

An Elegant Rosh HaShanah Dinner -2010 **Joan Kekst, Food Writer**

Ezra deliberately chose the time to return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. When his revered teacher died, he gathered the many remaining Jews and trekked to Zion. Upon arrival, Ezra read the laws of the biblical festival season to the people. He saw many customs had been lost or entwined with Babylonian ways; the people were deeply distressed for they didn't know how to celebrate. Ezra instructed his companion, Nehemiah to comfort them with these words, “- - - eat rich viands and drink the sweet beverages, and send portions to him who has none prepared; - - - do not be sad for joy in the Lord is your refuge.” (Neh.8:10) Ever since, Rosh HaShanah, a time for serious prayer and introspection, includes a rich festive family meal.

Over time, holiday celebrations imbued food with special meaning. On Rosh Hashanah, a new seasonal fruit is served for the first time, a whole fish and round challah to be dipped in honey are familiar foods on the table. It's a nice tradition to include some of these symbolic food gestures on the holiday table.

Pomegranates ripen in the fall, to fulfill the custom to eat a new seasonal fruit for the first time on Rosh HaShanah. A fruit of Biblical history (the Song of Solomon) and Greek fable, the pomegranate, (*punica*), was native to Persia and still grows all over the Middle East. Well-known in Egypt, it was a food the Israelites sorely missed in the desert. Happily, Moses assured them it would be found in the Promised Land.

The sharp flavor is refreshing and can be made into a delightful juice, wine or syrup such as grenadine. Buy them with bright, unbroken skins and a clear calyx (crown) on top. Pomegranates keep several weeks if refrigerated. Use the seeds to garnish salads or other foods. Cut it in half to enjoy the flavorful pulp surrounding the seeds. Eat carefully – the juices are a potent dye!

Honey, once the sweetener only of the rich, drips from desserts and entrees at the Rosh HaShanah table. Honey is unique as it is the product of bees, yet all insects are non-kosher. However, rabbis determined that bees merely facilitate the creation of honey. Flavored honey needs a rabbinic certification. Honey from Israel, if available is delicious. Since Biblical times, honey represented richness and a good, sweet life in the “land of milk and honey.”

Well known since antiquity as a preservative, honey contains many nutrients and is credited with antioxidant qualities. Honey retains freshness in baked goods and takes the Rosh HaShanah meal to sweet heights.

Eating Bread and Honey” is how most families begin the festive meal. Rosh HaShanah *Challah* baked in large rounds, is often topped with various original ethnic motifs. Holiday bakers may decorate challah with a dove of peace, a ladder ascending to heaven or perhaps a key to release one from their sins. Before the Yom Kippur fast, a hand may be placed on the challah implying that we are in the hands of God.

After reciting the *Motzi*, a piece of challah is torn or sliced and passed around the table for each person to dip in honey in anticipation of a full, sweet and well rounded New Year. Apples are also dipped in honey.

FISH remain an integral part of Jewish diets from the days of bondage to Babylonian times and in present day kosher kitchens, for Kashrut and health reasons. Kosher fish embody many Jewish symbols. God blessed fish (Gen. 1:22), instructed them to “be fruitful and multiply” then gave the same dictum to the Israelites. Thus fish became a symbol of fertility for Jews and other Mediterranean communities.

On Rosh Hashanah Greek Jews served a whole red mullet; Spanish Jews fried or baked fish in olive oil not lard, the local fat, inaugurating olive oil as a unique cooking source. Jews took this custom wherever they traveled, becoming known as “Fish in the Jewish style”. Jellied carp was ‘Jewish style’ delicacy in France; Ashkenazi Jews once made a finely chopped carp mixture re-stuffed into the skin and poached it. This became Gefilte Fish, which today is usually poached without the skin. On Rosh HaShana ethnic fish delicacies may grace the table. A whole fish is often served, in hope that the Jews will be at the head of the world in the New Year.

