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The
Axis of Evil
Cookbook
 29 January 2004

Val Stevenson

On 29 January 2004, it will be exactly two years since George W Bush first used the phrase 'Axis of Evil' in his State of the Union address in reference to Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

There are only a couple of North Korean recipes here, so *The Axis of Evil Cookbook* is a misleading title. It seemed inappropriate to include more when (according to the UN World Food Program) there is widespread malnutrition in the country. As well as recipes from Iran and Iraq (whose cuisine has been degraded by a decade of sanctions), there are recipes from Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, who are currently in the Axis of Naughty though this could, of course, change at any time. That's the exciting thing about American foreign policy. David Frum, the speech-writer who coined 'Axis of Evil' has just co-written *An End to Evil* which cheerfully - and in total seriousness - advocates overthrowing the governments of Iran, Syria, North Korea and China...

In *Through the looking glass*, the Red Queen introduces Alice to dishes which she then can't eat because "it isn't etiquette to cut anyone you've been introduced to." Enjoy the recipes, share them with friends, and try not to cut anyone you've been introduced to.

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Starters

Aubergine koo-koo (V - Iran)

4 small aubergines, peeled and sliced
 4 large eggs, beaten
 4 medium onions, thinly sliced
 .5 tsp saffron, dissolved in a couple of tablespoons of hot water
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry onions till just turning golden.
- 2 Add aubergines, and fry over medium heat on both sides until color changes. Add the saffron, salt and pepper, and stir well. Let the mixture cool and stir the eggs in.
- 3 Heat oil in a pan till hot, pour in the koo-koo mix, and fry over medium heat for 5-10 minutes.
- 4 Cut into 4 wedges, flip them over, and fry for another 5-10 minutes.

Serves 4

Cauliflower koo-koo (V - Iran)

1 small cauliflower, cut into small pieces
 4 large eggs
 1 tsp baking soda, dissolved in one teaspoon of cold water
 .5 tsp saffron, dissolved in a couple of tablespoons of hot water
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Boil cauliflower till soft and break it up with the back of a fork.
- 2 Mix the cauliflower florets, egg, saffron and baking soda.
- 3 Heat oil in a pan till hot, pour in the koo-koo mix, and fry over medium heat for 5-10 minutes.
- 4 Cut into 4 wedges, flip them over, and fry for another 5-10 minutes.

Serves 4

Green soup (Yemen)

450ml/16fl oz yogurt
 100ml/4fl oz milk
 2 chillis (one, if you're feeling feeble)
 6 garlic cloves
 Large bunch of coriander, leaves only, chopped
 2 pieces flat bread

- 1 Put all ingredients except the bread into a liquidiser and blend till smooth.
- 2 Divide the bread between four bowls and pour the soup over.

Serves 4

Herb soup (Iran)

900g/2lbs herbs (mint, coriander, parsley, dill, the green part of spring onion, chives, spinach in any combination)
 450g/1lb minced lamb
 200g/7oz basmati or long-grain rice, washed in several changes of cold water
 50g/2oz split peas
 4 large onions
 Juice of two limes
 2 tbsps sugar
 Handful of chopped fresh marjoram, or 2 tsps of dried marjoram
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Peel and chop two onions. Fry slowly in oil till golden (which should take about 10 minutes).
- 2 Add 2 pints of water and the split peas and simmer for 10 minutes.
- 3 Add rice to the soup. Cook for 15-20 minutes.
- 4 Peel and grate two onions. Knead the minced onion into the minced meat and season it. Shape into small balls and add them to the soup.
- 5 Wash and chop the herbs. Add all but a handful to the soup and cook for 15-20 minutes.
- 6 Add lime juice, sugar and marjoram, and stir well.
- 7 Fry the leftover handful of mint in oil till the smell rises.
- 8 Check the seasoning and serve garnished with the fried mint.

Serves 4-6

Meatball soup (Korea)

Just when you were wondering where North Korea figured in all this...

