

IN THE GALILEE, BIBLICAL ROOTS, RICH AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE, AND MEDITERRANEAN FLAVORS GIVE RISE TO ISRAEL'S MOST SOULFUL CUISINE

by Gabriella Gershenson photographs by Eilon Paz

THE PROMISED LAND

ABOUT AN HOUR OUTSIDE of Tel Aviv, driving north toward the Galilee, the land tells me I am getting closer to my destination. I see neat plots of banana plants and rows of avocado trees. I pass hardy date palms and fish farms with shallow rectangular pools. A stop at a gas station reveals a carob tree growing next to the parking lot and tufts of *za'atar*, a type of wild thyme eaten throughout the Middle East, sprouting from the curb. When I enter the Upper Galilee, subtropical hills and valleys give way to a rocky green vista of olive trees with gnarled, ropy trunks, which could be hundreds of years old. It's good to be back.

I've been to Israel before. I've seen the religious sites. As a Jewish American who spent my childhood attending Hebrew school, I anticipated having an "aha" moment in the old city of Jerusalem, or at the Wailing Wall, the holiest site for Jews. But it wasn't until I first stepped foot in the Galilee nearly ten years ago that I felt that visceral sense of the sacred so many others say they encounter here. The region, stretching from Lebanon in the north to the Jezreel Valley in the south, has been inhabited for more than 3,000 years. Somehow, the place itself telegraphs its antiquity.

The Galilee was the breadbasket of the biblical period, and more recently, the birthplace of the kibbutz, the 20th-century Jewish farming communes that harnessed the potential of this land, turning it into Israel's most fruitful region. It's also home to some of the most elemental and satisfying foods I've ever eaten: Israeli-style breakfasts of vibrant raw vegetables and soft goats' milk cheeses; specialties like *hummus mashausha*, chickpea-topped hummus swimming in olive oil, and *knafeh*, a syrup-soaked cheese and shredded phyllo pastry, which I sampled in the Arab-Israeli port city of Akko. The cuisine here is influenced by Arabs, Druze, and Bedouins (see "Original Galilee" on page 63), and even by the Bible. There are flavors from the Jewish diaspora,

from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Dishes are executed with the freshness and simplicity that's a hallmark of Mediterranean cooking. To me, it all amounts to Israel's most exciting regional cuisine.

The meal I remember best from an earlier trip to the Galilee was prepared by Erez Komarovsky, who runs a cooking school out of his home. A celebrated Israeli chef, Erez left a thriving business in Tel Aviv to live in Mitzpe Matat, a wilderness minutes from the Lebanon border. I found his way with the foods of this place so profound that I couldn't imagine returning without seeing him.

I ARRIVE AT EREZ'S on a Thursday morning in May. It's just before the harvest festival of Shavuot, which celebrates the bounty of the land. The hills are verdant after the winter rains, and the land is at its most beautiful. Erez, a fit man of 50, comes out to the road wearing jeans and a red T-shirt. He waves me toward his home, which is built into a mountain overlooking villages and valleys. I descend pale stone steps lined with fuchsia (*continued on page 60*)

A meal at the home of the chef Erez Komarovsky in the Upper Galilee. Clockwise from top left: cherry tomatoes with fennel pollen and *sfatit*, an Israeli sheep's milk cheese; roasted eggplant; crusty bread; and beet salad.









Left: a stretch of highway along the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel; above: Lisa Fisher carries a tray of grilled pita topped with *za'atar* spice and olive oil (see page 66 for recipe) at Bustan Chaim, her in-laws' orchard in the Upper Galilee, less than a mile from the Lebanon border.

(continued from page 56) blossoms and follow him in. From his kitchen, Erez produces a pot of Turkish coffee and a lacquered roulade filled with crushed almonds and marzipan. The pastry speaks to his background—Erez rose to prominence with Lehem Erez, or “Erez’s Bread,” a chain that heralded the arrival of the artisan bread movement in Israel in the 1990s. “I wanted a simple, more satisfying life,” he tells me. “Wild leaves, lambs and goats, chickens, dogs, cats, and lots of vegetables in my garden.”

These days, Erez lives in a paradise of his own making. As he walks me through his garden to gather ingredients for our meal, he offers me tastes of what he has grown. There is an abundance of everything: herbs and beets and chickpeas; a mulberry tree that we duck under like it’s an umbrella.

