE:

Mix the yogurt and garlic together in a bowl. Set aside.

FINISHING:

- 1 Heat the meat broth. Add in the tomato, pepper paste and butter.
- 2 Ladle the broth over the cooked manti on a plate.
- 3 Lightly heat the oven and put it in for 10 minutes or until the mantis are slightly wet.
- 4 Heat the yogurt-garlic sauce until it becomes lukewarm. To serve, sprinkle sumac and red powdered pepper along with a bit of butter on the manti along with a side of the yogurt-garlic sauce.





Kofta (Stuffed Meatballs)

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

MEAT FILLING:

- 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds of ground beef
- 1 large onion, diced
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of walnuts or pine nuts, grounded
- 3–4 tablespoons of butter
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of ground sweet black pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of paprika
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of ground black pepper

BULGUR DOUGH:

- 14 ounces of ground beef
- 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of fine bulgur
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of semolina
- 1 medium onion, divided into 3–4 pieces
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of paprika
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of ground black pepper
- Water to mix the ingredients
- Oil for frying
- Parsley (*optional*)

DIRECTIONS

FILLING:

- 1 Heat the butter in a frying pan. Add onions and fry.
- 2 Add the beef and salt. Continue to cook until the meat is fried for 10 minutes.
- 3 Add the spices and stir—turn off the stove.
- 4 Add the walnuts to the mix.
- 5 Set aside the filling until it cools completely.

DOUGH:

- 1 In a large mixing bowl, combine the bulgur, beef, semolina, onion and spices and knead them for several minutes to form a dough. Use water to mix the ingredients as needed.
- 2 Turn the kofta meat into plum-sized chunks.
- 3 With your index finger create a hole in the bulgur balls. Put filling into the center and close the ends.
- 4 Shape the meatballs to be narrower at the end and thicker in the middle, in a spindle shape.
- 5 In a large skillet, heat a generous amount of oil.
- 6 Fry the meatballs evenly on all sides until dark golden-brown.
- 7 Place on paper towels to drain any excess oil. Serve hot and garnish with parsley.

TIP Semolina helps with the binding of the bulgur dough. A substitute for semolina is an equal amount of all-purpose flour.



ZEKRAH AMEEN / Yemen

“I will never forget this food.”

Zekrah Ameen loves living in Canada, but confesses it took a while to adjust to her new surroundings. “It was a little bit difficult for me when I came to this country.” The young mother is walking around her apartment in Toronto, holding up her cell phone as she speaks on the video call. In the background, her three-year-old daughter calls out to her. Like many parents during the coronavirus pandemic, she is at home looking after a child who is getting progressively more restless.

Zekrah was four months pregnant when she arrived in Canada. Originally from Yemen, she moved to Saudi Arabia when her husband found work there. But in 2016, he was laid off after the government introduced a policy that prioritized jobs for Saudi nationals, and they had to leave the country.

Yemen was marred with ongoing civil war and famine, and Zekrah and her husband were afraid to return. “We were scared about our future and our life,” she explains. “We were scared about my baby. How’s she growing up? Where’s the future?”

They claimed refugee status and after an 18-hour flight, landed in Toronto. She admits it was a challenge to arrive in a new country, pregnant, with no family nearby, and unable to speak English. While she was glad to be in Canada, she was lonely. She frowns slightly. “All the time, I spend my time in the home alone. I don’t have job. I don’t have friends.”

After a year with no social network, where most of her time was spent inside with her husband or looking after her newborn daughter, she decided to make some changes. She signed up to attend school to obtain her high school equivalency certificate. “I started to make friends,

go outside,” she says with a smile. “Life has become a little bit busy,” she adds, grinning. She now also wants to prevent other refugees from going through the challenging first few months she did. She started working at a health and community service centre in Toronto, which provides services to refugees and immigrants. “I try my best to help those who are newcomers to Canada, to facilitate life, and to help them avoid what I faced here,” she explains. “I tell them the best way to start their education, how to rent a good house or an apartment.”

“I try my best to help those who are newcomers to Canada, to facilitate life, and to help them avoid what I faced here.”

Zekrah also meets up with newcomers to share meals, and to talk about her experiences as a new resident of Canada. She enjoys cooking and sharing dishes from Yemen. Zurbian, a dish made with lamb and rice, and Bint Al-Shan, a sweet honey cake, are two traditional dishes she holds dear because both were served at her wedding. “So, I will never forget this food.” She laughs.

Zekrah adores living in Toronto, and says she is thankful for the people she has met, and her ability to go to school. “Canada is now my favourite country in the world.” She flashes her bright smile. “There is equality between any member of society. Everyone can get what they need. Right from education or support, anything you want—you can work until you get it.” <



Zurbian

SERVES

2 to 4 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound of lamb chunks
- 2 cups of basmati rice, cooked
- 1 cup of yogurt
- 2 potatoes, cubed and boiled
- 1 cup of red or yellow onion, sliced
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¼ cup of vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons of butter, browned
- 1 tablespoon of cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon of ground coriander
- 1 stick of cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon of green cardamom
- 1 teaspoon of cloves
- 1 teaspoon of turmeric powder
- ½ tablespoon of black peppercorn
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ tablespoon of salt

DIRECTIONS

- 1** In a saucepan, roast the cumin seeds, coriander, black peppercorns, cinnamon stick, cardamom, cloves and turmeric powder together.
- 2** In a medium-sized pot, on medium heat, sauté the sliced onions in heated vegetable oil until it turns golden. Save half in a separate bowl.
- 3** Add the lamb-chunks to the pot, and sauté for 2–4 minutes. Then add the potatoes and salt, and continue to sauté for 5 minutes.
- 4** In a separate bowl, mix the yogurt with the fried onions saved from step 2, the minced garlic, and the roasted spice mixture from step 1.
- 5** Cover the meat with the yogurt mixture and let it cook over medium heat for 30 minutes.
- 6** In a large pot, place a layer of the cooked meat and potatoes, and cover with a layer of rice.
- 7** To the same pot, add the browned butter and bay leaf. Cook on low heat for approximately 15–20 minutes or until the rice is fully cooked.

To serve, place in a large shallow tray and garnish with fried onion.

TIP

- Grinding the roasted spices allows for greater coverage.
- Add a mixture of grinded saffron thread and water to the rice to give it a golden hue.



Bint Al-Shan (Yemeni Honey Cake)

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups of flour
- 3 eggs, plus 1 egg yolk
- 1½ cup of water
- ¾ cup of ghee or melted butter
- 1 tablespoon of yeast
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- 1 tablespoon of powdered milk
- ¼ teaspoon of salt
- ¼ teaspoon of vanilla
- Sesame and honey for garnish

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat the oven to 390° F.
- 2** Soak the yeast in a quarter cup of warm water, until it gets foamy.
- 3** In a large bowl, mix the flour and salt.
- 4** In a separate bowl, whisk three eggs, sugar, powdered milk, ghee, one cup of water and the activated yeast.
- 5** Add flour to this mix and knead the dough for about 15 minutes until the dough is soft.
- 6** Cover the bowl with a dry cloth and set aside for 30 minutes.
- 7** Cut the dough into 12 to 15 ball-shaped pieces. Place the dough balls on a tray and cover them with a dry cloth. Let the dough rise for 15 to 30 minutes.
- 8** Grease a 10- or 12-inch baking dish with a ghee or oil.
- 9** Roll out the first ball of dough as thinly as possible and place it inside the tray, making sure the first layer covers all the edges. Cut off any excess dough around the edges. Brush the top layer with ghee and repeat this process with each dough ball, stacking each layer on top of each other with ghee in between. For the final layer, brush the top layer with egg yolk and vanilla.
- 10** Sprinkle with black sesame seeds.
- 11** Bake for 25 to 40 minutes, until the cake is golden. To serve, drizzle the top with honey while the cake is still warm and cut into triangular slices. Serve warm.

TIP Traditionally the Bint Al-Shan is baked in a round baking dish with short edges.



AYA WADI / Syria

“To share our culture with them.”

“Thank you for waiting!” **Aya Wadi** smiles into her laptop video camera from her bedroom. It is almost 10 pm, and she has just returned home from the restaurant she runs. “There was a lot to clean,” she explains. At just 24 years old, Aya has now started two businesses in Canada: a catering company and a restaurant.

Aya moved to Canada in 2017, with her parents and siblings, after fleeing war-torn Syria. They arrived in Thunder Bay, Ontario, during a heavy snowstorm in late November. She remembers the look of shock on her parents’ faces as they left the airport. “They thought they were in the North Pole!” She bursts out laughing and shakes her head. “When we left in the cars, there was just snow. The whole way, just snow.”

Aya is now well accustomed to northern Ontario winters, and to life in Thunder Bay. She runs the restaurant with her mother, Duha Shaar, who is responsible for the cooking. They named the eatery **Royal Aleppo Foods**, and they serve up their favourite dishes from their native country. “Aleppo is very famous and popular, with the most delicious Syrian food.” She grins.

Aya grew up in the bustling city of Aleppo and lived there until 2014, when she and her family left Syria because of escalating violence. “A bomb landed too close to our house, so we had to move out.”

Prior to that, her entire family spent months trying to escape encroaching bombs by relocating every few weeks. She recalls sneaking out of her childhood home in the middle of the night. “We weren’t able to take anything with us,” she explains.

“Nothing at all. We said: ‘Maybe tomorrow things will be better—and we’ll come back.’” But when her sister and father returned the next morning to collect their belongings, the house had been looted. Aya rubs her forehead. “The thieves took everything in it.”

Like so many other Syrian families, they fled to neighbouring Turkey. But that, too, was a challenge. It was hard to make ends meet, and they faced daily racism and prejudice. “We were

struggling,” she says. “People didn’t like us. So, we had two options: find a better place, or go back to Syria. It’s hard for the first one, and the second one is impossible.”

Then one day Aya’s mother met a United Nations official who helped her apply for refugee status in Canada. “We know that Canada is a good place to live in,” Aya says. “We did our research on the internet. We were so excited,” she says, with a wide smile.

Wanting to share the flavours from their native country, Aya and her mother launched a Syrian catering company shortly after arriving in Thunder Bay. “They’re kind of unique flavours in our food!” Aya says. “Pomegranate, molasses, blossom water.”

“It’s a good way to tell the people who we are, right?” Aya asks. “To share our culture with them.”

The catering business was so successful they were able to transition it into a full-fledged restaurant, signing a lease in December 2019. When the coronavirus pandemic hit in early 2020, Aya and her mother were at the height of preparations for their grand opening. But despite the setbacks, they opened **Royal Aleppo Foods** in June 2020, offering takeout, and as restrictions eased, a full dining experience. So far, their unique menu has piqued the interest of many people in the community.

“It’s a good way to tell the people who we are, right?” Aya asks. “To share our culture with them.”

Aya says despite the challenges her family has faced she is happy where she is. She is proud of the restaurant and being able to share her culture with her new community in Thunder Bay. She smiles brightly. “The nice thing is that we can share that through food.” «



Ma'amoul Cookies with Dates and Pistachio

SERVES

25 to 30 cookies

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ½ cups of all-purpose flour
- 2 cups of unsalted pistachio nuts
- 2 cups of grounded dates
- 1 cup of icing sugar
- 1 cup of warm water
- ½ cup and 2 tablespoons of melted ghee or butter
- ½ cup of regular sugar
- 5 tablespoons of sugar syrup
- 4 tablespoons of orange blossom water
- 2 tablespoons of rose water
- ¼ teaspoon of ground Greek Mistika (*optional*)
- Ground "mahlab" to taste (*optional*)

TIP

- Middle Eastern stores carry the wooden mold tabbah and Greek Mistika.
- Semolina can be used in place of flour; and butter in place of ghee.
- Store in an airtight container.

