

Baba Ghanouj or Moutabal

Eggplant and Tahina Dip

Serves 6 • This is a popular mezze in every Arab country and a regular companion to falafel. You will always find it in Lebanese and Egyptian restaurants in the West, and even in supermarkets. The smoky flavor of the eggplant and the nutty taste of tahina sharpened by lemon and garlic make a seductive combination.

- 2 pounds eggplants
- 2 or 3 cloves garlic, crushed (optional)
- Salt
- 4 tablespoons tahina (sesame paste)
- Juice of 2 lemons, or more to taste
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin (optional)
- Optional garnish: 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil and 1 tablespoon finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

Broil or roast the eggplants until very soft inside (see page 63). Peel them, letting the soft flesh fall into a colander with small holes, then chop the flesh with a pointed knife and mash it with a fork in the colander, letting the bitter juices run out. Pour into a bowl and add garlic, a little salt, the tahina paste, and lemon juice, beating well and tasting to adjust the flavoring. You may use a food processor, but the texture is best when it is done by hand.

Pour the eggplant into a shallow dish and garnish, if you like, with a dribble of olive oil and a sprinkling of parsley. Serve with Arab or pita bread to dip in.

Variation

Instead of lemon juice, add 2–3 tablespoons pomegranate syrup (see page 45). Garnish, if you like, with fresh pomegranate seeds.

Tarator bi Tahina

Tahina Cream Sauce

Serves 6 • Serve as an appetizer with pita bread, or as a sauce to accompany various dishes such as fried fish, boiled vegetables, and falafel.

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup lemon juice or the juice of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lemons, or more to taste
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup tahina paste
- 1–3 cloves garlic, or to taste, crushed
- Salt
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley to garnish

Blend all the ingredients together in a food processor or blender, adding enough cold water to achieve a smooth, light cream. Taste and add more lemon juice, garlic, or salt until the flavor is fairly strong and sharp.

Serve in a shallow bowl sprinkled with chopped parsley and provide Arab or other bread to dip in it. Or use as a sauce to accompany falafel (page 61) or grilled meats and salads.

Variations

- An Egyptian way is to flavor this with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin and to garnish with a sprinkling of olive oil and a dusting of cumin and chili pepper.
- For a parsley-and-tahina cream, *ba'dounes bi tahina*, stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely chopped flat-leaf parsley.
- For a wonderful version rich with pine nuts, *tahina bi senobar*, fry 1–1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups pine nuts in a drop of oil over low heat, shaking the pan, until lightly golden, and stir them in. This is particularly good as a sauce for fried or grilled fish.