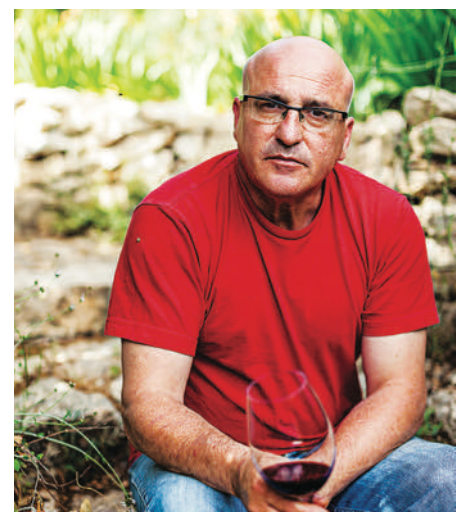
Inside the house, the floor is covered in crates brimming with produce and firewood for the *taboon*, a clay and mud oven that Erez fired up for our lunch. His style of cooking is powerful and spontaneous. He uses just a mortar and pestle, fire, and his hands. To make a cherry and herb salad, he sings hot peppers to intensify their flavor, splits each cherry along its seam, tears cilantro, and breaks walnuts between his fingers. He does the same with eggplant, which he chars, peels in one motion, and plates with jagged halves of soft-boiled egg and *zbug*, a Yemenite chile paste.

When everything is ready, Erez and I dig in. The cherry and herb salad is zesty and sweet. The recipe is from the Turks, Erez says, who occupied this land for centuries. The roasted eggplant, meanwhile, tastes smoky and fresh, the combination of nutty tahini, hot chiles, and garlic one you’d find all over the Middle East. “In the Galilee, the influences are not from abroad but from the Druze and Arabs living here,” Erez explains. “The richness of the culinary knowledge that I get here is unparalleled to what you get in the big city.” Here, Erez picks mushrooms with Jewish Moroccans and Kurds, makes goat cheese out of milk from a Druze neighbor, and buys the foods they forage. Because of the divisions inherent in modern Israeli life, and the tensions between Arabs and Jews, his culinary curiosity feels like a political act, one that emphasizes the way the land connects the people. Before I leave, Erez tells me, “Borders are politics. Borders do not cut the food.”

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON, I meet my friend Lior Lev Sercarz, a 41-year-old silver-haired chef who owns a spice shop in Manhattan but grew up in the Upper Galilee. When I found out he’d be here visiting his family, I convinced him to let me tag along. Today, we’re going to “Parliament,” a social club that Lior’s father, Moshe, belongs to. Started 30 years ago by a group of guys at Ayelet HaShahar, a kibbutz near the Syrian bor-



Top row, from left: *labaneh* with olive oil; Gera Egozi, a member of the Parliament at Ayelet HaShahar, chio trees near the village of Gush Halav; Israeli chopped salad; Moshe Lev Sercarz at his home in the with chile sauce and tahini; Erez Komarovsky’s home kitchen; almond and marzipan roulade; Komar



a kibbutz near the town of Kiryat Shmona; *poike*, a Galilean beef stew; *dolma*, grape leaves stuffed with rice; cherry salad with walnuts and cilantro. Middle row: pista-Upper Galilee; *chreime*, spicy Tunisian fish stew; Turkish coffee at the Parliament. Bottom row: *knafeh*, a sweet cheese and shredded phyllo pastry; charred eggplant ovsky at his garden in Mitzpe Matat. (Recipes begin on page 66.)

TODD COLEMAN (ISRAELI CHOPPED SALAD, CHARRED EGGPLANT WITH CHILE SAUCE & TAHINI, CHREIME)

der, the club is where the men, now mostly in their 50s and 60s, meet on Fridays to talk politics and farming, and to cook a potluck meal made from the foods they've grown.

We arrive at the clubhouse, a crude stone structure with a tin roof and an Israeli flag flying on top. It's growing noisy with greetings and the thuds of wine bottles being placed on the table. Lior's father, a bespectacled man with wavy white hair, approaches us, clutching plump green figs that he offers me and Lior's wife, Lisa, saying they're the first of the season from his trees. I taste one—they're pulpy, fragrant. Moshe's gift carries special meaning. The holiday that starts at sundown tomorrow, Shavuot, is also called Hag ha'Bikkurim, the festival of the first fruits, and marks the beginning of the growing season. Thousands of years ago, farmers like him would bring the first harvest of the seven species named in the Old Testament as models of the land's fertility—wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates—as offerings to the temple in Jerusalem.

Everyone gets started on the meal. There's an easy rhythm to the preparation—though some of the men no longer live on the kibbutz, working together is still second nature. Shlomo Razili, a bearded figure in a cowboy hat, fires up coals in the grill while Yoni Erez, in a black T-shirt, sharpens the knife that Gera Egozi, with a thick mustache and eyes creased into a permanent smile, will use to carve chickens destined for the grill. Behind them, two more men sit and chop green peppers, tomatoes, parsley, cucumbers, and onions into a typical Israeli salad. As they finish, Shlomo squeezes lemons over the vegetables, cupping his hand under the fruit to capture the seeds. Meanwhile, Dror Galili has been making *poike*, a stew cooked over fire in a cast-iron cauldron that layers beef with kohlrabi, turnips, and heaps of other seasonal vegetables. His father was so enamored of the region, he tells me, that when he moved here in 1935, he took its name for his own.