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F.

- 1 Prepare the dough by combining the flour and melted ghee in a food processor or a mixer. Add more flour as needed. Put the dough aside in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.
- 2 In a cup, mix the warm water and regular sugar.
- 3 In a pot, warm the rose water, orange blossom water, and Greek Mistika.
- 4 Add the warm mixture to the dough, along with a dash of mahlab powder and knead the dough with your hands or a mixer for 3–5 minutes.
- 5 While kneading the dough add the sugar water slowly and keep kneading into a pliable dough.
- 6 Roll out 25–30 small portions and set aside.
- 7 For the fillings, mix the pistachios along with sugar syrup, 1 tablespoon of melted ghee, and a dash of rose water and orange blossom. Using a food processor, grind these ingredients into a smooth mass or if desired into chunks. Repeat the same step using dates instead of pistachios and omit the syrup.
- 8 Scoop 1 tablespoon of ma'amoul dough and place them in the palm of your hand, flattening it to a thickness of ⅓ inch.
- 9 Add about 1 teaspoon of the desired filling to its centre, then bind the edges together to seal the cookie and completely coat the filling with dough.
- 10 If you own a wooden ma'amoul mold press, place the cookie in the mold and gently press to mold the surface of the cookie. If you do not have a traditional wooden mold, you can use a metal or plastic cookie mold to alter the shape and design of the cookie's surface.
- 11 Place your molded ma'amoul on a baking sheet or cookie tray that has been brushed slightly with butter or ghee.
- 12 Bake for 15–20 minutes or until it is lightly brown on the bottom and pinkish and pale at the top.
- 13 Once out of the oven, while still hot, dust powdered sugar through a sieve on top of the ma'amouls to fully cover them and let them cool. The powdered sugar will eventually melt and turn to a glaze.

To serve, once cooled to room temperature, sprinkle some more powdered sugar until fully covered on the pistachio ma'amouls. The date ma'amouls, do not require additional sugar. Pair with either Arabic coffee or tea.

Ouzi

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

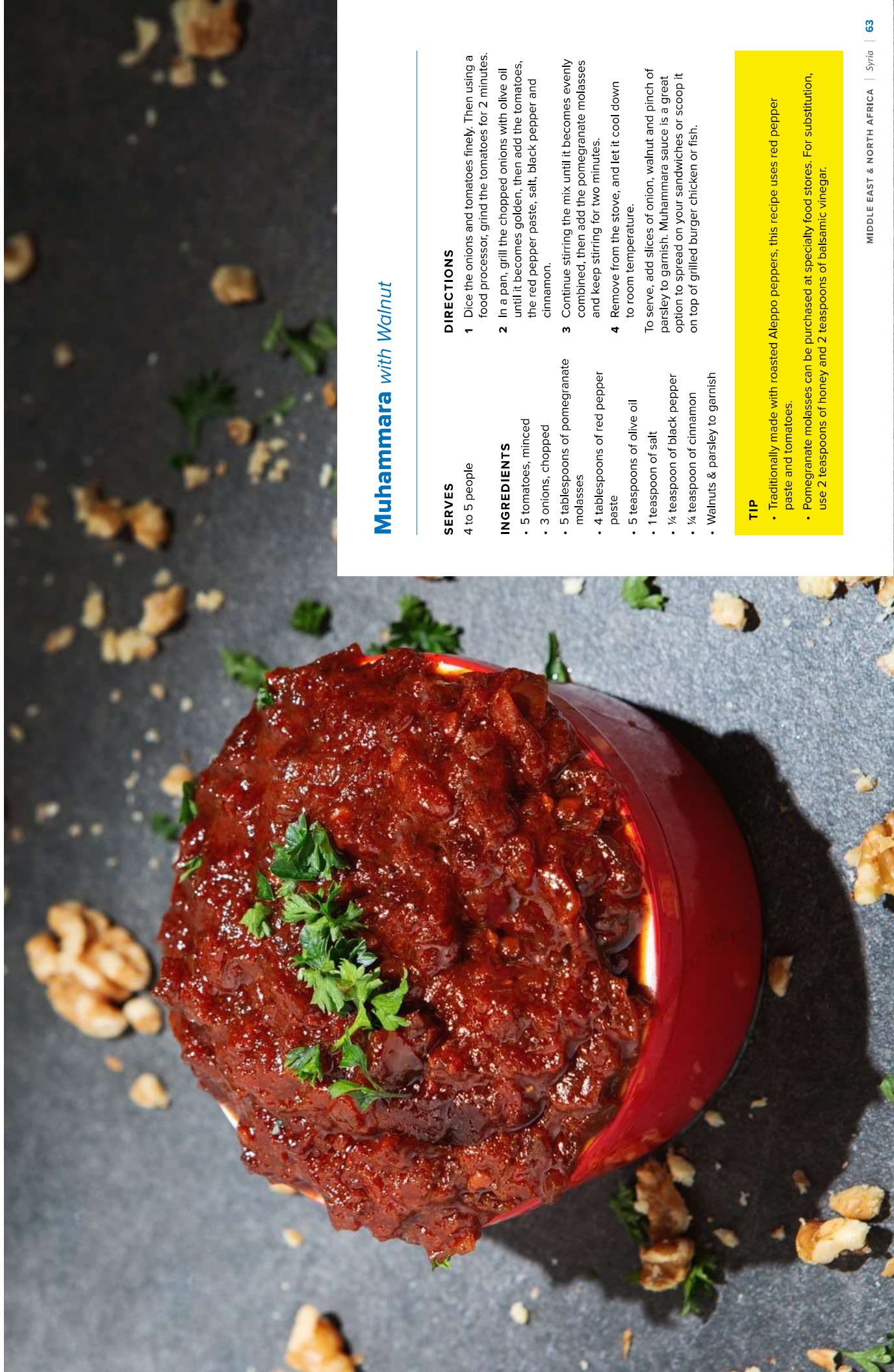
- ½ pound of ground chicken or beef
- 3 ½ cups of water
- A packet of puff pastry or spring roll sheets
- 2 cups of basmati rice
- 2 small onions, diced
- ⅔ cup of frozen peas
- ⅔ cup of carrots, diced
- ¼ cup each of cashews, almonds and pistachios
- 7 tablespoons of ghee or butter
- 1 ½ teaspoon of salt
- ½ teaspoon of black pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a large skillet over medium heat, put 2 tablespoons of ghee and sauté the onions until softened. Add the ground meat and cook until it is brown.
- 2 Continue stirring the meat. Add salt, black pepper, peas and carrots.
- 3 Wash the basmati rice 2–3 times, and soak it in hot water for 30 minutes. Drain and rinse the basmati rice until the water runs clear.
- 4 In a large saucepan, add the 3 ½ cups of water, 2 tablespoons of ghee and a teaspoon of salt and let it boil. Once it is boiling, add the rice and let it cook at a low temperature.
- 5 After 15 minutes, the rice should be ready. Add the cooked meat with the vegetables to it.
- 6 In a separate pan, put 2 tablespoons of ghee and add the nuts to it. Sauté the nuts until they turn slightly golden, add to the rice and stir until all the ingredients are well mixed. Let it cool before wrapping it.
- 7 Preheat the oven to 360°F.
- 8 To assemble the rice parcel, take a small dessert bowl and brush the inside with ghee to prevent the pastry or spring roll sheets from sticking.
- 9 Layer the bowl with 2–3 sheets stacked on top of each other, then fill it with the rice filling.
- 10 Close the ends with a little bit of water, turn it upside down on a parchment brushed with ghee onto a baking tray.
- 11 Once all the mounds are assembled, brush the top with melted ghee, and make sure there is enough space between each piece. Bake for 10–15 minutes or until they turn golden brown. Your Ouzi should be ready now, crispy on the outside and soft from the inside.

To serve, pair the Ouzi with a yogurt mint salad.





Muhammara with Walnut

SERVES

4 to 5 people

INGREDIENTS

- 5 tomatoes, minced
- 3 onions, chopped
- 5 tablespoons of pomegranate molasses
- 4 tablespoons of red pepper paste
- 5 teaspoons of olive oil
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- ¼ teaspoon of black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon of cinnamon
- Walnuts & parsley to garnish

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Dice the onions and tomatoes finely. Then using a food processor, grind the tomatoes for 2 minutes.
- 2** In a pan, grill the chopped onions with olive oil until it becomes golden, then add the tomatoes, the red pepper paste, salt, black pepper and cinnamon.
- 3** Continue stirring the mix until it becomes evenly combined, then add the pomegranate molasses and keep stirring for two minutes.
- 4** Remove from the stove, and let it cool down to room temperature.
To serve, add slices of onion, walnut and pinch of parsley to garnish. Muhammara sauce is a great option to spread on your sandwiches or scoop it on top of grilled burger chicken or fish.

TIP

- Traditionally made with roasted Aleppo peppers, this recipe uses red pepper paste and tomatoes.
- Pomegranate molasses can be purchased at specialty food stores. For substitution, use 2 teaspoons of honey and 2 teaspoons of balsamic vinegar.



RIVKA AUGENFELD

68 Liba's Honey Cake

A sweet dessert passed down from a mother to a daughter. Honey, coffee and citrus flavours make this cake a delicious treat.

70 Liba's Noodle Kugel

A casserole-like dish made with egg noodles and onion, traditionally served on Shabbat and Jewish holidays.



PAUL MATES

Romania

74 Salata De Vinete (Romanian Eggplant Spread)

Though it translates to "eggplant salad", salata de vinete is also a perfect dip to pair with fresh bread or crackers.

76 Ardei Umpluti (Romanian Stuffed Peppers)

Stuffed with rice, onion, dill and parsley, these sweet bell peppers are filled with delicious flavor.

78 Mititei (Romanian Grilled Hand-rolled Sausages)

These spicy hand-rolled (and skinless) sausages are mouthwatering. Supposedly, they were created when a restaurant in Romania ran out of sausage casings.



EUROPE

UNHCR was created to help the millions of Europeans who fled their homes after the Second World War, and between 1947 and 1952, 250,000 displaced persons (DPs) from Europe came to Canada as victims of Nazism, Communism and Soviet occupation.

