

Pumpkin Kibbeh

Chef: Deena Dina

I learned to make kibbeh from my ex mother in law and her mother. It is a common dish in Lebanon and there are many vegetarian variations. I learned to make it from potatoes, squash and zucchini. Sometimes it had a filling and at other times the crust alone is baked. We frequently dipped it in plain yogurt seasoned with salt.

Adapted from recipe posted on www.onearabvegan.com and The Complete Vegetarian from America's Test Kitchen. I combined the Kibbeh crust recipe from the website and the book as I thought the recipe from America's Test Kitchen held together better. One Arab Vegan had better seasoning and I loved the stuffing combined with the crust.



Pumpkin Kibbeh with Spinach, Chickpeas and Walnuts

Serves 4

For the kibbeh crust:

- 1 can organic pumpkin puree
- 1 1/2 cup wholewheat bulgur,
- Spices: 1.5 tsp each of cumin powder, cinnamon, paprika + 1/2 a tsp of all spice.
You may substitute 1.5 tbs of kibbeh spice mix*.
- 1 tsp ground asafetida**
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 flax egg (1 tbsp ground flaxseed + 2-3 tbsp of warm water, mixed until gelled)
- ½ whole wheat flour or dried bread crumbs

For the stuffing:

- 1 cup frozen (or 2-3 cups of tightly packed fresh) organic spinach
- 1 can organic chickpeas

- 1/4 cup toasted walnuts, roughly chopped
- 1 small tomato, diced
- 1-2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp of sumac***
- 1 tsp ground asafetida**
- pinch of nutmeg
- canola oil or cooking spray

“Yogurt” sauce

- 1 container of Tofutti cream cheese
- ¾ cup soy milk (unflavored and unsweetened.)
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp zatar spice* mix or sumac*

1. At this point, you’ll want to pre-heat your oven to 375 F. Grease a medium size pan/casserole dish with canola spray.
2. Place bulgur in separate bowl and add water to cover by 1 inch. Let sit until tender, about 10 minutes. Drain bulgur through fine-mesh strainer, then wrap in clean dishtowel and wring tightly to squeeze out as much liquid as possible.
3. Combine the pumpkin, bulgur, spices, flax egg, flour and olive oil in a large bowl and mix thoroughly. You should have a mixture that easily spread and not too crumbly. If it’s too “wet” add in a little more flour or even some breadcrumbs would do the trick.
4. Now on to the stuffing! In a pan heat a small amount of olive oil on medium heat for a couple minutes sprinkle in the asafetida and let it sautee for moment to flavor the oil.
5. Add in the chopped tomato followed by the spinach and stir through along with the sumac, nutmeg, lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste. Add the chickpeas (along with a little reserve water or vegetable stock if you feel the mixture getting dry – although this shouldn’t be the case if you’re using frozen spinach) and allow it to simmer on low heat until most of the liquid has condensed or evaporated.

6. In a separate pan, toast the walnuts for a few minutes, stirring frequently, then add to the rest of the spinach mixture.
7. Now it's time to assemble. Start to layer the bottom of the dish with the pumpkin crust. You ideally want to split the mixture between the top and bottom layer. The kibbeh mixture is easier to spread with clean hands that are slightly wet. I like to flatten a bit of the mixture between my hands before placing it in the pan. Pat the mixture down until it is smooth and even.
8. Spoon the stuffing on top as evenly as possible and cover with the remaining crust mixture, smoothing out with a spatula or your hands as needed.
9. Spray the top crust with a little canola oil or olive oil. Sprinkle some freshly ground black pepper on top. Cut the Kibbeh into about a dozen small squares using a sharp paring knife. Be sure to cut through the bottom crust. This will make it easier to serve.
10. Bake 40- 45 minutes or until the edges are slightly golden. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.
11. For the vegan yogurt sauce: whisk the soymilk into the tofutti cream cheese a little at a time until you have yogurt like consistency. Add the lemon juice and salt. Season with sumac or zatar.
12. Alternately you may use plain Greek yogurt for the sauce. Be certain that no sugar has been added to the yogurt. I tried to find vegan yogurt but all of it had sugar and was not truly plain.
13. Serve the Kibbeh with cucumber and tomato salad. I like drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with a little zatar spice mix.

*Kibbeh, Sumac and Zatar spice mixes may be found at many Middle Eastern markets and international grocery stores.

**Asafetida is an Indian spice. It can be found at international spice stores and on Amazon.