The meal progresses casually. Someone has brought a loaf of challah and *labaneh*, a thick yogurt-like cheese, drizzled with olive oil. We tear off pieces and dunk, and use the same bread to mop up the juices from the salad, which is refreshing and cool. The chicken is served as it comes off the grill. Someone passes a bowl of roasted potatoes; everyone takes them with their fingers. "We share from the same plate," one man says. "You don't mind?" Of course not—this is exactly what I came for.

The last dish to come to the table is the *poike*, and the crowd exclaims at the tender vegetables and savory meat. Now Dror's brother Eli, an avid hunter, claims the grill to cook wild boar. I can't believe he's captured that animal in these hills. This place keeps

From left, Uri Jeremias and Fatmeh Wachesh, in the old port city of Akko in Western Galilee.



surprising me. As we nibble the first cooked morsels, a passionate discussion erupts in Hebrew. I'm dying to know what it's about. Farm equipment and irrigation, it turns out. I should have guessed.

A third Galili brother, an organic farmer named Moshe, passes bowls of his cherries. I think how wonderful it feels to eat this just-picked food among the men who lived together on this kibbutz and worked this soil. The open air and camaraderie are as nourishing as the meal. The mindfulness of this gathering, of the cooking and eating, embodies a reverence for the ordinary that I associate with this region.

THE FOLLOWING DAY, I arrive at Bustan Chaim ("orchard of life" in Hebrew), Lior's home on a remote plot of land near the Lebanon border, for Shavuot dinner. It's a holiday I've never celebrated before, but here, it feels right to do so. I ascend a steep incline planted with lemon, pomegranate, olive, and fig trees and approach a low-slung house covered with vines. Inside, Lior's mother, Aya, a no-nonsense woman, is frying chicken livers and onions. She was born on a nearby kibbutz to a Tunisian father and a Transylvanian mother, but explains that she grew up eating Eastern European dishes like this one made by the Polish Jews who cooked their communal meals.

While Lior goes off to gather ingredients from the orchard's trees and the plants that grow wild among them, his father shows me the grounds, which, like so much of the land here, are idyllic. "My dream was to plant the seven species here," Moshe tells me.

Farming, he says, has transformed him. "From the first plant I put in the ground, I decided I had to live here." Moshe isn't religious, but the land has led him to the Bible for unconventional reasons. For him, the text is full of agricultural insights into nurturing this very earth. Lior returns with lavender and figs for our dessert; purslane, which he'll toss with feta cheese and cured olives; wild fennel, his addition to a Tunisian turnip salad; rosemary as kindling for grilling vegetables; and grape leaves for rolling *dolma*.

As the sun sets, we gather on a deck overlooking the Galilee. The table is set. Lior's wife, his siblings and their kids are here, as are friends. Moshe Galili enters with nectarines from his orchard singing "Shalom Aleichem" in Hebrew, a Sabbath song written by kabbalists in the Middle Ages in nearby Safed, still recited by Jews all over the world: *Peace unto you, ministering angels, messengers of the Most High, of the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.*

Aya's Shavuot table holds riches. There's the Polish chicken liver. Lior has made *chreime*, a spicy North African fish and tomato stew using St. Peter's fish, tilapia from the Sea of Galilee. There are stuffed grape leaves and grilled pita bread with *za'atar* spice, both Arab specialties. And there are dishes Lior has improvised based on what's grown nearby—fennel bulbs, scallions, and zucchini grilled over lemonwood charcoal, a salad of chickpeas with preserved lemon. The table tells the story of age-old flavors, of recent migrations, and of fresh, new beginnings. The combination, to me, is pure Galilee. 🐦

GALILEE, ISRAEL

Dinner for two with drinks and tip: Moderate \$40–\$80

WHERE TO STAY

Efendi Hotel

Louis IX Street, Akko (972/747/299-799; efendi-hotel.com). Rates: \$350–\$650 for a double. Restaurateur Uri Jeremias has painstakingly transformed two 19th-century Ottoman-style buildings into a hotel in Akko's old city. Restored frescoes, soaring ceilings, and views of Haifa Bay are all part of the luxurious setting.

Pausa Inn

She'ar Yashuv 63, She'ar Yashuv (972/546/904-434; pausa-inn.co.il). Rates: \$200 for a double. This small guesthouse run by Avigdor and Einat Rothem is located on a gorgeous two acres with an orchard and garden in Upper Galilee. The highlight is the Israeli-style breakfast buffet, featuring fresh cheeses and an array of just-picked fruits and vegetables.