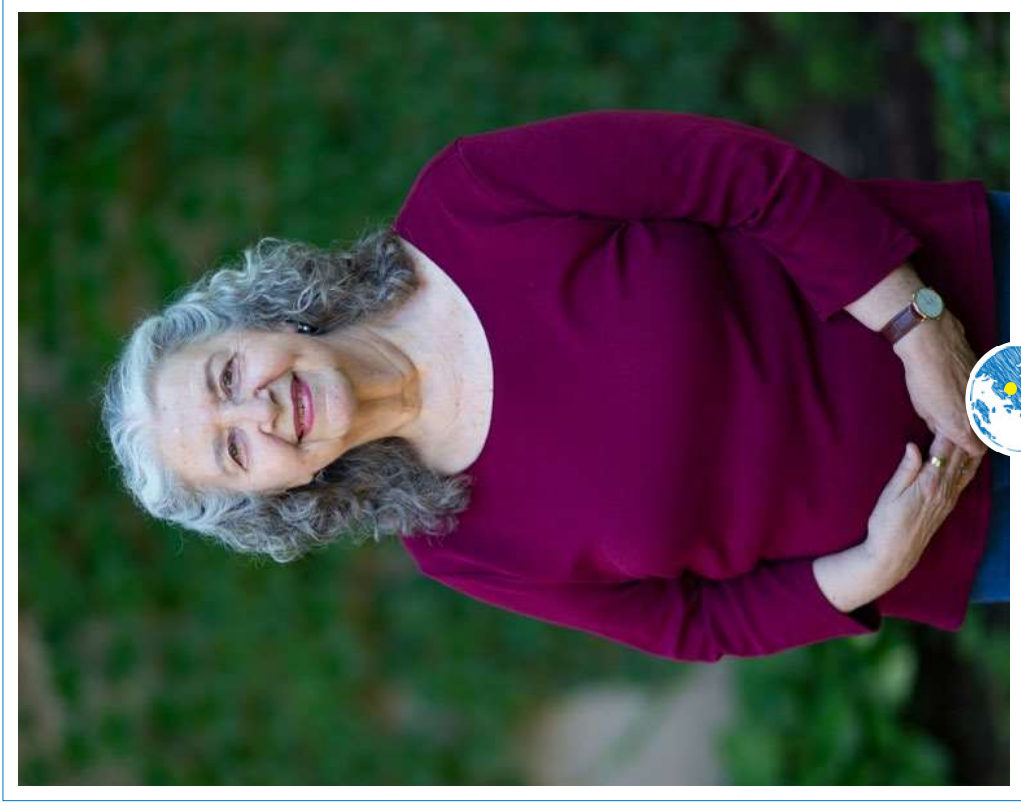
As you will hear firsthand from one refugee, many of them arrived on the shores of Halifax at Pier 21, an ocean liner terminal that would eventually welcome close to one million immigrants by the 1970s.

Close to 50,000 Hungarians and Czech refugees arrived in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s and 20,000 Soviet Jews settled in Canada between 1970 and 1990. You will also hear the story of one refugee's family who fled Romania during the Cold War, before making Toronto their home.

While there are now far fewer refugees arriving in Canada from Europe, the number of people seeking protection in Europe has grown substantially in recent years, as conflicts in other continents persist. Since 2015, more than one million refugees and migrants have made their way to Europe, many making the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean to reach countries like Greece, Spain and Italy. Several have lost their lives at sea, including children just trying to reach safety.

There is much to be done to tackle the root causes of this migration, and UNHCR continues to urge countries to take action to prevent the loss of lives at sea, and to make sure people arriving have access to asylum and dignified reception facilities.

Over the past few decades, European refugees have clearly made a mark on Canadian culture. From the historic Jewish neighbourhoods in Montreal, whose food is now recognized around the world, to Toronto's vibrant Polish neighborhood, which hosts North America's biggest Polish festival every year, European food is widely loved. Though the cuisine varies dramatically between countries, you will get a taste of the hearty and rich flavours found in some of the dishes. «



RIVKA AUGENFELD

“Liba means love...”

Rivka Augenfeld peers over her glasses at a small, yellowed paper card in her hand. On it, her mother’s faded handwriting spells out her honey cake recipe. “One of the problems,” Rivka says, “in Yiddish, a *leif* is a spoon, and a *lefele* is a little spoon [teaspoon], and sometimes she would specify *leif*, but other times...” Rivka points at the card. “This is just an ‘L.’”

Rivka is standing in a bright kitchen, in a low-rise apartment in central Montreal. The kitchen belongs to Kat Romanow, who is standing beside Rivka, also looking at the card. Kat founded The Wandering Chew, a company that preserves and revitalizes Jewish food. The two women are surrounded by an array of kitchen appliances and baking ingredients. “It’s just figuring out the instructions,” Kat muses as she whisks batter in a large metal bowl.

Together, they are attempting to revive Rivka’s mother’s old recipes. “My passion is really to help preserve Jewish food culture, and when Rivka told me her mom’s story, and that she had some of her recipes... it was really something that I wanted to help her with,” says Kat.

Rivka’s mother, Liba Magarschak Augenfeld, was a Holocaust survivor who arrived in Montreal in 1948 as a displaced person. After Liba’s death in 2018, Rivka preserved the small, plastic, pale-blue box containing her mother’s old recipes, most of them in Yiddish.

Until now, Rivka had never made any of the dishes. “I never learned to bake, and one of the reasons was, I think, I thought if I didn’t bake, she would have to keep on baking forever,” Rivka rolls her eyes. “That’s ridiculous,” she says, in a no-nonsense tone, almost to herself.

Rivka is a pragmatic person, but her love for her mother is clear. When she was approached about taking part in the cookbook, she decided it was time to bring her mother’s recipes back to life, and to share her story. “Her name is Liba, and Liba means love or beloved,” Rivka says. “And she was.”

Liba grew up in the city of Vilna, part of Poland between the two World Wars — now named Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Occupied by the Soviets in 1939, the city was seized by the Nazis in 1942, and all the Jews were forced into a ghetto. There, Liba joined the United Partisans Organization, a clandestine movement whose members eventually moved to the nearby forest in 1943 to continue their armed resistance against the Nazis.

In that forest Liba met David, her future husband. “We always celebrated their anniversary as being January 1st, 1944,” says Rivka. “Because that was the day that they sat somewhere, I don’t know where, in the middle of the snowy forest, and promised each other that if they survived, they would stay together forever.”

Vilna was liberated in 1944. In 1945, Liba and David made their way to Austria, where Rivka was born, a stateless child. After many efforts, they immigrated to Canada when Rivka was two years old, arriving at Pier 21, a port of entry to Canada for over one million immigrants since 1928. From there, they took a train to Montreal.

Rivka recalls during her childhood that her mother cooked often, and there was always a seat at the table if someone came to visit. “My friends said she cooked and fed people with love,” Rivka says. “And that’s the thing to convey. Despite everything, despite all of the terrible things that happened, she had this intrinsically loving nature.”

One of Rivka’s favourite things her mother made is honey cake, which was often served at Rosh Hashanah. Rivka remembers sitting around the table with family and friends, eating the cake and talking. “We’d be talking and my father [would say]... ‘Can we just take a moment, and speak about the cake? This cake is delicious.’”

Kat, who is just finishing up the batter, laughs heartily at the story. “That’s so sweet.” As she pours the batter into a cake pan—she says, “I think it’s so important to preserve recipes because they are a tangible piece of culture.”

Rivka says the happy times she and her family spent eating and sharing Jewish food celebrates the fact that they were able to have a normal life, despite everything her parents went through. “It’s kind of a refugee story of finding normalcy and life through food,” Rivka says. “To share food, to share moments with people... You know, [the Nazis] tried to dehumanize them, and this is people at their most human.”

When the cake is finally ready, Kat takes it out of the oven and puts it onto the counter, slicing into the rich, moist loaf. Rivka picks up a piece and takes a bite.

Her reaction is instant and authentic. “Mmm, yum,” she says, nodding vigorously. “Really good.”

“Does it remind you of your mom?” Kat asks. “Yep,” she replies, still nodding her head. She takes another bite. “Absolutely.” ◀



Liba's Honey Cake

SERVES

8 to 10 people

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups of all-purpose flour
- 1 cup of sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup of dark honey
- 1 cup of brewed coffee
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of canola or vegetable oil, with extra for the pan
- 2 teaspoons of baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of ground cloves
- Zest of 1 orange

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 10-inch Bundt pan or a 9-inch cake pan with oil.
- 2 In a small bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, baking powder and ground cloves.
- 3 In a separate larger bowl, using an electric mixer or a stand mixer, mix the oil and sugar together on medium speed.
- 4 Add in the eggs one at a time into the larger bowl until the mixture is light and fluffy. Then gradually add in the honey.
- 5 Add the flour mixture into the honey mixture. Alternate mixing in the dry ingredients and the brewed coffee in three batches, starting with the coffee and ending with the dry ingredients. Add the orange zest to the batter and mix until just combined.
- 6 Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 50 to 55 minutes until a knife or cake tester comes out clean.

To serve, let the cake cool in the pan on a cooling rack for 20 minutes. Loosen the cake from the pan with a thin rubber spatula, then invert the cake onto the rack and let cool completely before serving.

TIP Best served the next day. Keeps at room temperature for 3–4 days.



Liba's Noodle Kugel

SERVES

6 to 8 people

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups of water
- 1 cup of extra broad egg noodles
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced into half moons
- 3 tablespoons of schmaltz (*rendered chicken fat*)
- 2 tablespoons of canola oil
- 1 teaspoon of kosher salt
- 5–6 grinds of fresh pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- 2 Place the canola oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat, and warm until the oil is glistening.
- 3 Add the onions to the skillet, and sauté until they are golden brown, about 15–20 minutes. Set aside to cool.
- 4 Bring 4 cups of water to a boil in a medium pot. Once the water has come to a boil, add a ½ tablespoon of kosher salt to the pot. Add the egg noodles to the water and cook for 4 minutes until the noodles are cooked through but still firm to the bite. Drain the noodles in a colander.
- 5 Place the noodles in a 3 quart baking dish and mix in 3 tablespoons of schmaltz. Let the noodles and schmaltz mixture cool for 5 minutes.
- 6 Mix the onions, eggs, salt, and pepper into the noodles, and stir well to combine so that all the ingredients are evenly distributed.
- 7 Bake the kugel for 30 minutes until the top is golden brown.
Let it cool for 5–10 minutes before serving.

TIP Perfect to break the fast of Yom Kippur or for Rosh Hashanah.



PAUL MATES / Romania

“It’s like the perfect food.”

Romanian food embodies warmth and comfort for **Paul Mates**. “It’s comforting food. It’s family food,” the father of two says from his house in Toronto’s west end. “I don’t think of fancy restaurants. I think of family and family gatherings.” The hearty meals and rich dishes connect him to his heritage and the country he left when he was just a boy. “Because I didn’t have any extended family, it’s the food that offered that connection,” he explains.

Paul was just three years old when he left Romania in the midst of the Cold War. It was 1978, and Romania was under the rule of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, who, at the time, was considered one of the most oppressive leaders in the Eastern Bloc. “Much like in East Germany, there were a lot of informants,” Paul explains. “So, people you knew, who were your neighbours, your friends, your co-workers, were reporting on you.”

“My mom believes we were being surveilled, because her sister had already left, and that was not seen as good.” Resources were also in short supply, with food and gas becoming increasingly scarce.

His parents attempted to leave the country legally but were denied, so bribed an official for travel documents to go to Switzerland. “They had no guarantee that he would even honour their agreement. He could have just taken the money, turned them in, and imprisoned them,” Paul says. “He also demanded my dad’s watch.”

In the fall of 1980, Paul and his family moved from Switzerland to Toronto. Being raised in Toronto by Romanian parents meant Paul’s childhood was a perpetual mix of both Romanian and Canadian traditions. He watched hockey on Saturday nights with his brother and dad but also went to Romanian church and ate Romanian food regularly.

“There were a few years where my grandmother came to live with us, and she was an amazing cook,” he says. The hearty home-cooked meals

had an impact on his appearance, as his wife recently noticed when looking through family photo albums. She said, “The years where your grandmother is living with you correlates to you being a chubbier kid.” He laughs heartily. “We were very well fed.”