1.1l chicken/beef/vegetable stock
 220g/8oz minced beef
 125g/4oz tofu
 65g/2.5oz seasoned flour
 1 egg
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 .5in chunk of ginger
 2 tsps dry-roasted sesame seeds
 6 spring onions
 1 tbsp soy sauce
 3 tbsps sesame oil

- 1 Squeeze any moisture out of the tofu and mash it. Finely slice three spring onions. Mix the meat, tofu, spring onions, garlic, sesame oil and seeds, and tofu together, and form into small meatballs.
- 2 Chop the remaining spring onions into three or four pieces, and slice the ginger. Add them to the stock and simmer for 15 minutes.
- 3 While the stock is simmering, beat the egg. Quickly dip the meatballs into the egg, then the flour, pop them into the stock, and simmer for another 5 minutes.
- 4 Remove the ginger and serve.

Serves 4

Turnip soup (Iran)

450g/1lb turnip, peeled and chopped
 100g/4oz long-grain rice
 200g/7oz minced lamb
 100g/4oz fresh mint, chopped
 50g/2oz split peas
 2 large onions, grated
 .5 tsp turmeric
 Oil, salt, black pepper

- 1 Knead the onions and minced lamb together, and season. Make into small meatballs and fry them till they're brown.
- 2 Add 1.1l/40fl oz of water and the split peas. Simmer for 10 minutes.
- 3 Add the turnip, rice, turmeric, salt and pepper. Simmer for 15-20 minutes.
- 4 Fry the mint in oil till the smell rises.
- 5 Check the seasoning and serve garnished with fried mint.

Serves 4-6

Ash-e joe (V - Iran)

100g/4oz pearl barley
 750g/1.5lbs herbs (coriander, parsley, dill, chives, spinach)
 125g/4oz each of garbanzo beans, kidney beans and lentils
 Good handful of long-grain rice
 3 large onions, sliced
 400ml/16 fl oz whey* or sour cream
 100g/4oz fresh mint, chopped
 1 tsp turmeric
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Soak the beans overnight. (If you don't have time, put them in a large bowl, pour boiling water over them and leave them for a few hours.)
- 2 Soak the barley and rice overnight. (Or treat them like the beans...)
- 3 Cover the beans with water and simmer for an hour. Add the rice and barley, and cook for a further 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 4 Wash the herbs. (If you leave them for a while in deep cold water, the grit drops to the bottom.) Shake off the water.
- 5 Remove the tough stems and chop the rest finely.
- 6 Add to the soup and simmer for 2 hours.
- 7 Add most of the whey or sour cream, leaving some to garnish the soup.
- 8 Fry the onions slowly till golden, add mint and tumeric and fry for a minute.
- 9 Check the seasoning, and serve it garnished with the whey or sour cream and fried mint.

Serves four.

* If you are straining yoghurt to make labneh (See p15), this is the liquid which separates from the curds.

Lentil soup (Yemen and all over)

This soup is served during Ramazan to people who have not eaten or drunk from sunrise to sunset.

1l/40fl oz water

450g/1lb lamb on the bone

170g/6oz red lentils, rinsed

1 onion, finely chopped

Vegetables, herbs and spices (optional)

Parsley, finely chopped, and lemon juice

Salt and pepper

- 1 Put all ingredients into a large pan, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for two hours, stirring occasionally so the lentils don't stick. You can add any veg (carrots, potatoes, leeks, chickpeas, beans, whatever), plus any herbs (mint or coriander) or spices (cinnamon, chili, paprika, saffron, cardamom or tumeric) you happen to have lying about.
- 2 Remove the lamb, discard the bones, dice the meat and mix it back into the soup.
- 3 Squeeze lemon juice into each bowl of soup and garnish with parsley.

