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Passover Thoughts

Simple remains the best. Uncluttered dishes with focus on wholesome, unfettered flavors help me paint a family holiday meal like the one I imagine in a Norman Rockwell work of art. Our Passover dinner starts where all my food begins at my local farmer's market. During Passover all foods made from leavened wheat, barley, rye, oats and spelt are forbidden and thus naturally pave the way for a low carbohydrate menu. My family and I love to fill in these blanks with a wide array of seasonal vegetables. I say a wide array because when trying to satisfy the discerning palettes of my four daughters a variety is my best plan of action.

Fava beans, acceptable at Passover by many Jews including my wife who is Yemenite, are always sprouting around this time of year and strongly represent a staple food of the Egyptians, one that the Jews of the Exodus had a strong craving for during their Journey to the Promised Land. Fava bean leaves seem to be all the rage recently and with good reason as I learned from my farmer friends, besides being delicious the fava bean plant is beneficial in pulling nitrogen from the air and enriching the soil with it. Before the beans are formed the plants are harvested for their tasty leaves and the highly beneficial nitrogen enriched fertile soil is left for the next rotating crop. I added them to an elegant rendition of matzo ball soup borrowing flavors from the Middle East to add to the appropriate setting of our telling of our Jewish history.

Passover is a time for reflection on our Jewish history and the process of passing our heritage on to the next generation. I love to embellish this process of the Seder meal with the tastes and foods of our past as well as the present adding new and healthy ingredients. The menu becomes an edible Jewish history revealing and allowing us to relive the many stops along our long journey to freedom.

Aarons Family Passover Menu

Hot smoked salmon with beet butter and pickled parsley root
Persian-style chicken soup with fava beans
Seared duck breast with braised whole baby turnips and dates with blood orange gastrique and orange gremolata
Halvah pots de crème

Recipe

Persian Style Chicken Soup

Chicken Broth (or substitute 10 – 12 cups of your favorite homemade or store bought broth)

3 pounds of chicken backbones
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 large onions, peeled and quartered
3 ribs celery, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 head of garlic, unpeeled and sliced in half, separating the top from the bottom
2 carrots, cut into ½ inch thick pieces

½ tablespoon ground turmeric
4 dried Persian limes*, smashed or regular limes, quartered
3 bay leaves
1 tablespoon dried mint
Sea salt to taste

Dumplings and Garnish

1 ½ pounds ground chicken
3 cloves garlic, minced
½ medium Spanish onion, minced
1 teaspoon ground cardamom
¼ cup matzo cake flour
1 whole egg plus 1 egg yolk, beaten together
3 teaspoons salt
1 cup fresh spinach cut in chiffonade
Fresh herbs such as mint, dill and parsley chopped
1 cup fresh fava beans or frozen fava beans
Juice from 1 fresh lime

1. To make the broth rinse off the bones with cold water and set aside.
2. In a large stock pot heat the olive oil and add the onions, celery, garlic and carrots and stir while cooking for approximately 5 minutes until the onions become translucent but not brown. Adjust the flame in order to not brown the vegetables.
3. Add the turmeric, limes, bay leaves and the mint and continue to sauté for an additional 2 minutes. Add the chicken backbones and enough water to cover the bones by six inches. Bring to a boil and skim any scum that has accumulated. Reduce to a low heat and simmer, covered for 2 ½ hours. Season with salt to taste. You can also refrigerate overnight, skimming in the morning.
4. Meanwhile, make the dumplings. Mix the ground chicken meat with the garlic, onion, cardamom, matzoh cake flour, eggs and salt.
5. Roll into 1-inch diameter meat balls approximately 1 ounce each. Refrigerate until the broth is ready.
6. When the broth is ready, carefully strain into a clean pot. Bring the broth back to a simmer and add the chicken dumplings. Place a lid on to the pot and let cook for 10 minutes or until the dumplings have cooked all the way through.
7. Blanch the fava beans by dropping in salted boiling water for thirty seconds then transferred to ice water, skins removed. Then add to the broth with the dumplings.
8. Spoon the broth into the soup bowls and place a couple of dumplings and fava beans into each soup bowl along with some freshly chopped spinach leaves, and herbs, adding the lime juice.

Yield: 8- 10 servings

*Dried Persian limes, that add a nice flavor to the broth, are available at most Middle Eastern stores or from Pereggourmet.com, Kalustayan.com or Sadaf.com