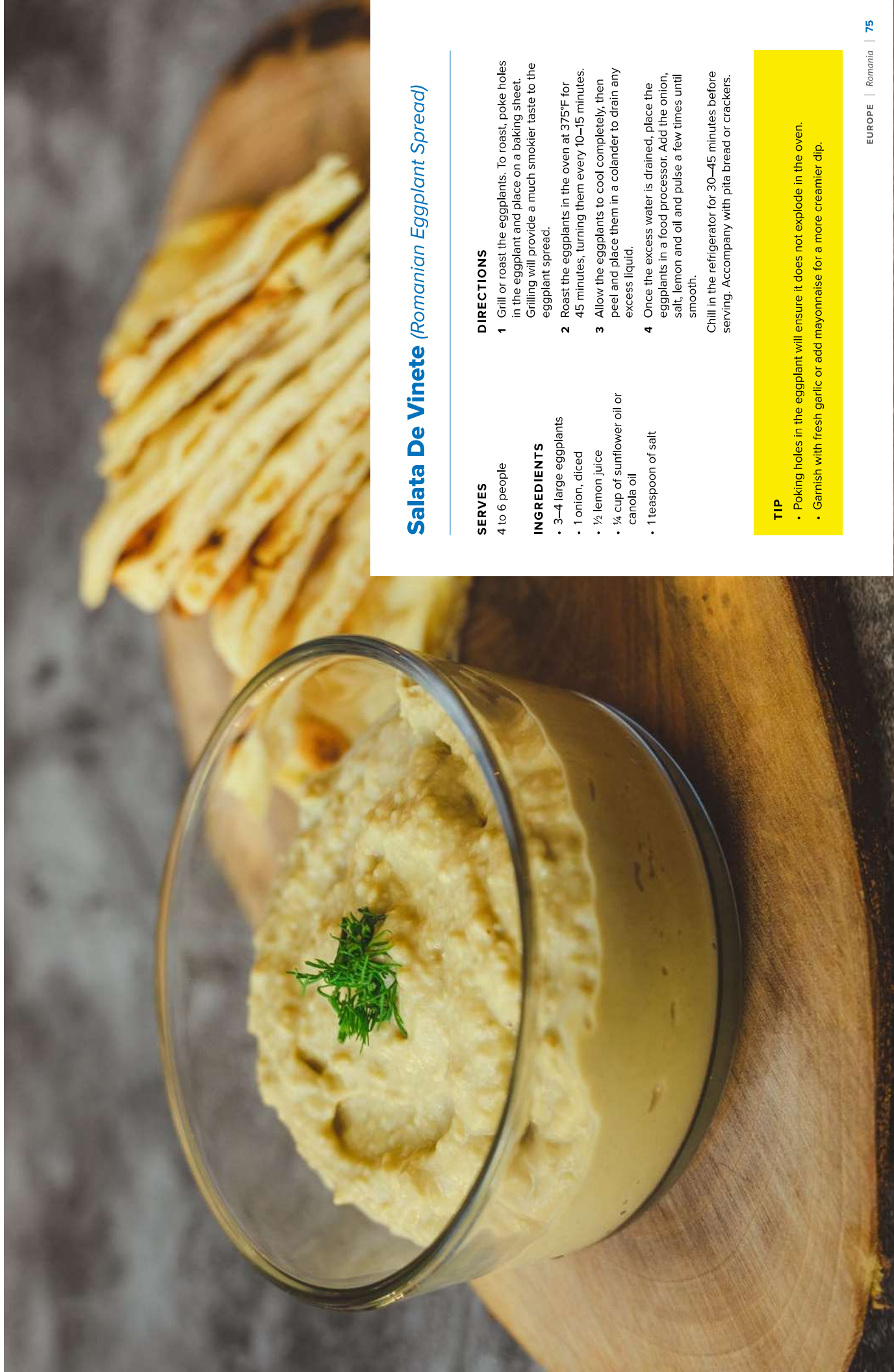
Of the dishes she made, stuffed red peppers were one of his favourites. “It’s filling, it’s yummy, it’s comforting. It’s like the perfect food.” Paul pauses and starts to laugh. “Oh my god, I want to make it tonight now.”

Despite the comforting connection he had to Romania, every so often he would catch glimpses of the harsh reality people there were still facing. He remembers an upsetting letter his mother received in the 1980s. “Some relative or friend was talking about not having any heat in the winter, and their kids had to do their homework with mittens on. I remember my mom getting so upset she slammed the letter down.”

When the revolutionary wave that led to the end of communist rule in Eastern Europe arrived in Romania, Paul watched the events unfold on the nightly news with his parents. “It was absolutely electrifying,” he says. “You just see those seas of people outside on the street. For that tension to have finally exploded.” He shakes his head. “I remember holding my mom’s hand so tightly.”

Watching the Eastern Bloc crumble had a profound impact on Paul and made him that much more thankful to be in Canada. “I always did feel grateful,” he says. “That really crystallized my views on social justice.”

He now passes on his gratitude to his children. “I tell them, ‘We are so fortunate to live where we live.’” He says while some connections to his native culture will inevitably be lost from generation to generation, he strives to communicate the values solidified by his experience as a refugee. He says everyone deserves to feel safe and happy where they are. “Everyone is owed that as a basic human right.” [«](#)



Salata De Vinete *(Romanian Eggplant Spread)*

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 3–4 large eggplants
- 1 onion, diced
- ½ lemon juice
- ¼ cup of sunflower oil or canola oil
- 1 teaspoon of salt

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Grill or roast the eggplants. To roast, poke holes in the eggplant and place on a baking sheet. Grilling will provide a much smokier taste to the eggplant spread.
 - 2 Roast the eggplants in the oven at 375°F for 45 minutes, turning them every 10–15 minutes.
 - 3 Allow the eggplants to cool completely, then peel and place them in a colander to drain any excess liquid.
 - 4 Once the excess water is drained, place the eggplants in a food processor. Add the onion, salt, lemon and oil and pulse a few times until smooth.
- Chill in the refrigerator for 30–45 minutes before serving. Accompany with pita bread or crackers.

TIP

- Poking holes in the eggplant will ensure it does not explode in the oven.
- Garnish with fresh garlic or add mayonnaise for a more creamier dip.



Ardei Umpluti (Romanian Stuffed Peppers)

SERVES

6 to 7 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1½ pound of ground beef or pork
- 6–7 medium red bell peppers
- 2¼ cups of water
- 1 large onion, diced
- ¼ cup of white rice
- ¼ passata/tomato puree or tomato paste
- 1 bunch of chopped fresh dill
- 1 bunch of chopped fresh parsley
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of pepper
- ½ teaspoon of dried thyme
- Sour cream to serve

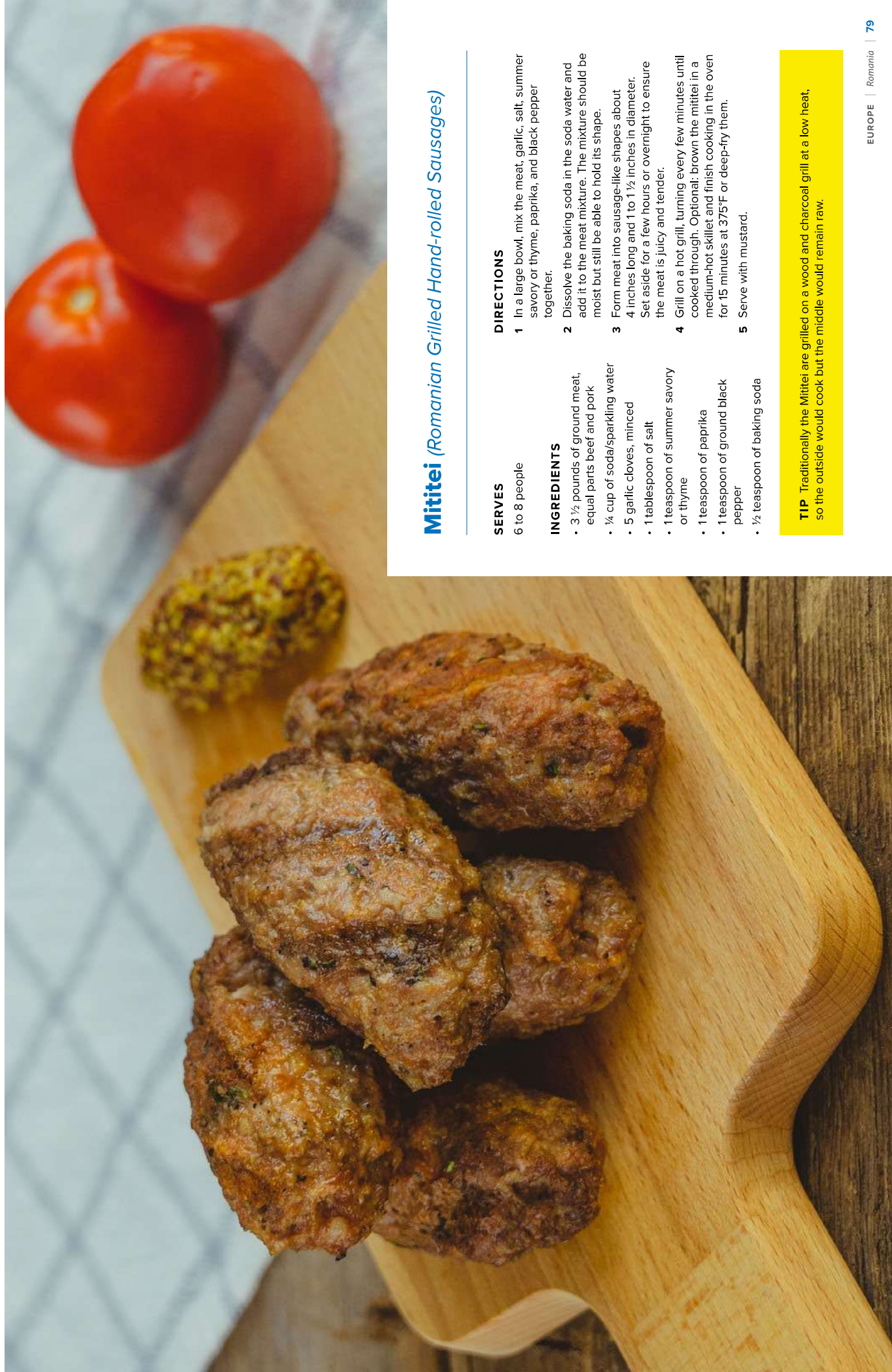
DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- 2 Mix together the ground meat, rice, onion, dill, parsley, salt and pepper and ¼ cup water in a bowl.
- 3 Wash the peppers and cut a hole at the top around the stem and remove the seeds. Then, fill it up with the ground meat mixture and place them on a baking dish.
- 4 Next, mix the rest of the water, tomato paste, salt, pepper and spices and pour it over and around the peppers, coming up to about ¾ of their height.
- 5 Cover the baking dish with a lid or aluminum foil and put the pan in the oven to simmer.
- 6 After an hour, remove the lid or foil and allow the peppers to bake for another 30–40 minutes or until they brown on top and the sauce is reduced.

Plate and serve hot with a dollop of sour cream on top and some bread for dipping in the sauce.

TIP

- For a quicker cooking time, you can use an Instant Pot to cook the peppers.
- To keep the peppers from falling, cut a small flat piece off on the bottom to steady it.
- Best made with sweet yellow Hungarian peppers or sweet yellow dove bell peppers.