Serves 4

Aubergine caviar (Baba gannoush - all over)

1 large aubergine

3 cloves of garlic

4 tbsps tahini

Lemon juice

Salt and pepper

Oil

Parsley and cayenne pepper or sumak to garnish

- 1 Roast the aubergine in a hot oven or over a gas flame till the skin is black, then leave it to cool.
- 2 Peel off the blackened skin and squeeze between your hands to get rid of the bitter juice.
- 3 Bung the aubergine, garlic and tahini into a food processor and whizz. Add oil and lemon to taste.
- 4 Serve with a drizzle of oil, and garnished with parsley and either cayenne or sumak, depending on whether you prefer fiery or lemony flavour.

Main courses

Rhubarb khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb stewing lamb

450g/1lb rhubarb, cut into long chunks

200ml/8fl oz water

2 tbsps brown sugar or lemon juice

Saffron

Oil

Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry the meat till brown.
- 2 Add water, season and simmer (covered) for 50 minutes.
- 3 Sauté the rhubarb in remaining oil for a minute and add it to the meat.
- 4 Mix the sugar with hot water, stir into the stew and simmer (partially covered) for 10-15 minutes. Don't stir the stew, or the rhubarb will collapse into mush.
- 5 Add lemon juice or sugar, depending on whether the stew is too sour or too sweet, and the saffron.
- 6 Serve with rice or bread.

Serves 4

Aubergine and tomato (V - Yemen)

1 large aubergine

2 medium-sized onions, chopped finely

800g/1.75 lbs tomatoes, peeled, seeded, chopped (or 1kg of tinned tomatoes, drained)

1.5 tsp ground cumin

.75 tsp paprika

.25 tsp tumeric

2 tsp tomato purée

4 garlic cloves, minced

Cayenne pepper

Salt and pepper

Oil for frying

- 1 Peel and slice into thick wedges. Layer in colander with salt between each layer, and leave to disgorge the bitter juice for at least 30 minutes. Wash under cold water and pat dry.
- 2 Fry onions very gently for 15 minutes, then add the paprika, tumeric and cumin

and fry for another minute.

- 3 Add the tomatoes and a good pinch of cayenne, and bring the sauce to a boil.
 - 4 Reduce the heat and simmer gently for 30 minutes. Add salt and pepper if you want, and the tomato purée.
 - 5 Preheat oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4.
 - 6 Sauté the aubergine slices for a couple of minutes on each side.
 - 7 Put alternating layers of aubergine and sauce into an oiled oven-proof dish, ending with a layer of sauce.
 - 8 Bake for 30 minutes, and serve either hot or at room temperature.
- Serves 4 as a side dish. Up the quantities slightly for a main dish.*

Fruit and nut khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb minced lamb
 450g/1lb dried fruit - prunes, apricots, peaches and plums
 200g/7oz chopped almonds, pistachios or walnuts
 100g/4oz yellow split peas
 1 large onion, grated
 200ml/8 fl oz water
 Good pinch of saffron
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Dry-roast the nuts over very low heat until golden.
 - 2 Knead the meat and onion together and make into small meatballs. Fry in oil until brown.
 - 3 Add the split peas and water and cook (covered) for 30 minutes at a gentle simmer, stirring occasionally to stop it sticking.
 - 4 Add the dried fruit, nuts and saffron, and simmer for 30 minutes. Add salt and pepper.
 - 5 Serve with rice or bread.
- Serves 4*

Celery khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb stewing lamb
 100g/4oz coriander or parsley
 Large head of celery with leaves
 Bunch of mint (optional)
 1 onion, chopped
 .5 tsp turmeric
 450ml/16fl oz hot water
 100ml/4fl oz lemon juice
 .5 tsp saffron
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry the meat with the onion, turmeric, salt, and pepper in oil till brown.
 - 2 Add the water and cook (covered) for 15 minutes.
 - 3 Separate the celery leaves. Cut the stalks into large chunks and sauté them gently.
 - 3 Chop the celery leaves, the coriander or parsley and the mint. Fry them till the smell rises, and add them to the meat with the lemon juice and saffron.
 - 4 Simmer for 30 minutes. Lay the celery pieces on top of the meat and cook gently for 30 minutes.
 - 5 Serve with rice and chunks of lemon.
- Serves 4*