Carrots cut into rounds represent gold coins and symbolize prosperity in the coming year. Another food custom is to serve dishes such as couscous or rice to wish for a prosperous bountiful year.

This year, the early holiday can put a bounty of fresh vegetables on the Rosh HaShanah table. Whatever your family customs, Rosh Hashanah is an invitation to celebrate rich delicacies and sweet foods for body and soul. Shana Tova!

The following recipes will be delectable and many are easily prepared ahead. All recipes serve 8 or more.

TOMATO SOUP with EGGPLANT and ROASTED PEPPERS -

1 medium eggplant peeled, cut into 1" cubes

3T fresh lemon juice

3T olive oil

1 large white onion, minced

1 – 2 garlic clove, minced

3 lb. tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped

2T chopped fresh thyme leaves

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1 each yellow and red bell pepper, peeled, cored and seeded

6C vegetable stock or 'pareve' chicken broth

Chopped fresh parsley

Place eggplant in a colander, sprinkle with lemon juice and 2t. salt. Toss, drain 20 minutes. Meanwhile, roast peppers under broiler, turning until charred on all sides. Cover with a towel to cool slightly. Peel and set aside. In a large non-reactive pot, heat the olive oil on medium heat. Add onion and cook 3 minutes or until softened. Add garlic, cook 1 minute, add tomatoes and thyme.

Rinse eggplant and pat dry, add to the pot. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, 15 minutes until eggplant softens. Meanwhile, cut half the roasted peppers into small dice, set aside for garnish. Chop remaining peppers, add to the pot. Pour in the stock, increase heat to bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover and cook 5 minutes. In processor or blender, puree soup in batches. Season with salt and pepper; stir in parsley and reheat. Serve hot or at room temperature garnished with the diced roasted peppers.

LEMON SOLE with TOMATOES – Pareve

3 garlic cloves, sliced

6T olive oil

1/2C dry white wine (one half)

8 fresh plum tomatoes, peeled and chopped

Salt and pepper

3/4C brined cured olives (three fourths)

1/3C basil leaves (one third)

1 – 2 anchovy filets

8 lemon sole fillets, about 6 oz. each

Cook garlic in 2T olive oil in a medium saute pan over medium heat. Stir 2 minutes until softened, but not browned; add white wine. Boil until reduced by half. Add tomatoes and any accumulated juices, simmer until thickened, about 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, transfer to a shallow baking dish, set aside. Preheat oven to 400°F.

Process olives, basil and anchovies to a coarse paste, add 2T olive oil. Place fish fillets on wax paper, season with salt and pepper, evenly spread paste on fish. Roll up from narrow ends.

Arrange fish rolls on tomato sauce in baking dish, seam side down. Drizzle with remaining olive oil and bake uncovered until fish is just cooked, about 15 minutes. Serve hot or at room temperature.

SPANISH FLAVORED CHICKEN - Meat

8 (6 oz.) skinless and boneless chicken breast halves

½ t kosher salt; freshly ground black pepper (one half)

2T flour

3T olive oil

1C vertically sliced onions

2 garlic cloves, minced

¾ C dry white wine (three fourths)

6T finely chopped fresh cilantro or parsley, divided

½ C unsweetened white grape juice (one half)

½ t ground coriander (one half)

¼ t ground cumin, optional (one half)

¼ t crushed red pepper, to taste (one fourth)

1 ½ C seedless green grapes, halved (one and one half)

Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Sprinkle chicken with salt and black pepper, dust with flour. Heat oil in a 12" non-stick skillet over medium high heat. Add chicken pieces, do not crowd, cook 2 minutes per side or until lightly browned; remove to a platter. Add onion and garlic, sauté 3 minutes or until onion is tender. Stir in wine, 3T parsley, and unsweetened grape juice, coriander, cumin and red pepper, bring to a boil. Return chicken to pan, cover, reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes or until chicken tests done.

Transfer chicken to a serving platter and keep warm. Increase heat to medium high, boil sauce until it is reduced to 1 cup, about 5 minutes. Stir in grapes. Spoon over chicken and sprinkle with remaining 3T cilantro or parsley.