Mititei (Romanian Grilled Hand-rolled Sausages)

SERVES

6 to 8 people

INGREDIENTS

- 3 ½ pounds of ground meat, equal parts beef and pork
- ¼ cup of soda/sparkling water
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of summer savory or thyme
- 1 teaspoon of paprika
- 1 teaspoon of ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon of baking soda

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a large bowl, mix the meat, garlic, salt, summer savory or thyme, paprika, and black pepper together.
- 2 Dissolve the baking soda in the soda water and add it to the meat mixture. The mixture should be moist but still be able to hold its shape.
- 3 Form meat into sausage-like shapes about 4 inches long and 1 to 1 ½ inches in diameter. Set aside for a few hours or overnight to ensure the meat is juicy and tender.
- 4 Grill on a hot grill, turning every few minutes until cooked through. Optional: brown the mititei in a medium-hot skillet and finish cooking in the oven for 15 minutes at 375°F or deep-fry them.
- 5 Serve with mustard.

TIP Traditionally the Mititei are grilled on a wood and charcoal grill at a low heat, so the outside would cook but the middle would remain raw.



**THE RIGHT HON.
ADRIENNE CLARKSON**
Hong Kong

84 Poached Chinese Chicken
Served in a ginger and green onion sauce, this poached chicken is juicy, tasty and rooted in traditional Chinese cooking.



FAISAL MOHAMMED
Myanmar, Rakhine State

88 Duú Fiça
This simple dessert made with rice flour, coconut and sugar has a delicious flavor and texture.



PAM PHAM
Vietnam

92 Salty Caramel Pork
Salty caramel flavours and pork is a delicious combination that we can't get enough of.

94 BBQ Lemongrass Pork Chops

These pork chops made with brown sugar, teriyaki sauce and garlic are perfect for a summer night.

96 Rice Cakes

A unique meal often found in Asia, which is a must-have during the Lunar New Year celebration of Vietnam.



ASIA & THE PACIFIC

Canada has welcomed tens of thousands of refugees from the region of Asia and the Pacific. Notably, between 1979 and 1980, Canada resettled more than 60,000 refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam—half of whom came through the private sponsorship stream. In 1986, UNHCR took the extraordinary step of awarding its prestigious Nansen Award to the people of Canada, marking the first time the honour had ever been given to a nation.

Canada was recognized for its role and response to supporting refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, among other places.

Asia and the Pacific still continue to be impacted significantly by mass displacement. The Afghan refugee population represents one of the world's largest protracted displacement situations. Up to 96 per cent of all Afghan refugees live in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, which have generously hosted them for more than 40 years.

The region has seen a three per cent overall increase in the number of refugees over the past decade. This is largely due to the exodus of 700,000 Rohingya, a stateless Muslim minority, following an outbreak of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State which began in August 2017. More than one million Rohingya refugees have fled violence in Myanmar in successive waves of displacement since the early 1990s.

In recent years, thousands of Rohingya children, women and men have made the harrowing journey to one of the world's largest refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh. In the following stories, you'll meet a young Rohingya refugee who shares his experience growing up in a camp, and his memories of the food there.

Whether it is snacks sold by vendors in the refugee camp in Bangladesh, rice cakes being cooked over an open flame in Vietnam, or a perfectly poached Chinese chicken, the cuisine varies dramatically across the region. The diverse flavours of the dishes and the traditions that come along with them are put on display in the recipes shared by Canada's former Governor General, a young Rohingya man and a business owner and mother. «



THE RIGHT HON. ADRIENNE CLARKSON / Hong Kong

“...it was a country where everyone had come from somewhere else.”

Food is something **The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson** clearly cares deeply about. “I have my recipe,” she says on the phone from her home in Toronto. “It’s a lovely chicken recipe, and anyone can do it,” she says before launching into a detailed description of how the chicken should be cooked, and the importance of Chinese cooking principles.

“The Chinese are very obsessed with making sure things are cooked, but not overcooked,” she explains. Her voice is deep and authoritative, a possible vestige of her decades as a broadcaster. “When you cut that chicken, it’s cooked through to the bone, and there’s still blood in the marrow of the bone. Perfectly cooked,” she says of her poached chicken, with ginger and green onion sauce.

Clarkson is known for her high profile role as Canada’s Governor General, and for her 30-plus-year-career as a broadcaster with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). But there was a time long before those prominent positions, that a career as a cook was on the table.

“Because they had to redo their whole lives, my mother was obsessed with *(the thought)* ‘We might lose everything again,’” Clarkson says. Clarkson and her family fled to Canada from their native country of Hong Kong in 1941. “She said: ‘Because you have temper tantrums, and you don’t get on with people very well, you have to learn to cook,’” Clarkson chuckles. “So, I always had in my mind, if I lost everything, I could be a cook.”

Clarkson first learned to appreciate food through her parents. “I cleaned chickens from the time I was six because the Chinese really believe everything has to be fresh,” she says.

Clarkson’s mother learned how to cook in Canada, having grown up with servants in Hong Kong. She learned her first few recipes from a local Chinese restaurant. “There were only about three Chinese restaurants in Ottawa,” Clarkson explains. “She asked if she could go in and watch what the cook was doing.”

Clarkson was just two years old when her family arrived in Ottawa from Hong Kong after it was invaded by Japan during the Second World War. “We had no choice about fleeing,” Clarkson says matter-of-factly. “I mean, Hong Kong was an occupied city. The Japanese conquered it. My mother and father saw their home sold in the street, while they were forced to kneel, and the Japanese, as conquerors, paraded through the city. We didn’t have a

choice. We were very lucky to get out.”

Despite losing everything as a child, Clarkson never self-identified as someone who was without, but rather as someone who was given an incredible opportunity. “My father and mother were very strong *(in their belief)* about ‘We have lost everything, and we will get everything back and more.’ That I remember as a distinct mantra in our house,” she recalls.

That mantra may be what propelled the young refugee into her immensely successful career. In her twenties she became the first visible minority to headline a national television program: in her role as host of *Take 30* with CBC Television. She went on to create the acclaimed show *The Fifth Estate*, which has now been on the air for 45 years, and she later created and hosted *Adrienne Clarkson Presents*, a show which presented cultural events, before becoming Governor General in 1999.

“When you realize a life such as I have realized in Canada, and you came when you were two and you were a refugee with nothing, with one suitcase, you realize that the country made it possible by simply not trying to hurt you in any way,” she says.

When Clarkson became Governor General in 1999, she was the first visible minority to be appointed to the role of the Queen’s representative in Canada. She used her platform during her six-year tenure to celebrate diversity in Canada. “I always felt that we had been saved somehow here, so I felt I owed the country something,” she says.

She continues to champion Canada and its diversity. In 2005, she co-founded The Institute for Canadian Citizenship, a charity that helps new citizens integrate into life in Canada. She has also published several books, including *Room for All of Us*, a collection of stories about the Canadian immigrant experience. She says she was profoundly shaped by her experience as a refugee, but also by a feeling of belonging in Canada. “That’s why I leapt on to Canada so much because it made me feel—because it was a country where everyone had come from somewhere else.”

She recalls a letter she received when she was Governor General from a young girl. “She was Portuguese, and she said: ‘Now that you’re Governor General I know that I can become Governor General, too,’” Clarkson says. “And that was the point. I think—I think it’s the point of my life in many ways.”



Poached Chicken

with Ginger and Green Onion Sauce

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1 whole chicken of approximately 2.5–3 pounds
- 3 whole green onions, trimmed and cut into fine strips
- ½ cup of peanut oil or olive oil
- ½ cup of fresh ginger, finely chopped
- ¼ cup of vermouth or Chinese wine
- 4 tablespoons of soy sauce
- 3 tablespoons of sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon of sugar

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place the chicken in a large pot filled with enough water to cover it.
- 2 Over high heat, bring to a boil and then lower to simmer with bubbles just breaking the surface for 20 minutes.
- 3 Turn off the heat and put a cover on the pot. Let the chicken stand in the cooking liquid until warm (*about four to five hours*).
- 4 Drain the chicken and keep the broth to boil down for soup.
- 5 Pat the chicken dry and rub lightly with the toasted sesame oil.
- 6 Cut the chicken into serving pieces—this is where your skills with a chopper will come in handy! You will see that the chicken is cooked through but there is still blood inside of the marrow. In place of a chopper, you can carve the chicken nicely in generous pieces and lay out prettily on a platter.
- 7 Heat the peanut or olive oil in a saucepan and when it is hot, add the ginger and green onions.
- 8 Cook for about 30 seconds.
- 9 Drain and keep the oil aside.
- 10 Scatter the ginger and the green onions over the chicken evenly.
- 11 Add the remaining ingredients—soy sauce, sugar and wine to the oil. Bring it quickly to a boil.
- 12 To serve, pour the oil mixture over the chicken. Best served at room temperature.

TIP

- The essence of Chinese cooking is to cook things until they are just done and not a moment more. My mother always said that when you chop a chicken that had been cooked properly, there would be blood still in the marrow of the bones. That is, the meat must be cooked just to the bone and no further.
- You can use dry sherry or sake as a substitute for vermouth.
- You can keep the chicken at room temperature for a couple of hours. Do not refrigerate.



FAISAL MOHAMMED / Myanmar, Rakhine State

“This is my country.”

Faisal Mohammed lives with his parents and eight siblings in a house they recently purchased in Kitchener, Ontario. His street is dotted with trees in a neat line, nearby houses have large backyards, and cars zip down the neighbourhood’s wide suburban lanes.

The midsize Canadian city is worlds away from the bustling, crowded refugee camp where he grew up. Faisal is Rohingya. His house, like many others in the camp in Bangladesh, was made from plastic and bamboo. It sat on a dirt pathway alongside rows of other similar homes. He had never seen a car until he moved to Canada.

“Growing up back home was totally different,” the 24-year-old says, as he tilts his head to the side. He is sitting inside his apartment, his back causally resting against a wall. “Coming here is like waking up from a dream.”

Faisal was 12 years old when he and his family were transported into their new world. In December 2008, they left the camp for Toronto. Within 24 hours, they took their first plane ride, saw their first snowfall, and even rode an escalator all for the first time.

“When we were going down the escalator, everyone fell down, because no one knew how to use it the proper way.” His stoic exterior cracks, and he laughs deeply at the memory. “Everything was new for us.”

He was also surprised to learn how few Canadians had heard about the Rohingya people. “I said I’m from Burma, and I’m Rohingya, and they’re like, ‘What is that? Is that a food?’”

The Rohingya have been described as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. They are an ethnic minority in Myanmar (formerly Burma)—the government there does not recognize them as citizens, so they are stateless.

When Faisal’s mother was pregnant with him, she fled with Faisal’s father and his elder siblings to Bangladesh to escape military abuse. He says his parents lost five children before they left

Myanmar, all of whom died from sickness or hunger. “When I look at pictures from the bad days...” Faisal frowns. “My mom was like, as skinny as my pinkie.”

While food was still scarce at the camp, Faisal has fond memories of vendors near the mosque in the makeshift city of thousands of people. One of his favourite items was Dui Fica, a dish made of coconut and rice flour. His eyes light up as he describes the smells from the food stalls. “The whole community smells nice.” He grins. “Even just walking by your stomach fills up!”

Food is one thing he misses from the camp, but he reveals that coming to Canada feels like winning the lottery. “For my family, for every single family that was able to escape genocide, that’s how we felt when we first came here.” He smiles proudly. “Because now I can finally say: ‘This is my country.’”