Easy veggie stew (Iran - V)

2 large onions, sliced
 3 large tomatoes, sliced
 1 large aubergine, peeled and sliced into .5" slices
 1 bunch of parsley or coriander, finely minced
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 Salt and pepper
 Oil

- 1 Arrange alternating layers of onions, tomatoes and aubergine in a heavy frying pan with a tightly-fitting lid, sprinkling each layer as you go with the minced herbs.
 - 2 Add hot water and oil, and garlic. Cover and simmer gently for about 30 minutes, checking occasionally that it isn't burning on the bottom.
 - 3 Serve hot with rice or bread.
- Serves 4 as a side dish.*

Melon chicken (Yemen)

Magnificent or magnificently odd, depending on your tastes.

2 cantaloupe melons
 450g/1 lb diced chicken breasts
 200g/7oz cooked rice
 2 medium onions, finely chopped
 Generous handful of flat parsley, finely chopped
 Juice of two lemons
 Salt and pepper
 Oil

- 1 Half and de-seed the melons.
 - 2 Scoop out the melon flesh and put to one side.
 - 3 Fry the chicken till it's cooked through.
 - 4 Add the onion, parsley, lemon juice and a decent pinch of salt, and cook till the onions are soft.
 - 5 Take the chicken off the heat, add the rice and let the mixture stand for a few minutes.
 - 6 Stuff the mixture into the melon skins, not quite filling them, and top them up with as much of the reserved melon as will fit.
 - 7 Put the stuffed melons into a large, oiled oven-proof dish and bake at 180°C/350°F for 20 minutes.
 - 8 Serve hot. All you need to go with this is a salad.
- Serves 4*



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Quince khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb minced lamb or veal
 100g/4oz yellow split peas
 2 large quince, peeled and sliced
 1 large onion, minced
 .5 tsp turmeric
 230ml/8 fl oz water
 Pomegranate molasses (or brown sugar) and lemon juice
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry the meat with the onion, pepper, and turmeric till brown.
 - 2 Add water and simmer (covered) for 30 minutes.
 - 3 Add split peas and continue cooking at a gentle simmer, stirring frequently to stop it sticking.
 - 4 Fry the quinces till they are light brown and add them to the meat.
 - 5 Add salt, lemon juice and molasses or brown sugar, depending on whether the stew is too sour or too sweet, and simmer for 30 minutes.
 - 6 Serve with rice or bread.
- Serves 4*

Aubergine khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb diced stewing lamb or beef
 8 small aubergines, sliced into thick chunks
 3 medium onions, sliced thinly
 2 tbsp tomato paste
 Juice of two fresh limes
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry the onions until starting to colour.
 - 2 Add meat and fry till lightly browned. Barely cover with water and simmer, covered, for 50 minutes.
 - 3 Add the tomato paste and lime juice (and water if necessary), and mix well.
 - 4 Fry the aubergines till golden, layer them over the meat and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes.
 - 5 Serve with rice or bread.
- Serves 4*

Pomegranate khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb minced lamb
 450g/1lb onion, minced
 250g/8oz walnuts, coarsely chopped
 100g/4oz coriander or parsley, finely chopped
 Bunch of mint
 .5 tsp turmeric
 .5 tsp ground cloves (optional)
 450ml/16fl oz pomegranate juice*
 Salt and pepper
 Oil

- 1 Fry the coriander or parsley and the mint leaves in half the oil until wilted.
- 2 Knead the meat, onion, pepper, salt, turmeric and ground cloves together. Shape it into tiny meatballs and fry them in the remaining oil till brown.
- 3 Add the meatballs, nuts and pomegranate juice to the herbs. Simmer (partially covered, and stirring from time to time) for an hour.
- 4 Serve with rice or bread.

Serves 4

* Either buy it, or make it yourself by rolling pomegranates under your hand on a hard surface, splitting them and squeezing out the juice.