WHERE TO EAT

Al Tanur

Reina Junction, Upper Nazareth (972/046/014-948). Owned by the

family behind Nazareth's El Babour, an old spice market and mill, this casual Arab restaurant offers one of the many fine meals in the region's best dining town. Try the stuffed lamb neck over *freetkeh*, roasted green wheat.

Goats with the Wind Farm

Har Hashabi, Yodfat (972/505/327-387; goatswiththewind.com). Dalia and Amnon Zaldstein run this dairy and restaurant in the hills of the Lower Galilee. The Eden-like setting features cushion seating under carob trees for a rustic, seasonal meal that includes the farm's organic goat cheese.

WHAT TO DO

Erez Komarovsky's Galilee Cooking School

Route 899, Mitzpe Matat (972/39/772-929; erez-komarovsky.co.il). Israeli chef Erez Komarovsky teaches cooking classes out of his Upper Galilee home. His dishes—based on regional foods, including those he grows in his garden—are part of the lunch that follows. Register in advance for

Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday classes.

The Old City of Akko Market

Marco Polo Street, Akko. The old city of Akko, with its serpentine alleys and Crusade-era architecture, is home to one of Israel's best markets. Get to know local ingredients, such as *za'atar* and St. Peter's fish, and taste exemplary Galilean-style hummus from Hummus Said, and sweets from Knafeh Qashash. —G.G.



THE MAPFACTORY



ORIGINAL GALILEE

Thanks to modern irrigation systems and other agricultural technologies, Israel's Galilee is a farming powerhouse that today yields everything from kiwis to avocados. But the region's culinary character has roots in ancient traditions that are still practiced here. According to Abbie Rosner, author of *Breaking Bread in Galilee* (Hilayon Press, 2012), before the formation of Israel in 1948, the Arabs, Bedouins, and Druze (an ancient religious sect) who make up nearly half the area's population "farmed pretty much exactly the way it was described in the Bible." In other words, they tended indigenous foods such as chickpeas, wheat, and olives grown from heirloom seeds. These native crops, referred to as *baladi* ("my land" in Arabic), are sometimes grown without irrigation, resulting in stronger, truer flavors. They form the bedrock of the Galilean pantry. For centuries, these subsistence farmers pressed olives into oil; ground chickpeas to make hummus; and transformed whole wheat into nutty flour, bulgur (cracked wheat, a main ingredient in tabbouleh), and *freekeh*, toasted green wheat. The prevalence of foods such as *labaneh*, a tangy, yogurt-like cheese, can be ascribed to the local Bedouin tribes, who, as herders, contributed dairy to the regional diet. Plus, the Jordan River on the eastern border, the inland Sea of Galilee, and the Mediterranean at the west have all supported centuries of fishing, still evident in the Arab-Israeli port city of Akko, where you'll find local species such as tilapia. And foraging in the wild is equally important for Druze, Arabs, and Bedouins: Countless greens such as wild asparagus and mallow serve as the bases for stews, savory pies, and other dishes, while *za'atar*, wild thyme, is dried and mixed with sumac (a powder made from tart red berries) and a variety of spices to make a type of seasoning that's consumed all over the Middle East. —G.G.



Olives



Chickpeas



Galilean tilapia



Wheat



Za'atar

Almond & Marzipan Roulade

SERVES 10–12

Chef Erez Komarovsky's buttery almond pastry (pictured on page 61), swirled through with marzipan and toasted nuts, makes a fine breakfast or afternoon snack.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups cake flour
- 1 ¼-oz. package active dry yeast
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 egg yolks
- 1¼ cups butter, softened
- 12 oz. marzipan (almond paste; see page 84)
- 1 cup whole almonds, toasted and roughly chopped
- 1 tbsp. coarse sugar
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon

1 Whisk flours, yeast, and salt in a bowl; make a well in the center. Whisk buttermilk, ½ cup sugar, 3 yolks, and ¼ cup warm water in a bowl; pour into well and add butter. Stir until a stiff dough forms. On a lightly floured surface, knead dough until smooth, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a greased bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to overnight.

2 Heat oven to 350°. On a floured surface, roll dough into an 11" x 16" rectangle. Distribute marzipan and almonds evenly over dough, leaving a 1" border. With a long side facing you, roll dough up and over filling; pinch and tuck ends of dough under. Transfer loaf, seam side down, to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet; brush with remaining yolk and sprinkle with coarse sugar. Bake until golden and

cooked through, about 1 hour.

3 Boil remaining sugar and ¼ cup water in a 1-qt. saucepan; cook, stirring, to make a syrup, 1–2 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and zest and brush syrup over the hot cake. Let cool slightly before serving.

