

Chef's Table

A Taste Of Rosh Hashanah

By Guest Chef Gil Marks

Although everyone is familiar with the custom of dipping slices of apple into honey at the Rosh Hashanah meal, many of us are not conversant with other ancient gastronomical traditions. The Talmud (*Keritot* 6a) states, "Since symbols are meaningful, everyone should eat the following on Rosh Hashanah: *kara* (a gourd), *robiya* (black-eyed peas, or some believe this is fenugreek), *kareti* (a leek), *silka* (a beet), and *tamrei* (dates) [foods are in Aramaic]." Why these items? The answer is a similarity between the particular names and words that signify a wish for the coming year. Thus, *kara* is similar to *yikra* (to be called out), reflecting that our good deeds be called out at this time of judgment. *Robiya* also means "abundance" and "increase," signifying our wish for a fruitful year. *Kareti* is similar to *yikartu* (to be cut off), signifying that the Jews' enemies should be cut off. *Selek* (beet in Hebrew) is reminiscent of *sheyistalku* (that they will be removed), referring to the Jews' enemies. Similarly, *tamar* (date in Hebrew) sounds like *yitamu* (to be removed).

Ashkenazim, who did not have most of these plants available to them, were forced to use substitutes that were available in northern Europe. As a result, *Ashkenazim* traditionally eat carrots,

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gezer in Hebrew, which is similar to the words *ligzor* "to tear" (referring to tearing bad decrees) and *gezerah* "decree" (*shelo yihayu gezerot ra'ot aleinu* "May there be no evil decrees against us"). The Yiddish name for carrots, *meyren*, means "to multiply" or "increase." In addition, when sliced, carrots resemble golden coins, a symbol of prosperity. German Jews include *kohl* (cabbage), reminiscent of the words in an important Rosh Hashanah prayer, *Kol Mevasser* ("the voice that announces").

Living in the warmer areas of the Mediterranean and having access to medieval Arab agronomic advances, *Sephardim* had a profusion of vegetables at their disposal and developed numerous traditional dishes incorporating them. Before eating the various types of foods, it is common to recite a verse or a prayer beginning with the term *yehi ratzon* ("May it be Thy will"). In many Sephardic homes, a cornucopia of symbolic fruits and vegetables is served in a basket called a *teraskal*, with the head of the family removing one item at a time and reciting the appropriate verse. *Sephardim* also serve lung (*re'ah* in Hebrew) while reciting *re'eh na be'anyenu* ("Behold us in our affliction"). On the other hand, Iraqi Jews avoid fish, since its Hebrew name *dag* is similar to *da'ag* ("to worry").

Here are some classic recipes to enjoy on Rosh Hashanah. May the coming year be a sweet and fruitful one.

Fijones Frescos

(Sephardic Black-Eyed Peas with Tomatoes)
Yields 6 to 8 servings

Black-eyed peas, also called cowpeas, are not peas but rather a relative of mung beans. Black-eyed peas, either fresh or dried, are very popular in many Middle Eastern Jewish communities.