Cherry and apple khoresh (Iran)

450g/1lb minced lamb
 450g/1lb sour cherries, stoned (bottled are fine)
 200ml/8 fl oz water
 Two eating apples, peeled and chopped
 Juice of two lemons
 Brown sugar
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry the meat in half the oil till brown.
- 2 Add the water and simmer (covered) for about 30 minutes.
- 3 Fry the apples in the remaining oil until just softening, and add them and the cherries to the meat.
- 4 Simmer for 30 minutes or till the meat is tender.
- 5 Add the lemon juice. If it's too sour, add as much brown sugar as you want.
- 6 Serve with rice or bread.

Serves 4

Chicken and rice (Yemen)

1 medium chicken, jointed
 600ml/20fl oz chicken stock
 200g/7oz long-grain rice
 50g/2oz butter
 2 medium tomatoes, skinned and chopped
 2 medium carrots, grated
 1 large onion, chopped
 7 garlic cloves, minced
 3 tbsps tomato purée
 Grated peel of 1 orange
 3 cloves
 1 cinnamon stick
 .5 tsp ground seeds of green cardamom (if you're using black cardamom, grind 2 whole pods)
 Good handful of toasted flaked almonds
 Good handful of raisins soaked briefly in boiling water
 Salt and pepper
 Oil

- 1 Melt butter in a large frying pan, add chicken pieces and cook till slightly golden.
- 2 Put chicken pieces to one side, and add the onion to the pan. Fry gently till the onion is golden.
- 3 Add the tomato purée, tomatoes, peel, carrots, spices, salt and pepper, and cook for a couple of minutes. Add the stock and simmer, covered, for half an hour.
- 4 Sprinkle the rice between the chicken pieces, cover and simmer for half an hour.
- 5 Garnish with almonds and raisins.

Serves 4.

Wheat and meat (Iran)

This is a proper winter breakfast or lunch - it will keep the cold out.

450g/1lb chicken or lamb

450g/1lb wheat

1 onion

Melted butter

Honey or sugar

Cinnamon

- 1 Dice the meat and put it in a heavy-bottomed pan with the whole onion. Cover with water and simmer very gently for up to two hours. Discard the onion. If you used chicken, bone it.
- 2 Put wheat in a heavy-bottomed pan, cover well with water and any stock left over from the chicken, and simmer for up to two hours.
- 3 Mince the wheat and then the meat. Mix them together.
- 4 Cook the mixture very gently to a thick porridge, stirring non stop.
- 5 Tip porridge into a bowl, pour over very hot melted butter to cover it, then sprinkle with cinnamon and honey or sugar.

6 Serve with bread.

Serves 4

Shesh Andaze (Iran)

450g/1 lb quinces, apples, carrots or potatoes, grated (choose one)

6 medium eggs

Butter

Juice of two lemons

Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry the fruit or vegetable in butter in a large frying pan till *al dente*. If you're using apple, quince or carrot, add the lemon juice; if potatoes, just add a good splash of hot water.
- 2 Season, cover and simmer for 15 minutes.
- 3 Smooth the fruit or vegetable and make six indentations in the surface.
- 4 Drop an egg into each indentation and cook until the eggs are firm.
- 5 Serve with rice or bread.

Serves 4

Faisenjan (Iran)

This can - ishould - be made with pheasant or duck, but it is then indigestibly rich.

Medium chicken, jointed

450g/1lb ground walnuts

3 medium onions, thinly sliced

Juice from 3-5 pomegranates, or 5 tbsps pomegranate molasses, diluted with water

Sugar

Oil

Salt and pepper

- 1 Fry onions till just turning golden.
- 2 Add chicken pieces and fry till they change colour.
- 3 Add hot water to cover and bring to boil. Simmer for half an hour, adding water if gets too low.
- 4 Add the ground walnuts and pomegranate juice or molasses. Add some sugar if the stew is too sour.
- 5 Cook till the oil in the walnuts comes out.
- 6 Served with rice.

