

Borek

This is similar to spanikopita, called such because of cigar shape.

1 box phyllo dough
1 stick melted butter (olive oil can also be used)
1 package frozen spinach, thawed, squeezed dry
1 lb. feta
1/4 small onion, finely diced
2 eggs
salt, pepper
pinch of dried dill
3 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley (preferably flat leaf)

For spinach filling: place thawed, squeeze dried spinach in bowl, add onion, 1 egg, 1/4 of the feta (crumbled), dill and salt and pepper to taste. Mix until well blended. Place aside.

For cheese filling: place rest of feta, crumbled into bowl, add 1 egg, parsley, salt and pepper to taste and mix until well blended and forms a paste-like mixture.

Assembly: Remove phyllo dough from box, lay flat and cover with a damp towel. Take 1 sheet of phyllo dough, lay out on work surface and brush with a fair amount of butter. Place 1 more sheet on top, aligning the two as closely as possible, brush with butter. Place a third sheet on top of the other two, brush with a little less butter than the other two. Cut the stack of three phyllo sheets into thirds. Place a good heaping tbsp. of either filling at one end, spreading out into a line. Fold end of phyllo dough over and continue rolling in a cigar-like fashion. Place on baking sheet. Continue the process with the remaining phyllo sheets and filling (you may need to melt more butter). Bake at 350 until golden brown. Serve.

Greek Cocktail Meatballs in Sauce

From "Little Foods of the Mediterranean" by Clifford A. Wright, Boston, 2003. I change some steps of this recipe. For instance, I pan-fried the meatballs in a little olive oil rather than deep-frying them. I sometimes use canned tomatoes.

2 cups cubed Italian bread, white part only
3/4 cup water
1 1/4 lbs. lean ground lamb
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley (preferably flat leaf)
2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh mint
1 tsp. ground coriander
2 small onions, 1 grated, 1 chopped
4 large garlic cloves, 2 mashed and 2 finely chopped
salt and pepper to taste
6 cups olive oil or veggie oil for frying
flour
2 tbsp. olive oil
2 lbs. ripe plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
1 cup dry red wine
1 cinnamon stick
2 tbsp. chopped fresh savory leaves, or 1 tsp. dried savory

In large bowl soak the bread cubes in the water until sodden. Squeeze the water out between your palms as if making a snowball. Drain the water from the bowl and knead together the bread, lamb, 6 tbsp. parsley, mint, coriander, grated onion and mashed garlic, salt and pepper. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat the frying oil in a deep fryer or in 8" saucepan fitted with a basket to 375 degrees. Remove meat mixture from the refrigerator and form meatballs half the size of a walnut, keeping your hands wet with water so the meat doesn't stick to them. Dredge the meatballs in flour, tapping off excess. Deep-fry the meatballs in batches in hot oil until lightly brown, about 3 min. Drain on paper towels and set aside. Let oil cool, strain and save for future use.

In a large cast iron skillet, heat the 2 tbsp. olive oil over medium heat, then cook the chopped onion until translucent, about 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the chopped garlic, tomatoes, wine, cinnamon stick, remaining 2 tbsp. parsley, savory and salt and pepper. Stir well to blend and simmer for 45 min.

Remove the cinnamon stick and discard. Add the meatballs to the sauce, stir, reduce heat to low and cook until thickened a bit, another 15-30 min. Serve warm in deep platter with toothpicks.

Shepherd's Salad

The possible combinations for this salad are endless. For this meal, I wanted the strong taste of herbs to balance the other items on the menu, so I went for a more herby mix - 2 tomatoes, 1/2 a cucumber to a whole bunch of flat leaf parsley. You can ease up on the herbs so that they are just part of the dressing and replace them with more veggies or lettuce. The quantity of items depends on the number of people you're serving.

Tomatoes (cut into cubes; preferably plum tomatoes)

Cucumber (cut into 1/4 moons)

Fresh parsley (preferably flat leaf), roughly chopped

Fresh dill

Fresh mint

Red onions (opt), large dice

Feta (opt), crumbled

Juice of 1 lemon

1 tsp. red wine vinegar

salt and pepper

Olive oil

For salad: Mix tomatoes, cucumbers, parsley, dill, mint and any other vegetable in bowl.

Dressing: Whisk the juice of one lemon, red wine vinegar, salt, pepper and olive oil together in small bowl, add a bit of sugar if it is too bitter.

Toss dressing with vegetable/herb mix right before serving.

Hummus

Traditional hummus recipes call for tahini or sesame paste. This recipe follows the type of hummus I had in Turkey, which is much lighter without the addition of the tahini and allows the flavors of the beans, garlic and lemon to come out much more.

1 can drained and rinsed garbanzo beans
lemon juice (to taste)
1-2 cloves of garlic (or more if you love garlic)
salt and pepper
olive oil
Sumac (Aleppo pepper)
Pita bread, cut into wedges

Place garbanzo beans in a food processor or blender with garlic, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Puree/blend/pulse until all mashed together. While processor/blender is still running add enough olive oil to bring the whole mashed mess together until it forms a thick puree. Season with more salt and pepper if necessary. Place in flat-ish bowl or plate, smooth out until it forms a thin layer. Sprinkle with olive oil and sumac (Aleppo pepper) - if you cannot find sumac, fresh chopped parsley would work or paprika or cayenne. Serve with pita wedges.

Tzatziki

(Yogurt dip - YUMMY)

1 lb. plain yogurt (I recommend Dannon all natural - all fat!!)
1/2 cucumber, medium diced
1 clove of garlic mashed with 1/2 tsp. kosher salt to form paste
Dried mint

Place yogurt into a strainer lined with a tea towel, paper towels or coffee filter. Place strainer over bowl and place into refrigerator. Let sit for at least 1 hour so that all the liquid in yogurt is removed. Place strained yogurt in mixing bowl add cucumber, mashed garlic and pepper. Stir until well blended. Season to taste with more salt if needed. Place in bowl and sprinkle with dried mint.