SWEET ASHKENAZI CHUCK ROAST – *Meat*

½ cup red wine vinegar (one half)

4 lb. chuck, about 2" thick

Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

2T vegetable oil

1 large onion, chopped

3 garlic cloves, slivered

2 T flour mixed with ½t Paprika (one half)

1 -1½ cup beef stock (one and one half)

2 bay leaves

½ cup orange honey (one half)

2 tart apples, peeled, cored and sliced

½ cup pomegranate seeds (one half)

Preheat oven to 350° F. Sprinkle the chuck red wine vinegar, season to taste with salt and pepper. In a Dutch oven, heat oil to medium high on stove top. Add onions, cook until limp; add the garlic and cook 2 minutes.

Dust the meat with the flour and paprika. Add to pan and brown about 4 minutes per side. Add 1 cup beef stock, bay leaves, cover and roast in oven about 1 1/2 hours (one and one half). Baste occasionally, add more stock as needed. Discard bay leaves and cool the meat or refrigerate overnight.

Skim fat from pan and place on low heat on stove top. Add the apple slices and simmer

10 minutes, swirl in the honey; adjust the flavor, it should be slightly sweet. Lift the apples to a platter and reserve. Thinly slice the meat against the grain; return to the pan, cover and simmer until tender, about 30 minutes. Serve garnished with apples and pomegranate seeds, pour the sauce over the meat.

BARLEY PILAF – *Meat or Pareve*

3T pine nuts

1 medium onion, chopped

2T pareve margarine

1C quick cooking barley

3C beef or vegetable broth

Kosher salt and pepper to taste

4T parsley chopped

2 T pomegranate seeds

Sauté pine nuts and onion in margarine about 3 minutes or until onion softens; stir in the barley, slowly add the broth. Cover and simmer about 10 minutes or until barley is tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper. If necessary, add a small amount of water during cooking if barley becomes too dry. Liquid should be absorbed when done. Stir in parsley and garnish with pomegranate seeds to serve.

FINGERLING POTATOES – Pareve

3 lb. fingerling potatoes

2 1/2C water (two and one half)

4T olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

5T chopped chives

3T parsley leaves, chopped

Scrub potatoes and cook in salted boiling water until barely tender. Drain. When cool enough to handle, cut potatoes in half lengthwise. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Place potatoes in a 9 x 13" baking dish, drizzle with olive oil. Before serving, bake in a 400°F oven until crisp and tender, about 20 minutes. Sprinkle with chives and parsley to serve.

MARINATED EGGPLANT – Pareve

1 1/2 lb. thin Asian eggplants, 3 or 4 small ones (one and one half)

5T olive oil, divided

2T red wine

1/4C chopped mint (one fourth)

2T small capers, rinsed

Preheat broiler to medium high. Slice eggplants very thin, 1/4". Brush slices on both sides with 2T oil and arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet. Broil close to the heat, turning once until both sides are golden, about 8 to 12 minutes total.

Stir together vinegar, mint, capers, 1/4t (one fourth) salt, 1/2t (one half) pepper and remaining 3T olive oil. Toss in a shallow pan with eggplant slices and keep at room temperature 20 minutes. If made one day ahead, chill. Garnish with fresh mint leaves.

CABBAGE SALAD - Pareve

1 1/2T fresh lemon juice (one and one half)

1t grated fresh lemon zest

1/4t sugar (one fourth)

1/4t salt (one fourth)

1/4t black pepper (one fourth)

1/3C + 1T olive oil (one third)

6C Napa cabbage, thinly sliced, about half a head

3 bunches parsley leaves

2C radicchio, thinly sliced, 1/4 lb.

Whisk together lemon juice, zest, sugar, salt and pepper until sugar is dissolved. Add oil in a slow steady stream and whisk until emulsified. Before serving, toss cabbage, parsley and radicchio in a large bowl with enough dressing to coat. Taste and adjust salt and pepper.