Charred Eggplant with Chile Sauce & Tahini

SERVES 2–4

To make chef Erez Komarovsky's charred eggplant (pictured on page 60), choose young eggplant that haven't yet developed seeds, which can cause bitterness. If you have a gas burner at home, try cooking each eggplant over the open flame for about four minutes to impart smoky flavor.

- 2 small Italian eggplant (about 1 lb.)
- 2 cups cilantro leaves, chopped
- 1 cup mint leaves, chopped
- 1 cup virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup honey
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 serrano chile, stemmed and seeded
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup tahini, for serving
- 6 soft-boiled eggs, halved

1 Heat broiler to high. Place eggplant on an aluminum foil-lined baking sheet. Broil, turning as needed, until tender and charred, 8–10 minutes.

2 Purée cilantro, mint, oil, honey, garlic, serrano chile, juice, zest, salt and pepper in a food processor to make a smooth herb sauce. To serve, slice eggplant in half lengthwise, leaving stem attached. Season

with salt and pepper. Spoon herb sauce and tahini over eggplant and arrange eggs around eggplant on a serving platter.

Cherry & Herb Salad

SERVES 4–6

This sweet-tart cherry, cilantro, and walnut salad (pictured on page 61), chef Erez Komarovsky's riff on a classic Turkish recipe, is delicious on its own, or as a relish for grilled meats or fish.

- 2 red Holland chiles
- 1 lb. fresh dark pitted cherries
- 1 cup cilantro leaves
- ½ cup walnut halves, toasted and roughly chopped
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 1½ tbsp. pomegranate molasses
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste

1 Heat oven broiler to high. Place chiles on a baking sheet; broil, turning as needed, until charred and tender, 4–5 minutes.

2 Transfer to a bowl and cover with plastic wrap; let sit 5 minutes. Discard stems, skin, and seeds from chiles; finely chop and transfer to a bowl. Add cherries, cilantro, walnuts, oil, molasses, juice, salt, and pepper; toss to combine. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

Chreime

(Spicy Tunisian Fish Stew)

SERVES 4–6

This Tunisian-Jewish Sabbath specialty (pictured on page 61) from Israeli chef Lior Lev Sercarz features tender fish braised in a thick chile-spiced tomato sauce.

- 6 fish filets (about 4 oz. each), such as sea bass or grouper
- 3 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 10 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 3 small red Thai chiles, stemmed and roughly chopped
- 1 6-oz. can tomato paste
- 2 cups minced cilantro

Combine fish, juice, salt, and pepper in a bowl; set aside. Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add garlic and chiles; cook, stirring, until soft, 1–2 minutes. Add paste; cook,

stirring, until slightly caramelized, about 2 minutes. Add cilantro and ¼ cups water; boil. Reduce heat to medium; cook until sauce is slightly reduced, 6 minutes. Add fish, skin side up, with its juice and cover; cook until fish is done, 18–20 minutes.

Dolma

(Grape Leaves Stuffed with Rice)

MAKES 25

This recipe for stuffed grape leaves (pictured on page 61), from chef Lior Lev Sercarz, an expert in spice blending, uses both lemon juice and zest to enhance the flavor of the stuffing.

- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 small yellow onion, minced
- ½ cup long-grain rice
- ½ tsp. minced fresh thyme
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 oz. dried Turkish apricots, minced
- ½ cup minced cilantro
- ⅓ cup minced parsley
- ¼ cup golden raisins
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- 2 tbsp. minced mint
- 2 tbsp. red currant jelly
- ⅛ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice, plus the zest of 1 lemon
- 25 grape leaves packed in brine (see page 84), rinsed
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced

1 Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add garlic and onions; cook, stirring, until soft, 3–5 minutes. Add rice, thyme, salt, and pepper; cook 2 minutes. Add 1 cup stock and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cook, covered, until rice is tender, 22–24 minutes. Stir in apricots, cilantro, parsley, raisins, nuts, mint, jelly, cayenne, lemon juice and zest, salt, and pepper.

2 Heat oven to 375°. Working with one leaf at a time, stuff the grape leaves (see "How to Stuff Grape Leaves," left). Place stuffed grape leaves seam side down in a single layer in an 8" x 8" baking dish. Add remaining stock and distribute lemon slices over grape leaves. Cover pan with aluminum foil and bake until tender, about 1 hour. Let grape leaves cool before serving.

Grilled Pita Bread with Za'atar

MAKES 6 PITAS

This chewy flatbread topped with za'atar (pictured on page 59), a spice

HOW TO STUFF GRAPE LEAVES



1 Drain, rinse, and pat grape leaves dry. Lay flat, vein side up, with the stem facing you. Put 1 tbsp. rice filling in center of leaf and fold right side of leaf over filling.



