

The vegetables of ancient Egypt would have been familiar to us today. Forms of beans, carrots, lettuce, spinach, radishes, turnips, onions, leeks, garlic, lentils, and chickpeas all featured in their everyday diet. Melons, pumpkins, and cucumbers grew profusely on the banks of the Nile. The rich ancient Egyptians ate meat (beef, goat, mutton), fish from the Nile (perch, catfish, mullet), or poultry (goose, pigeon, duck, heron, crane) every day. Poor Egyptians ate meat on special occasions but ate fish and poultry more often.

Falafel – [V]

A Middle Eastern speciality, falafel are sometimes made with dried broad beans instead of chickpeas, especially in Egypt. A good falafel is light, fragrant and fluffy with a crisp shell. It is also traditionally deep-fried, but this version is much healthier.

Serves 4-6 - Makes 24

400g can chickpeas, drained
2 Spring onions, finely chopped
1 tbsp chopped mint
1tsp ground cumin
1 lemon, zest only
1 tbsp plain flour
½ tsp salt
pepper to taste
vegetable oil for frying

Blend all ingredients except the oil in a food processor to form a manageable mixture.

Shape into 24 small patties and fry in a thin film of oil in a non-stick frying pan until golden brown on both sides. Serve as a snack with low-fat natural yoghurt - or for a more substantial meal, in wholemeal pitta bread pockets with shredded salad.

Egyptian Fish Tagine - Sayadeya Tagen

This is a traditional recipe from Egypt for a classic tagine of sea bass cooked in a tomato and onion sauce flavoured with herbs and spices.

Serves 4

For the marinade:

60ml olive oil
Juice of 2 lemons
Salt and black pepper
1 tsp ground cumin and ground coriander seeds
1 garlic clove, chopped

4 x 200g trout, bream or sea bass fillets
1 tbsp sunflower oil
200g onions, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
450g fresh tomatoes, peeled and de-seeded
2 tbsp tomato purée
black pepper, ground cumin and ground coriander seeds to taste
35g fresh coriander, chopped
35g fresh dill, chopped
1 green bell pepper, de-seeded and very finely chopped

To make the marinade, combine olive oil, lemon juice, salt, black pepper, cumin and ground coriander seeds in a bowl. Add 1 clove of garlic.

Lay the fish fillets in a baking dish and pour the marinade on top. Set aside to marinate for about 20 minutes.

In the meantime, heat the sunflower oil in a tagine or flameproof casserole and use to fry the onion, remaining garlic and cook for about 5 minutes until the onion is soft. Add the tomatoes, tomato purée and season with black pepper, ground cumin and ground coriander seeds. Simmer and stir in the coriander, dill and chopped bell pepper for about 5 minutes.

Remove half of the tomato mixture from the tagine or casserole. Drain the fish and lay it on top of the remaining tomato mixture. Top with the tomato mixture that you have just removed. Cover with the lid and allow to cook gently for about 10 minutes until the fish is cooked through. Serve on a bed of white rice.

Cucumber-Feta Salsa with Pitta Bread – [V]

This is a typical dish which would be served before a meal as a selection of 'Mezze' or dips.

Serves 4 as part of a mezze

For the Salsa:

100g crumbled feta cheese
2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
¼ tsp freshly ground pepper
½ cucumber, peeled and seeded
1 large red onion, finely chopped
3 tbsp fresh mint, chopped
3 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
Lemon slices and fresh parsley for garnish

3 pitta breads cut in half
225g carrots, peeled and cut into quarters
3 sticks celery, cut into quarters

Combine feta cheese, lemon juice, and pepper in a bowl. Mash together with a fork. Stir in the cucumber, onion, mint and dill.

Serve with pitta bread, small pieces of carrots and celery and garnish with parsley and lemon slices.

Jewelled Cous Cous or Rice – [V]

Egyptians also traditionally eat rice so you can substitute rice for cous cous in this recipe.

Serves 4

200ml vegetable stock
1 tbsp olive oil
½ tsp salt
100g cous cous
Finely grated zest of 1 unwaxed lemon
Juice of ½ lemon
50g dried ready to eat apricots, chopped
25g raisins or sultanas
4 tbsp flat leaf parsley, chopped
4 tbsp roughly chopped coriander

Heat the stock and oil in a saucepan, add the salt. Bring to the boil and immediately remove from the heat. Add the cous cous in a steady stream and stir in the lemon zest. Set aside for 10 minutes and allow the grains to swell until the cous has soaked up all the liquid.

Return the cous cous to the heat and drizzle over the lemon juice. Heat gently

for about 5 minutes. Fold in the apricots, sultanas or raisins, parsley and coriander. Season with black pepper to taste. Serve with the tagine.

Lemon and Coriander Hummus – [V]

A recipe typically used in Greece and the Middle East which uses chickpeas a traditional vegetable grown in the region.

Serves 4 as part of a mezza

2x 400g canned chickpeas
2 garlic cloves, crushed
3 tbsp Greek yoghurt
3 tbsp tahini paste (sesame seed paste)
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra
Zest and juice of 2 lemons
20g coriander
Pitta bread, celery stick and carrots to serve

Put everything but the coriander into a food processor. Whizz to a smooth mix. Scrape down the sides of the processor if you need to. Season the houmous generously. Add the coriander and pulse until roughly chopped. Spoon into a serving bowl, drizzle with olive oil and serve.