SIMPLY TASTY TOMATOES - Pareve

4 large beefsteak tomatoes or 8 Romas

2T olive oil

3T fresh basil leaves

2T fresh parsley leaves

2T balsamic vinegar glaze

Slice tomatoes horizontally into ¼” slices and arrange overlapping on a shallow platter. Drizzle with olive oil, scatter with basil leaves and parsley. Drizzle balsamic vinegar glaze on top and serve at room temperature. Balsamic vinegar glaze can be purchase or made by simmering and reducing one cup balsamic vinegar to one half cup. It keeps refrigerated up to one week.

CORN MASH – Dairy or Pareve

12 ears fresh corn

1T salt

6T butter or margarine

Cut kernels from the cobs into a large bowl. Scrape all the liquid from the cobs into the bowl. Process three fourths of the kernels for 30 seconds.

Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease an 8 x 8” casserole. Combine all kernels and the salt in the casserole. Dot with the remaining butter or margarine; bake about 35 to 40 minutes until top is lightly browned and corn is tender. Serves 6.

SQUASH AND CHICKPEA CASSEROLE - Pareve

1C cooked chickpeas (canned may be used)

2T cornstarch

6T olive oil, divided

1 1/2T za’atar (one and one half)

Kosher salt and pepper to taste

1 1/2 lb. small zucchini, sliced (one and one half)

3/4 lb. small yellow squash, sliced (three fourths)

½ medium red onion, diced (one half)

2T basil leaves shredded

2T parsley leaves, minced

Rinse chickpeas and dry in paper towels. Place cornstarch in a shallow pie plate or on wax paper. Roll chickpeas around to coat; place in a strainer and shake off excess.

In a small saute pan, heat 3T olive oil to very hot. Add chickpeas, cover with a splatter guard; cook gently, shaking the pan to cook evenly. Remove chickpeas to a plate lined with paper towels to drain; sprinkle with 1t za'atar, pinches of salt and roll to coat well; set aside.

Heat 2T olive oil in a large saute pan until very hot. Arrange squash in pan and sprinkle with pinches of salt and pepper. Cook until deeply golden, about 3 minutes. Turn and cook 2 minutes more. Remove to a shallow casserole. Add remaining 1T olive oil and cook the summer squash in the same manner. Add red onion when squash is turned. Arrange the squashes and red onion in a shallow plate; sprinkle with salt, pepper and za'atar to taste. Add chickpeas and garnish with basil and minced parsley.

CARROT RING – Pareve

8 carrots, peeled

1/2C unsalted pareve margarine (one half)

4T granulated sugar

4T light brown sugar

1 egg, well beaten

4T honey

1C flour

1/2t baking powder (one half)

1/2t cinnamon (one half)

Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 350° F. Generously grease an 8" ring mold.

Grate carrots, you should have about 1 1/2C (one and one half). In a large bowl, mix margarine and sugars until creamy and smooth. Add carrots, egg and 3T honey, stir well. Sift dry ingredients and thoroughly stir into carrot mixture.

Pour the mixture into the ring mold and bake for about 30 minutes until carrots are set and a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool to room temperature.

Run a knife around edges and center of pan; place a serving plate over mold and invert. Drizzle with remaining 1T honey and garnish with some mint sprigs.

CANTALOUPE in CABERNET

2 C Cabernet Sauvignon

1/4 C sugar (one fourth)

1 or 2 ripe cantaloupe

12 mint leaves, reserve 4 for garnish

1 piece of vanilla bean, split

1/2 pint of red raspberries (one half)

Combine wine, sugar, vanilla bean and 8 mint leaves in saucepan, bring to a simmer for 20 minutes, reduce to one cup. Strain sauce, quick chill in freezer, but do not freeze. Meanwhile, peel, seed and chunk cantaloupe into 2" pieces. Keep both cold until serving time. Ladle sauce over melon, garnish with fresh mint leaves. Strew raspberries over melon. Serve with cookies or brownies.