2 Fold left side of leaf over filling, overlapping the other side completely. Squeeze filling on top and bottom to form a compact package.



3 Fold bottom of the leaf over the center of the package and roll it forward into a cylinder, tightening as you go to ensure a snug parcel.

blend of wild thyme, tangy sumac, and toasted sesame seeds, can be grilled outdoors or oven-baked and finished in a grill pan.

- 1 ¼-oz. package active dry yeast
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt, plus more for kneading
- 4 cups bread flour, plus more for greasing and grilling
- ⅓ cup olive oil, plus more for greasing and grilling
- ½ cup za'atar seasoning (see page 84)
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon

1 Combine yeast, sugar, and ½ cup water heated to 115° in a bowl. Let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Combine 1 tbsp. salt and 1 cup warm water in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook; mix until salt is dissolved. With the motor running, slowly add flour in 3 batches and yeast mixture in 2 batches. Add 2 tbsp. oil; mix until a soft, sticky dough forms. On a floured surface, knead dough until smooth, 5–10 minutes. Shape dough into a ball and place in a lightly greased bowl. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let sit in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 hour.

2 Heat oven to 350°. Punch dough down; knead for 5 minutes. Divide into 6 pieces and roll each piece into a ball; place on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let sit in a warm place until doubled in size, 20–25 minutes.

3 Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, dust dough heavily with flour and roll into a 7" circle, about ⅛" thick. Transfer to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Bake, flipping once, until puffed, 3–5 minutes. Transfer pita to a plate and cover with a kitchen towel to keep warm.

4 Mix remaining oil, za'atar, juice, zest, and salt in a bowl. Heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat. Working with one pita at a time, cook, flipping once, until puffed and charred in spots, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter and brush generously with za'atar mixture.

★ Hummus Mashaushé

(Galilean-Style Hummus)

MAKES 3 CUPS

Generous spice, a good dose of olive oil, and chickpeas piled high are the

hallmarks of this Galilean-style hummus (pictured on page 64).

- 1½ cups dried chickpeas, soaked overnight; drained
- ½ cup tahini
- ¾ cup olive oil, plus more
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 small red Thai chile, stemmed and seeded
- Kosher salt, to taste

Bring chickpeas and 4 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, covered, until chickpeas are very tender, 1–1½ hours. Drain, reserving ½ cup cooking liquid; cool to room temperature. Transfer all but ¾ cup chickpeas to a food processor with the tahini, oil, juice, cumin, garlic, chile, and salt; purée until smooth. Add reserved cooking liquid and continue to purée until airy in consistency, about 5 minutes. Transfer hummus to a serving dish. Top with remaining whole chickpeas, drizzle with more oil, and sprinkle with salt.

★ Israeli Chopped Salad

SERVES 8–10

Janna Gur, author of *The Book of New Israeli Food* (Schocken, 2008), uses sumac and cinnamon to heighten the flavors of this Israeli staple (pictured on page 60).

- ¼ cup minced cilantro
- ¼ cup minced mint
- ¼ cup minced parsley
- 2 tsp. ground sumac (see page 84)
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ cup olive oil
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced
- 4 cloves garlic
- 4 medium ripe tomatoes, cored, seeded, and minced
- 3 medium cucumbers, seeded and minced
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1 large white onion, minced
- Juice and zest of 3 lemons
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Mix all the ingredients in a bowl. Let sit 20 minutes before serving.

★ Knafeh

(Syrup-Soaked Cheese Pastry)

SERVES 10–20

In this recipe (pictured on page

60), *kataif*, a bird's nest–like phyllo dough, is layered with fresh cheese and doused in amber-hued syrup.

- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. red food coloring, optional
- ½ cup whole milk
- 3 tbsp. semolina
- 1 lb. whole-milk ricotta
- 1 lb. kataif (shredded phyllo dough, see page 84), crumbled
- 2 cups unsalted butter, melted, plus more for greasing
- ¼ cup minced pistachios

1 Boil sugar and ½ cup water in a 2-qt. saucepan; cook, stirring until sugar is dissolved, 1–2 minutes. Stir in juice and food coloring; set syrup aside. Boil milk and semolina in a 1-qt. saucepan; cook, whisking, until slightly thickened, 1–2 minutes. Whisk in ricotta; set mixture aside.

2 Heat oven to 350°. Lightly grease a 9" x 13" baking dish. Toss kataif and butter in a bowl until butter is absorbed; press half into the bottom of the dish. Spread ricotta mixture evenly over kataif; top with remaining kataif. Press layers firmly together. Bake until crisp and golden, 1–1½ hours. Let cool to room temperature. Transfer cake to a serving platter. Spoon syrup over the top and sprinkle with pistachios.