Serves 4.

Aubergine fritters (Iraq)

This, according to yellowing, food-spattered notes, is a mediæval Iraqi recipe.

1 large or 2 medium aubergines

175g/6oz fresh breadcrumbs

2 large eggs, beaten

1 tbsp oil

1.25 tsp ground coriander

1.5 tsp ground cinnamon

Oil for frying

Sauce

2 tbsp oil

2 tbsp vinegar

2 tsp murri (You can substitute Thai fish sauce or - at a pinch - soy sauce)

2 cloves of garlic, minced

- 1 Peel and quarter the aubergines, and boil them in salted water till tender.
- 2 Drain and purée the aubergines.
- 3 Stir in the rest of the fritter ingredients.
- 4 Drop spoonfuls of the mixture into hot oil in a frying pan and cook till golden on both sides.
- 5 Shake the sauce ingredients together in a jamjar (how mediæval is that?) and spoon some over the fritters before you serve them.

Serves 4 as a side dish.

Jewelled rice (Iran)

The name says it all...

1 medium chicken, jointed and washed

450g/1lb long-grain rice

2 large onions, thinly sliced

Good handful of dried barberries, washed (small, rather astringent, red berries)

50g/2oz flaked almonds

50g/2oz pistachios, chopped

50g/2oz raisins, washed

100g/4oz orange peel, thinly sliced

Three pinches of saffron, soaked in warm water

Sugar

Oil and melted butter

Salt and pepper

- 1 Soak rice in warm salted water for at least an hour, and preferably longer.
- 2 Prepare the nuts and fruit. Fry the barberries and raisins separately for a few minutes, adding a spoonful of sugar to the barberries towards the end. Soak the almonds in water for an hour. Boil the orange peel for a few minutes, drain it, then refresh it in cold water for an hour. Bring a small amount of water and a couple of tablespoons of sugar to the boil, and boil the peel for a few minutes. Drain it and set to one side.
- 3 Fry onions in oil till just turning golden.
- 4 Add chicken pieces and fry them till the colour changes. Add hot water, season and simmer for 20 minutes, adding more water if necessary. There should be a couple of tablespoons of water left at the end. Debone the chicken.
- 5 Bring water to the boil in a large pan and add the rice. Cook till it's starting to soften, then drain it and rinse it with warm water.
- 6 Pour some oil and hot water into a casserole, and add half the rice. Spread the chicken over the rice, and cover with half the remaining rice. Spread half the peel and almonds over rice and cover with the remaining rice. Pour some oil, the chicken stock and the saffron water over the rice.
- 7 Cook very slowly, covered, for half an hour. Add the rest of the ingredients and stir well.
- 8 Pour a couple of tablespoons of melted butter on top, and serve.

Serves 4

Upside-down aubergines (Syria)

2 large aubergines

200g/7oz long grain rice

2 large onions, diced

900g/2lbs lean minced beef or lamb

.75 tsp cinnamon

1 tsp allspice

330ml/12fl oz boiling water

25g/1oz pine nuts dry roasted till golden

Parsley or coriander to garnish

Oil

Salt and pepper

- 1 Peel and cube the aubergines, sprinkle with salt and put aside for an hour. Cover the rice with boiling water and leave for an hour.
- 2 Rinse the aubergine and pat dry with kitchen towel.
- 3 Fry the aubergine in batches in a frying pan till brown. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the aubergine to a heavy, shallow casserole dish.
- 4 Fry the onions in the frying pan till golden, then add the meat and brown. Add the spices, then stir into to the fried aubergine.
- 5 Spread the drained rice over the aubergine and meat mixture.
- 6 Pour boiling water over rice and bring to a boil. Cover tightly, boil for two minutes, then turn the heat off and leave the rice to absorb the water - 30 minutes should do it.
- 7 Remove the casserole lid, invert a large serving plate over the casserole and flip it over. You'll end up with the rice underneath the meat and aubergine mixture or - also a strong possibility - the whole shooting match on the floor. You can chicken out and serve it straight from the casserole.
- 8 Garnished the dish (or floor) with pine nuts and either parsley or coriander. Serve with salad and labneh (see p15) on the side.