“I love how Canada gave us, and other families, the opportunity to come here—to start a new journey.”

He also wants to share the story of his people. “We want to tell the world who we are,” he says. Since 2015, Faisal has acted in a touring play about the Rohingya, which was later turned into the documentary *I Am Rohingya* that received national recognition. “After this play, a lot of Canadians now know who Rohingyas are,” he says with pride.

He also recently graduated from college and is working towards becoming a police officer. He says he is forever grateful for this second chapter of his life.

Over the quiet hum of traffic outside, he pauses, searching for his words. “I love how Canada gave us, and other families, the opportunity to come here—to start a new journey.” ◀



Duú Fiça

SERVES

2 people

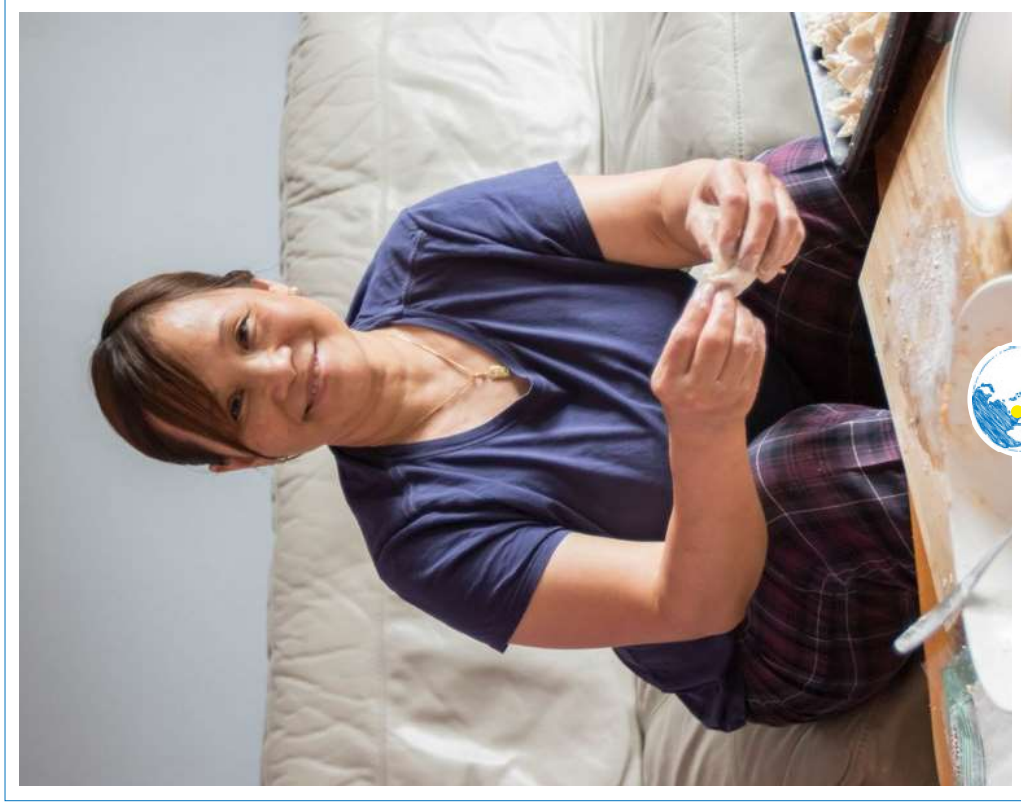
INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups of rice flour
- 1 cup of coconut, grated
- 1 cup of jaggery or brown sugar
- ½ cup of water
- 1 teaspoon of salt

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Sieve the rice flour with a teaspoon of salt. Add enough water so that the rice forms small lumps but is not wet. Cover and set aside for 30 minutes. For optimal results, leave it for a few hours or overnight.
 - 2 Fill the pot or steamer with water and boil until hot steam comes out.
 - 3 Wet the muslin or cheese cloth and set it aside.
 - 4 Sieve the rice flour halfway into the ramekin bowl.
 - 5 Fill a quarter of the ramekin with jaggery and coconut. Then, cover with more rice to fill the remaining space.
 - 6 Squeeze out the water from the cloth and cover the ramekin tightly. Gather the corners of the cloth and carefully flip the bowl, placing the ramekin upside-down on the top of the steamer.
 - 7 Carefully remove the ramekin, and gather the corners on top of the flour mixture—the cloth will hold the shape.
 - 8 Steam cook for 5–10 minutes. Remove from steamer and unwrap the Duú Fiça and place on a plate. Rinse the cloth and repeat.
- To serve, let the Duú Fiça cool. It makes a great snack or a light dessert.

TIP For this recipe you'll need a sieve, a bowl, a clay-water-pot or steamer, a small cup or ramekin and 2 pieces of white muslin or cheese cloth.



PAM PHAM / Vietnam

“I follow people.”

Cooking was not always easy for **Pam Pham** when she moved to Canada from Vietnam in 1985. The simple task of finding ingredients could be challenging.

“I didn’t know there were eggs in a carton! Usually back home they are open, and you can go and pick them up in a market.” The mother of three chuckles. She has a playful sense of humour, and with a twinkle in her eye, reveals how she eventually found the eggs. “I follow people.” She laughs heartily. She explains that watching and following people around her local grocery store was how she learned to navigate it. “When you’re young, you adapt fast,” she says, nonchalantly.

Pam was 20 years old and six months pregnant when she and her boyfriend landed in Edmonton and took a bus to their new home in Red Deer, Alberta. She had been in Hong Kong for a year after fleeing her home country of Vietnam.

She describes the difference between Hong Kong and Red Deer as startling. “From the place where millions of people are living—to the place where we’ve got so much land and not many people.”

She left Vietnam in 1984, during the Sino-Vietnamese border conflicts with China, over fear of being deported because her mother’s maiden name sounded Chinese. “At the time, if you have any relation to China, they would pack you up and give you back to China,” she says.

Though glad to be in Canada, Pam found the first months in Red Deer challenging. She didn’t speak English and missed her friends and family.

Her voice softens as she describes her childhood in rural Vietnam. It is filled with memories of her parents cooking an array of fragrant dishes, including one of her favourites:

rice cakes. Every New Year, her father would cook them over an open fire for her and her siblings. He would wrap the cakes, filled with mung beans and pork, in banana leaves and put them in a barrel of water over the flames. “We put rocks on top, so they are heavy and don’t float,” she explains.

The family would sit talking around the fire for hours, roasting potatoes and nuts, waiting for the rice cakes to cook. “My dad would always make each of us a tiny little one on top. First thing in the morning when it’s done, we wake up, and my dad gives us each our own and we eat it.” She smiles at the memory.

When asked how long it took them to cook, her playful humour is back. “Oh, probably all night.” She laughs. “It takes about 12 hours to cook that thing.”

Pam eventually found her way in Canada. She moved to Vancouver after spending a year in Red Deer. She split up with her boyfriend and soon met her now-husband while studying hairstyling. The two of them moved to the small port city of Prince Rupert in northern British Columbia, where they opened a salon. She still lives there, and her three adult children live nearby.

She has settled into life, and her days of following people around a grocery store are long behind her. She now even makes rice cakes at home. When asked how she converts the 12-hour process for a modern kitchen, she bursts out laughing. “I make it with an Instant Pot.”

Even though she uses a pressure cooker instead of cooking over open flames, on special occasions, like the Vietnamese New Year, she also makes rice cakes for her family. It is a tradition that has taken on a new format, in a new country, but is making memories all the same. «



Salty Caramel Pork

SERVES

6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds of pork butt
- 2 tablespoons of brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon of oyster sauce
- 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon of maple syrup
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 1 ¼ teaspoon of salt
- ½ teaspoon of black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon of bouillon chicken concentrate (*optional*)

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash and dry 3 pounds of pork butt and cut into cubes one inch thick. Place in a large bowl.
 - 2 Mix oyster sauce, vegetable oil, shallot, salt, black pepper and bouillon chicken concentrate together and marinate the pork butt for at least a half hour.
 - 3 Turn stovetop on high. Melt 2 tablespoons of brown sugar in a 9-inch pot and stir until sugar turns a dark caramel colour. Add the pork marinade and stir until meat is covered in caramel.
 - 4 Turns stove down to medium and cover the lid, stirring every 5 to 10 minutes until very little sauce in the bottom of the pot, about 25 to 35 minutes.
 - 5 Turn the stove back on high and add one tablespoon of maple syrup. Stir until it turns caramel colour.
 - 6 Serve.
- Best served with rice and steamed vegetables.



BBQ Lemongrass Pork Chops

SERVES

6 people

INGREDIENTS

WET RUB:

- 6 pork loin rib chops, a half inch thick
- 1½ tablespoons of chopped lemongrass
- 1 tablespoon of fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon of teriyaki sauce
- 1 tablespoon of oyster sauce
- 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons of brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon of '5 spices'
- 1 teaspoon of black pepper
- ¾ teaspoon of salt
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 shallot, chopped

GLAZE:

- 1 tablespoon of ketchup
- 1 tablespoon of honey
- 1 teaspoon of white vinegar mix
- A pinch of salt

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash and dry the six pork loin rib chops, a half inch thick.
- 2 Make the wet rub by mixing the rest of the ingredients.
- 3 Rub mixture on both sides of rib chops. Cover and keep in fridge overnight.
- 4 Take out at least a half an hour before barbecuing.
- 5 Barbeque until the internal temperature of the pork chops reaches 145°F.
- 6 Mix all the ingredients for the glaze together well.
- 7 Glaze the pork chops and serve.



Rice Cakes

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds of pork shoulder, half inch thick
- 5 cups of glutinous rice soaked overnight and strained
- 1 teaspoon of kosher salt

MARINATE:

- 1 shallot, chopped
- 1 tablespoon of fish sauce
- ¼ teaspoon of kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon of black pepper
- ½ teaspoon of chicken concentrate
- 1½ cup of water
- Banana leaves, frozen or fresh

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash and dry the pork shoulder.
- 2 In a bowl, mix together fish sauce, kosher salt, black pepper and chicken concentrate.
- 3 Cut pork shoulder into half inch-thick strips and marinate in mix for an hour.
- 4 Cut banana leaves to about 11 inches in length. Wash and roll into a cone shape.
- 5 Alternate placing a layer of rice and pork until 2 or 3 inches of banana leaves is left on top.
- 6 Fold and tuck the ends.
- 7 In a steam basket, fill the with rice cones and turn on an Instant Pot with water. Leave on manual high for 55 minutes.
Alternative: Bring a large pot filled halfway with water to a boil. Wrap the cones in cling wrap so water can't get in. Boil for five minutes, then turn the stove to medium heat for three hours.
- 8 Check often make sure enough water in the pot.
- 9 Serve.



LUCILA CABRERA
El Salvador

102 Fresco de Ensalada Salvadoreño

This delicious drink made from pineapples, cashew apples, oranges, mangos and other delicious fruits is a Salvadoran specialty.

104 Picadillo (*Ground beef with potatoes*)

A Salvadoran-twist on the classic beef with potatoes. In El Salvador, it's customary to pair this with a fresh salad.

106 Salvadoran Guacamole

Lucila's Salvadoran-style guacamole has some unique ingredients that elevates it to the next level.



YASMEN DE LEON
Mexico

110 Comal y Canela Tamales

Tamales are a Mexican favourite and Yasmen's recipes are legendary —just ask the line up outside her Mexican restaurant!



SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

The Americas are recognized worldwide for their rich traditions, diverse culture, and warm hospitality. The many refugees who have come to Canada from countries located in the Americas have brought those traditions and perspectives with them and help enrich communities across Canada.

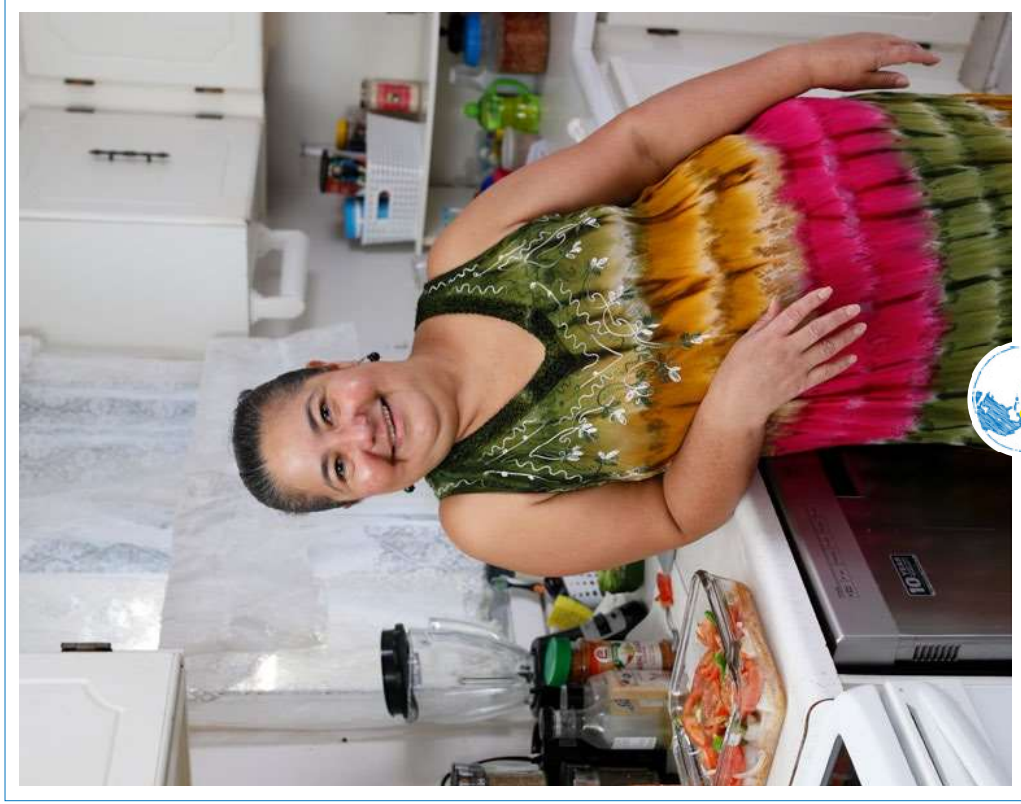
The first waves of refugees from Latin America arrived in the 1980s, with hundreds of people from Central America making Canada their home following political conflict in countries including El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

Nearly 15 million people are persons of concern in the region due to decades of conflict, organized crime, armed groups, and statelessness all posing threats to the people living there.

In 2018, one of the most complex displacement situations in the region in decades emerged, as people fled from Venezuela into nearby countries because of criminal violence and a lack of basic resources due to government policies. An average of 5,000 people a day, and more than three million Venezuelans ended up in countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and beyond.

As asylum applications, particularly from Central American countries like El Salvador and Guatemala, have soared in recent years, UNHCR is working with several countries who have shown a commitment to improving the drawn-out refugee situation in finding long-term solutions.

The Americas are steeped in rich history, boasting vibrant cultural traditions and cuisine, incorporating Latin and Caribbean influences. Dishes from the region use a vast range of ingredients including corn, beans, tropical fruit, and fresh herbs. As you'll hear from two refugee women, the food that they continue to cook here in Canada keeps them connected to the countries they left behind, while also allowing them to share in their culture and traditions culture with people in their new home. «



LUCILA CABRERA / El Salvador

“My way is a pinch of this, a pinch of that.”

Many newcomers find Canadian winters challenging, but they did not faze **Lucila Cabrera** at all. “By the time that I came to Canada, I enjoyed everything,” she says, from her house in Ottawa. The mother-of-two has a big smile and a warm personality. She speaks a mile a minute, and her words tumble off her tongue. “There was a time that it was minus 60-something with the wind chill, and the cars would not open, you feel that your skin breaks when you go out.” She smiles broadly. “I didn’t mind all of that.”

Lucila waited anxiously for five long years to come to Canada. When she finally arrived with her two young children in 1990, she felt overwhelming relief. Her native country of El Salvador was plagued by civil war, and citizens were disappearing—assumed captured by the military-led government. With knitted brows, Lucila explains. “Many disappeared, and families never knew about their whereabouts.”

In 1986, a group of soldiers arrived at her home looking for her husband—and she knew he had to leave. “We were never involved in any political situation there, but it doesn’t matter.” They decided he would flee to the United States, immediately. She would stay behind with their children for the time being, because they were too young to make the dangerous journey.

She says those years spent apart were agonizing. “We didn’t know if from one day to another we would survive all the bombings and all the attacks and killings.”

Meanwhile, her husband was sick with worry about them. They spoke on the phone often, and she put up a large photo of him by the phone for her children. “They would say: ‘Daddy, I’m looking at you.’” Her eldest, Erla, was 1½ years old when he left. Her youngest, Alex, was six months old.

Her husband eventually made his way to Canada when he learned he had a family member there. He claimed refugee status, and worked multiple jobs for several years to save up enough money to sponsor Lucila and their children to join him.

On December 27, 1990, Lucila and her children flew to Montreal. She remembers her husband standing at the arrivals gate, carrying three winter coats. She had told him not to wave or run to them, but to wait and see if the children recognized him from the photo. She recalls Erla desperately scanning the airport. “Then, she put her eyes on him and she yelled, ‘There he is, my Daddy!’” Lucila’s eyes start to glisten. “Then she ran,” she says, blinking rapidly.

In the beginning, her husband worked a variety of labour jobs to support the family, while she went back to school to study English and accounting. She began volunteering at the Catholic Centre for Immigrants and was soon hired.

It was during these early years that she taught herself to cook traditional food from El Salvador. “Back home, it was easy to have a maid to help you with those things,” she explains.

She began experimenting, making everything from plantains with cream to pupusas. Her eyes twinkle as she points out, “My way is a pinch of this, a pinch of that.” She cooked avidly, and her family happily ate her traditional food. Lucila starts to chuckle. “Then we started to see we were gaining weight!” she reveals gleefully. Salads were introduced after that.

Lucila still cooks often and still works for the Catholic Centre for Immigrants. She is now a manager. “My kids keep on telling me, ‘Mom, why don’t you retire from your work? Open a restaurant, and you will kill all of the restaurants in Ottawa.’” She laughs. She has no plans to do that—yet.

She still lives with her husband, and her adult children are working and studying. They all live in Ottawa. The corners of Lucila’s eyes crinkle as she thinks back to the first night they arrived. “The first thing my husband did was take us to the Parliament.” It was 3 or 4am, and she remembers not being able to stand outside for very long. But her children were right at home. “The kids were jumping in the snow.” She smiles. “The kids were as if they were Canadian already.” «



Fresco de Ensalada Salvadoreño

(Salvadoran Fruit Cocktail Juice)

SERVES

8 to 10 people

INGREDIENTS

- 8 cups of cold water
- 6 sweet oranges or 2 cups orange juice (*not from concentrate*)
- 4 cashew apples or 1 cup of cashew fruit juice
- 3 green mangos, finely chopped
- 2 sweet apples (*royal gala or similar*), finely chopped
- 1 small pineapple, diced
- ½ cup of sugar (*to your preferred taste*)
- ½ cup of iceberg lettuce, finely chopped
- A pinch of salt

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Peel the pineapple and dice into small pieces. Place the pineapple chunks in a food processor for a few seconds to get crushed pineapple pieces; place crushed pineapple into a large bowl.
- 2 Squeeze the juice from the oranges and the cashew apples and add it to the bowl of crushed pineapple. Alternatively, you can use 1 cup of cashew fruit juice and 2 cups of orange juice instead.
- 3 Finely chop the leftover skin from the cashew apples, mangos and apples. Add to the bowl with the rest of the fruit and gently stir. At the same time, add the sugar and salt, making sure everything is well mixed.
- 4 Let the mix sit for 30 minutes.
- 5 Next, in a punch bowl, add the entire mix, adding the chopped lettuce and the 8 cups of cold water.
- 6 Place in the fridge and let it sit for an hour. To serve, add ice and include a small spoon for each cup to help guests scoop out the fruit.

TIP

- Cashew fruit juice is available in Latin American food stores—in Spanish it's called 'jugo de marañón.'
- If you do not have a food processor for the crushed pineapple, remove the crown of the pineapple and use a knife to finely chop away at the fruit while it's still inside the skin. This will give it the crushed look. Then, scoop out all the fruit and place it in a large bowl.



Picadillo *(Ground Beef with Potatoes)*

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound of ground beef
- 3 small potatoes, peeled and diced into small pieces
- 2 large tomatoes, chopped
- 1 small green pepper, chopped
- ½ small onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon of beef consommé powder
- 1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon of cumin
- ½ teaspoon of paprika powder
- Dash of salt & pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium high heat, once hot add the ground beef, garlic, onion, tomatoes, and green pepper.
 - 2 Next, add all the seasoning ingredients: paprika, cumin, beef consommé, Worcestershire sauce, and salt and pepper; stirring occasionally until the meat is lightly browned throughout.
 - 3 Add the diced potatoes. Cover the skillet and continue to cook for 10–15 minutes, until potatoes are soft.
 - 4 Remove the skillet from the heat and open the lid to let it cool.
- To serve, accompany the dish with a side of white rice and fresh salad.