Labaneh

SERVES 4

Thick, tart, and creamy, this yogurt-like cheese (pictured on page 60), when eaten together with olive oil, pita bread, and za'atar spice, makes a typical Galilean breakfast.

- 8 cups whole milk
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Olive oil, for serving

1 Bring milk to a boil in a 4-qt. nonreactive saucepan fitted with a deep-fry thermometer. Remove from heat and let cool until thermometer reads 118°. Transfer 1 cup milk to a bowl; whisk in yogurt until combined. Add yogurt mixture to saucepan and whisk until smooth; cover tightly with plastic wrap and let sit in a warm place (ideally 70°–75°) until thickened, 6–8 hours.

2 Line a fine-mesh strainer with 3

layers of cheesecloth; set over a bowl. Transfer yogurt to strainer; let drain at least 8 hours or overnight. Transfer to a serving dish. Season with salt and drizzle with oil.

Poike

(Galilean Beef Stew)

SERVES 6–8

Any seasonal vegetable, from earthy turnips to pungent kohlrabi, can be added to this hearty beef stew (pictured on page 61).

- ⅓ cup olive oil
- 2 lb. beef chuck, trimmed and cut into 1½" pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 medium carrots, sliced
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 medium parsnip, peeled and cut into ½" pieces
- 1 cup dry red wine
- ½ cup beef stock
- 3 oz. dried apricots, quartered
- 3 oz. pitted prunes, halved
- ⅓ cup raisins
- ½ cup minced parsley
- ⅓ cup minced cilantro
- ¼ cup minced oregano
- ½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- ¼ tsp. ground ginger
- 6 fresh sage leaves
- 2 medium oranges, quartered
- 2 medium Yukon gold potatoes, cut into ½" wedges
- 1 medium turnip, peeled and cut into ½" wedges
- 1 small kohlrabi, peeled and cut into ½" wedges
- 1 small zucchini, cut crosswise ½" thick

Heat oil in a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Season beef with salt and pepper. Cook beef until browned, 5–7 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Add garlic, carrots, celery, onions, and parsnips to pan; cook until soft, 5–7 minutes. Add wine; cook until reduced by half, 4–6 minutes. Return beef to pot, along with stock, apricots, prunes, raisins, parsley, cilantro, oregano, nutmeg, cayenne, ginger, sage, and oranges; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and cover; cook until beef is just tender, 1½–2 hours. Add potatoes, turnips, kohlrabi, zucchini, salt, and pepper; continue to cook until vegetables are tender, 1–1½ hours more.

blend of wild thyme, tangy sumac, and toasted sesame seeds, can be grilled outdoors or oven-baked and finished in a grill pan.

- 1 ¼-oz. package active dry yeast
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt, plus more for kneading
- 4 cups bread flour, plus more for greasing and grilling
- ⅓ cup olive oil, plus more for greasing and grilling
- ½ cup za'atar seasoning (see page 84)
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon

1 Combine yeast, sugar, and ½ cup water heated to 115° in a bowl. Let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Combine 1 tbsp. salt and 1 cup warm water in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook; mix until salt is dissolved. With the motor running, slowly add flour in 3 batches and yeast mixture in 2 batches. Add 2 tbsp. oil; mix until a soft, sticky dough forms. On a floured surface, knead dough until smooth, 5–10 minutes. Shape dough into a ball and place in a lightly greased bowl. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let sit in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 hour.

2 Heat oven to 350°. Punch dough down; knead for 5 minutes. Divide into 6 pieces and roll each piece into a ball; place on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let sit in a warm place until doubled in size, 20–25 minutes.

3 Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, dust dough heavily with flour and roll into a 7" circle, about ⅛" thick. Transfer to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Bake, flipping once, until puffed, 3–5 minutes. Transfer pita to a plate and cover with a kitchen towel to keep warm.

4 Mix remaining oil, za'atar, juice, zest, and salt in a bowl. Heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat. Working with one pita at a time, cook, flipping once, until puffed and charred in spots, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter and brush generously with za'atar mixture.

★ Hummus Mashaushé

(Galilean-Style Hummus)

MAKES 3 CUPS

Generous spice, a good dose of olive oil, and chickpeas piled high are the

hallmarks of this Galilean-style hummus (pictured on page 64).

- 1½ cups dried chickpeas, soaked overnight; drained
- ½ cup tahini
- ¾ cup olive oil, plus more
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 small red Thai chile, stemmed and seeded
- Kosher salt, to taste

Bring chickpeas and 4 cups water to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, covered, until chickpeas are very tender, 1–1½ hours. Drain, reserving ½ cup cooking liquid; cool to room temperature. Transfer all but ¾ cup chickpeas to a food processor with the tahini, oil, juice, cumin, garlic, chile, and salt; purée until smooth. Add reserved cooking liquid and continue to purée until airy in consistency, about 5 minutes. Transfer hummus to a serving dish. Top with remaining whole chickpeas, drizzle with more oil, and sprinkle with salt.