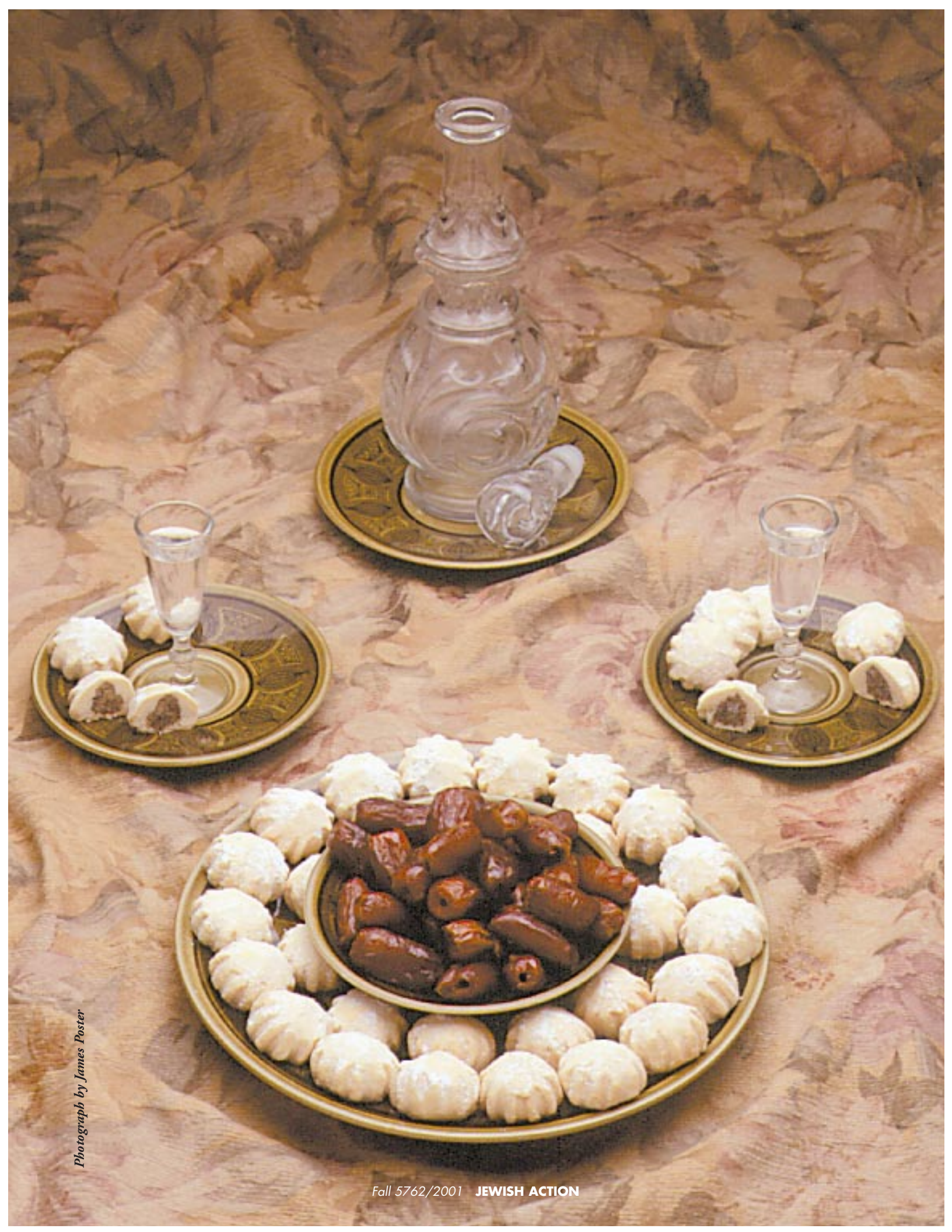
3 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil
2 medium onions, chopped
3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced (optional)
1 tablespoon tomato paste
8 cups water
1 1/2 cups (8 ounces) dried black-eyed peas
3 cups (about 1 1/4 pounds) peeled, seeded, and chopped tomatoes or 8 ounces tomato sauce
Salt and pepper

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and, if desired, garlic, and sauté until soft and translucent (5 to 10 minutes). Stir in tomato paste. Add water and bring to a boil. Add peas and tomatoes, cover, reduce heat, and simmer, adding more water if necessary, until peas are tender (about 1 1/2 hours). Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Keftes de Prassa

(Sephardic Leek Patties)
Yields about 24 small patties

Leeks have been a part of Jewish



Photograph by James Poster

cooking from the onset and became a Sephardic favorite. *Sephardim* enjoy combining leeks with other vegetables, including zucchini, eggplants, spinach, celery, and mashed potatoes. These delicate patties are traditional on Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

2 pounds (about 10 medium) leeks, white and light green parts only, trimmed, thinly sliced lengthwise, and cleaned

1 cup matzah meal or 3 cups mashed potatoes

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

About 1 teaspoon salt

About 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1/2 teaspoon grated nutmeg or cayenne (optional)

About 1/2 cup additional matzah meal or flour for coating

Vegetable oil for frying

1. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add leeks, cover, and reduce heat to low, and simmer until tender, about 30 minutes. Drain. When cool enough to handle, squeeze out excess liquid.