Lucila's Salvadoran Style Guacamole

SERVES

4 to 6 people

INGREDIENTS

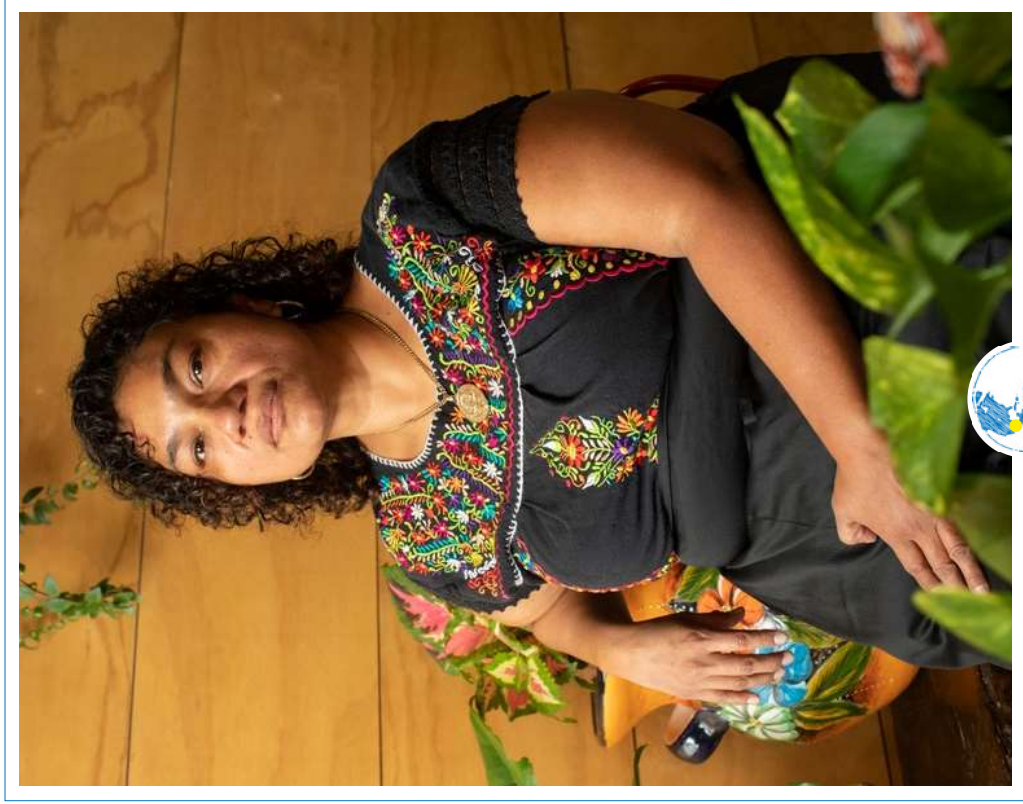
- 4 avocados, medium, ripe
- 3 eggs
- 1–2 limes (to your preferred taste)
- ½ pound feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 tablespoon of finely chopped cilantro (leaves and stems)
- 1 tablespoon of chopped Spanish red onions
- 1 tablespoon of jalapeño, finely chopped (optional)

TIP Personal preference—you can mash the avocado for a more even spread.

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Hard-boil your eggs. Put your 3 eggs into a small, but deep pot. Then, fill the pot with cold water—until all eggs are covered. Bring water to a boil and leave the eggs to cook for 15 minutes.
- 2 While eggs are boiling, chop your cilantro, onions and jalapeños and place them in a medium sized bowl.
- 3 Once eggs are boiled, drain the hot water and replace it with cold water. Let them sit until they cool, for about 2–3 minutes. Peel the shell off the eggs.
- 4 Cut the avocados in half and remove the seeds. Then, with a small knife, gently cut at the flesh (*still inside the peel*) in a crisscross pattern. Next, with a tablespoon scoop out the flesh and add it to the bowl (*do not mash avocado while doing this*).
- 5 Once the eggs have been peeled, cut the eggs into small pieces, including both the whites and yolks. Add all the egg pieces into the bowl. The egg whites add a bit more texture to the guacamole, while the yolk helps bind it all together, making it slightly fluffier and especially tasty.
- 6 Next, add the crumbled feta cheese into the bowl to add texture and flavour.
- 7 Lastly, cut your lime(s) in half and squeeze the juice out of them and into the bowl. With a large spoon gently mix all the ingredients together until you see an even spread.

To serve, pair the guacamole with any crunchy tortilla chips or include it as a side to a heartier meal (for example, with *steak, black beans and rice*).



YASMEN DE LEON / Mexico

“It’s home because I am safe.”

Yasmen De Leon holds up half an onion with the skin still on. “There is a bit of a debate in Mexico. Mothers and grandmothers will tell you not to take the skin off because it enhances the flavour. Modern cooks and chefs will say: ‘No, no, take it off, it doesn’t make a difference.’” She shrugs her shoulders and tosses the unpeeled onion into the steaming pot in front of her. “I always listen to my mother and grandmother.”

Yasmen is in the kitchen of her Mexican restaurant, *Comal y Canela*, in the northwest end of Toronto. A dish towel is casually tucked into the waistband of her apron and she is standing over an orange cast iron pot, stirring the bubbling liquid inside. The chef and mother of two has a loud laugh but a razor-sharp focus when she cooks. She is making her famous tamales, which like many items on her menu, require some heavy preparation.

“We make everything from scratch. The majority of the food that we make takes anywhere from a day and a half to three days,” she says. “We make our own chorizo from scratch, our sopas, our quesadillas.”

She follows traditional methods and refuses to cut corners. Even the dough for her tamales is made on the spot, by grinding corn in a lava stone mill she had flown in from Mexico. “A complete nightmare to do,” she says, as she shakes her head. “The logistics—of bringing a lava-stone mill, with zero money, is...a nightmare.” She sighs.

Yasmen developed a passion for cooking at a young age and opened her restaurant because it connects her to her family. “Whenever I cook, certain smells remind me of...I actually get flashbacks of my grandmother’s, and my mother’s hugs,” she says, smiling. “I have such a connection with food because it is the only tangible thing I have of my culture that we were able to bring with us.”

Yasmen left her native country of Mexico when she was about four years old. She crossed into the United States without proper documentation on foot, with her parents, siblings, and a group of other Mexicans. She remembers how cold the

journey was, and that someone with them was shot along the way. “They took his jacket off him and—” She pauses. “And they covered me with it because I was so cold.”

She and her family spent four years in the United States, undocumented, travelling from town to town trying to find a safe place to put down roots. They eventually made their way north, crossing into Canada, where they spent six years on a waitlist for refugee status before deciding to go back to Mexico. “My father thought that we had been away long enough and that whatever issues had affected us no longer would.”

They returned, and her father was murdered months later. Yasmen says her mother put her and her four siblings in a car and immediately drove back to Canada.

Yasmen chokes up at the memory of driving back into Toronto and seeing the familiar signs along the highway. “This is home,” she says as her voice catches. “It’s home because I am safe.”

Yasmen has been in Toronto since, and now has two grown children of her own. They often help out at the restaurant. As she adds dried chilli peppers to her pot, she says she is forever grateful she was able to raise her family in Canada. “I was able to raise my children without fear. And that is a blessing.”

For the fifth or sixth time in a matter of hours, despite the large “closed” sign on the restaurant window, someone knocks on the door. She pops her head out to tell him they will be open again tomorrow. Business is booming, and she is working to open a second location.

“Canada is a very special country in the way that it receives refugees and fosters them, and allows them to flourish, and then to be able to contribute to Canada,” she says.

“There will be a day where there will be 20 *Comal y Canelas* in Ontario,” she says, with a smile. “[The restaurants] will be providing jobs for Canadians—and will be feeding Canadians,” she says. “I am giving back to Canada what Canada gave to me.” <<



Comal y Canela Tamales

SERVES

8 to 10 people

INGREDIENTS

NIXTAMAL:

- 4 cups of dry whole yellow corn "maize"
- 2 tablespoons of Cal Mexicana or "pickling lime"

TAMALES:

- 30 corn husks for tamales

CHICKEN STOCK:

- 21 cups of water
- 5 chicken legs
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 bay leaves
- 3 whole Jamaican allspice berries
- 1 small sliver of Ceylon cinnamon
- ½ cooking onion, diced
- Salt to taste
- Epazote sprig

DIRECTIONS

NIXTAMAL

The evening before the day you want to make tamales you must begin by preparing the nixtamal.

- 1** Place your dry corn kernels into a large bowl top with water to wash kernels by rubbing them between your hands. Strain.
- 2** Repeat the washing of the kernels two more times. On the last wash, scoop out any debris that rises to the surface and drain corn.
- 3** Place corn in a non-reactive pot and top with your water. Allow to come to boil. Once water begins to boil, put your timer on for 40 minutes.
- 4** At the 40-minute mark, lower heat to medium. Dilute your cal mexicana with ½ cup of water and add to the pot. Top off the pot with more hot water and allow to cook for one hour. Turn off heat and let it rest till next morning.

Nixtamal Masa: In the morning, drain and rinse the nixtamalized corn until the water runs clear. The wet nixtamalized corn kernels are then placed in the "molino" and milled between a pair of rotating grindstones: corn kernels go in along with a thin stream of water. And out of the mill emerges fresh masa.

Now that we have fresh nixtamal masa dough we can begin to prepare our tamales.

TAMALES & CHICKEN STOCK

To make tamales we must first cook our chicken legs so that we have chicken stock for our sauce and dough.

In a stock pot, place all chicken stock ingredients except for epazote. Boil for 30 minutes until chicken is cooked through and then add epazote sprig and continue boiling for five more minutes. Remove chicken legs from stock and place aside to cool. Strain chicken stock and reserve.

[Recipe continued >](#)



Comal y Canela Tamales (continued)

INGREDIENTS

MARTINEZ SAUCE:

- 3 Ancho chilies, deveined, deseeded, toasted
- 3 Guajillo chilies, deveined, deseeded, toasted
- 3 Roma tomatoes
- 1 whole cooking onion
- 4 garlic cloves
- 3 tablespoons of sesame seeds
- 3 tablespoons of pumpkin seeds
- 1 small sliver of ceylon cinnamon
- ¼ cup of reserved chicken stock

TAMALE DOUGH:

- 1 cup of pork lard or vegetable shortening (*pork lard is preferred*)
- 14 cups of fresh nixtamal masa
- 7 tablespoons of reserved chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon of baking powder
- Salt to taste

DIRECTIONS

MARTINEZ SAUCE

- 1 In a small saucepan place first 5 ingredients for Martinez Sauce and add water to just cover tomatoes. Turn heat on high and cook till tomato skins burst and just before water enters the tomatoes. Remove all ingredients from the saucepan and place in a blender.
- 2 In a medium skillet toast sesame seeds and pumpkin seeds. Add toasted seeds to other ingredients already in the blender along with ¼ cup chicken stock and salt to taste. Puree all ingredients for one to three minutes on high. Reserve sauce.
- 3 At this time, place corn husk leaves in a large bowl and top with hot tap water to soften (*about 30 mins.*) Once softened drain and reserve husks.

TAMALE DOUGH

- 1 Place pork lard in a mixer and beat at medium speed with wire whisk attachment till the lard turns a lighter colour and is aerated, about eight to ten minutes.
- 2 Add masa, baking powder and salt and beat for another 10 minutes while slowly adding in the reserved chicken stock till the dough is soft and is easily pulled from the sides of the mixing bowl.
- 3 While your masa dough is in the mixer debone chicken legs.

BUILDING AND COOKING TAMALES

DIRECTIONS

For ease of building tamales, place your tamale pot beside you and your husks, tamale dough, sauce and chicken pieces within reaching distance.

- 1 Take one corn husk and place in your left hand. With your right hand, spoon two large tablespoons of tamale dough unto the husk and spread.
- 2 Top tamale dough with one tablespoon of martinez sauce.
- 3 Place pieces of chicken on top of sauce.
- 4 Fold over the sides of corn husk. Pinch bottom pointy end of husk and bring up to help hold tamale together.
- 5 Place tamales in a steam pot. Place so that they do not unfurl.
- 6 When all the tamales have been placed in the pot. Put on a stove top and heat on high till water boils and lower heat to medium low. Cook on medium low two to two and a half hours or until masa dough is firm.



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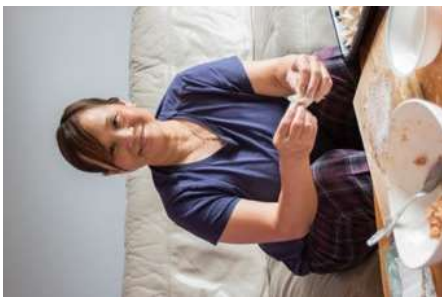
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This cookbook is dedicated to all those who have had to flee in search of a better future. We hope these stories and recipes brought you back familiar tastes from home. «



A brother and sister from Iraq at a temporary accommodation site in Souda, Greece.

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