★ Israeli Chopped Salad

SERVES 8–10

Janna Gur, author of *The Book of New Israeli Food* (Schocken, 2008), uses sumac and cinnamon to heighten the flavors of this Israeli staple (pictured on page 60).

- ¼ cup minced cilantro
- ¼ cup minced mint
- ¼ cup minced parsley
- 2 tsp. ground sumac (see page 84)
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ cup olive oil
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced
- 4 cloves garlic
- 4 medium ripe tomatoes, cored, seeded, and minced
- 3 medium cucumbers, seeded and minced
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 1 large white onion, minced
- Juice and zest of 3 lemons
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Mix all the ingredients in a bowl. Let sit 20 minutes before serving.

★ Knafeh

(Syrup-Soaked Cheese Pastry)

SERVES 10–20

In this recipe (pictured on page

60), *kataif*, a bird's nest–like phyllo dough, is layered with fresh cheese and doused in amber-hued syrup.

- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. red food coloring, optional
- ½ cup whole milk
- 3 tbsp. semolina
- 1 lb. whole-milk ricotta
- 1 lb. kataif (shredded phyllo dough, see page 84), crumbled
- 2 cups unsalted butter, melted, plus more for greasing
- ¼ cup minced pistachios

1 Boil sugar and ½ cup water in a 2-qt. saucepan; cook, stirring until sugar is dissolved, 1–2 minutes. Stir in juice and food coloring; set syrup aside. Boil milk and semolina in a 1-qt. saucepan; cook, whisking, until slightly thickened, 1–2 minutes. Whisk in ricotta; set mixture aside.

2 Heat oven to 350°. Lightly grease a 9" x 13" baking dish. Toss kataif and butter in a bowl until butter is absorbed; press half into the bottom of the dish. Spread ricotta mixture evenly over kataif; top with remaining kataif. Press layers firmly together. Bake until crisp and golden, 1–1½ hours. Let cool to room temperature. Transfer cake to a serving platter. Spoon syrup over the top and sprinkle with pistachios.

Labaneh

SERVES 4

Thick, tart, and creamy, this yogurt-like cheese (pictured on page 60), when eaten together with olive oil, pita bread, and *za'atar* spice, makes a typical Galilean breakfast.

- 8 cups whole milk
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Olive oil, for serving

1 Bring milk to a boil in a 4-qt. nonreactive saucepan fitted with a deep-fry thermometer. Remove from heat and let cool until thermometer reads 118°. Transfer 1 cup milk to a bowl; whisk in yogurt until combined. Add yogurt mixture to saucepan and whisk until smooth; cover tightly with plastic wrap and let sit in a warm place (ideally 70°–75°) until thickened, 6–8 hours.

2 Line a fine-mesh strainer with 3

layers of cheesecloth; set over a bowl. Transfer yogurt to strainer; let drain at least 8 hours or overnight. Transfer to a serving dish. Season with salt and drizzle with oil.

Poike

(Galilean Beef Stew)

SERVES 6–8

Any seasonal vegetable, from earthy turnips to pungent kohlrabi, can be added to this hearty beef stew (pictured on page 61).

- ⅓ cup olive oil
- 2 lb. beef chuck, trimmed and cut into 1½" pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 medium carrots, sliced
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 medium parsnip, peeled and cut into ½" pieces
- 1 cup dry red wine
- ½ cup beef stock
- 3 oz. dried apricots, quartered
- 3 oz. pitted prunes, halved
- ⅓ cup raisins
- ½ cup minced parsley
- ⅓ cup minced cilantro
- ¼ cup minced oregano
- ½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- ¼ tsp. ground ginger
- 6 fresh sage leaves
- 2 medium oranges, quartered
- 2 medium Yukon gold potatoes, cut into ½" wedges
- 1 medium turnip, peeled and cut into ½" wedges
- 1 small kohlrabi, peeled and cut into ½" wedges
- 1 small zucchini, cut crosswise ½" thick

Heat oil in a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Season beef with salt and pepper. Cook beef until browned, 5–7 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Add garlic, carrots, celery, onions, and parsnips to pan; cook until soft, 5–7 minutes. Add wine; cook until reduced by half, 4–6 minutes. Return beef to pot, along with stock, apricots, prunes, raisins, parsley, cilantro, oregano, nutmeg, cayenne, ginger, sage, and oranges; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and cover; cook until beef is just tender, 1½–2 hours. Add potatoes, turnips, kohlrabi, zucchini, salt, and pepper; continue to cook until vegetables are tender, 1–1½ hours more.