2. Combine leeks, matzah meal, eggs, salt, pepper, and, if desired, nutmeg. Shape leek mixture into 2-inch long and 1/2-inch thick patties. Dredge in matzah meal.

3. Heat a thin layer of oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Fry patties, in batches, until golden brown on both sides, about 3 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels. Serve warm or at room temperature accompanied by lemon wedges. *Keftes* can be stored in the refrigerator, then reheated in a 250-degree oven.

Variations:

Add 1/2 cup chopped fresh dill, 1/2 cup grated Romano cheese, or 2 to 3 minced cloves garlic.

Silka

(Moroccan Beet Green Salad)

Yields 3 to 4 servings

The beet, a Mediterranean native closely related to spinach and chard, has been part of Jewish cuisine for more than 2,500 years. It was so highly

regarded in ancient Israel that efforts were made to grow it during the summer, although back then the beet was primarily a late winter and spring vegetable. According to the *midrash* (Deuteronomy *Rabbah* 1:5), a sign of King Solomon's enormous wealth was that he enjoyed summer beets. The Talmud (*Berachot* 44b) noted, "A dish of beets is good for the heart and good for the bowels."

Those early references, however, actually refer to beet greens. The common garden beet root was only developed in the 16th century in Italy and did not make much of an impact on most of the culinary world until the 18th century. In northern Europe, where the beet root was one of the few vegetables that could be stored throughout the winter, it became a staple used in a wide variety of dishes, including soups, salads, relishes, and preserves. In the words of my sister who hates beets, "Beet greens taste more like spinach than beets."

Greens from 2 large bunches of beets, washed well (about 1 pound)

3 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice (optional)

Dash of paprika

Salt

1. In a large pot bring an inch of water to a boil. Add greens, reduce heat to low, and simmer until tender (about 10 minutes). Drain. Plunge greens into cold water to stop the cooking. Drain and squeeze out any excess liquid. Coarsely chop. (There will be about 2 cups.)

2. Add olive oil, optional lemon juice, paprika, and salt and toss to coat. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Ras-ib-Adjway

(Syrian Date-Filled Cookies)

Yields about 40 cookies

Dates are a symbol of beauty and sweetness. We are reminded as well that people should stand as straight and tall as a date palm.

Filling:

8 ounces (about 1 1/2 cups) dates, pitted

and finely chopped

1/2 cup water

1 tablespoon butter or margarine

3/4 to 1 cup finely chopped walnuts

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon grated orange zest (optional)

Dough:

3 1/4 level cups bleached all-purpose flour

Dash of salt

1 cup (2 sticks/8 ounces) unsalted butter or margarine

1 tablespoon orange blossom or rose water

About 3 tablespoons water

Confectioners' sugar

1. To make the filling: cook dates in water over low heat, stirring, for 10 minutes. Add butter or margarine and cook until mixture forms an almost uniform mass (about 5 minutes). Remove from heat and stir in nuts, cinnamon, and, if desired, zest. Let cool.

2. To make the dough: combine flour and salt. Cut butter or margarine into flour until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add enough water until mixture holds together, then knead to form a soft, pliable dough. Cover and chill for about 30 minutes.

3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

4. Form dough into 1-inch balls.

Using thumb or index finger, hollow out balls. Fill with a heaping teaspoon of filling and press sides of opening together to cover filling. Gently reform into balls, pinch the ends to make an oval shape, and flatten slightly. If desired, make designs in dough with a fork or knife.

5. Place cookies on a baking sheet. Bake until golden but not browned (about 20 minutes). (Cookies will firm as they cool.) When cooled, roll in confectioners' sugar. Store at room temperature in an airtight container.

Variations:

Roll out dough into thin rectangles (do not flour surface). Cut out 3-inch rounds. Place filling in center and bring sides of dough over filling to form balls.

Krabej (Syrian Filled Cookies): Omit confectioners' sugar and dip top of cooled cookies into marshmallow fluff. **IA**