Serves 6.

Chicken rissoles (Iran)

1 medium chicken, jointed and washed
 100g/4oz ground almonds
 100g/4oz bread crumbs
 200ml/8 fl oz milk
 50g/2oz butter
 4 medium eggs, beaten with a pinch of salt
 2 medium onions, finely sliced
 Good handful of chopped parsley
 Flour
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Poach the chicken and onions in a little water for half an hour, adding water as necessary. There should be a couple of tablespoons of stock left at the end.
- 2 Add the stock to the milk, along with the melted butter, almonds, parsley and breadcrumbs. Season and mix well.
- 3 Debone the chicken pieces and whizz them in a food processor. Add the breadcrumb and almond mixture and whizz again.
- 4 Put seasoned flour in a wide bowl.
- 5 Make walnut-sized balls, flatten them slightly, and roll in the flour so that both sides are coated.
- 6 Dip the cutlets in the egg, then in the flour again, and fry on both sides till golden.
Serves 5 or 6 incredibly, disgustingly greedy people

Chicken rissoles (North Korea)

450g/1lb minced chicken breasts
 2 cloves garlic
 3cm/1in chunk of ginger
 2 spring onions
 1 tbsp dry-roasted sesame seeds
 1 tbsp sesame oil
 1 tbsp soy sauce
 .5 tsp chilli powder
 Oil for frying

- 1 Smash the garlic and grate the ginger. Slice the spring onion finely.
- 2 Thoroughly mix everything except the oil for frying and make it into 4-6 flattish rissoles.
- 3 Fry in hot oil till they are brown on both sides.
Serves 4.

Meatballs with yoghurt (Iran)

450g/1 lb minced lamb
 1 medium onion, finely sliced
 2 tsps cumin
 1 tsp ground coriander
 1 tsp cardamom
 1 tsp tumeric
 .5 tsp ground cloves
 .5 tsp cinnamon
 Labneh (*See p15*)
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Mix the meat with turmeric and season.
- 2 Form into meatballs and fry them in a little oil till they're brown all over.
- 3 Fry the onion slowly in a heavy pan with the cumin, coriander, cardamom, cloves and cinnamon till it's golden.
- 4 Add the meatballs and hot water to cover, then simmer for 40 mins.
- 5 Add four or five tablespoons of yoghurt, and warm it through *without boiling* for 5 minutes. (If the yoghurt boils, it will curdle.)
Serves 4

Meatballs (All over)

1 lb. lean minced lamb
 1 small onion, finely chopped, *or* 3 cloves garlic plus .5 tsp ground nutmeg
 1 small bunch fresh parsley, minced
 1 egg, beaten
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon baharat (*See p16*)
 2 tablespoons flour
 Oil

- 1 Mix everything except the oil, then let them rest in the fridge for 15 minutes.
- 2 Take walnut-sized lumps and make them into round, slightly flattened balls. Let them rest in the fridge for about 15 minutes.
- 3 Heat the oil in a wide frying pan. Fry the meatballs in small batches till done on both sides. (Don't fry too many at a time, as the temperature in the pan will drop and more oil will be absorbed.) Keep the batches warm on a plates covered with paper towels to absorb any excess oil.
- 4 Serve with salad and pitta bread.
Serves 4.

Mince stew (Iran)

450g/1 lb minced lamb or beef
 100g/4oz pound dried yellow split peas
 1 large onion, chopped
 3 dried limes
 4 tbsps butter
 .5 tsp turmeric
 1tbsp tomato puree
 110ml/4fl oz hot water
 .5 tsp salt or to taste
 1/4 tsp saffron or .5tsp of ground clove (optional)
 Salt and pepper

Any one or more of the following: 225g/8oz fried diced potatoes, chopped and fried; or 1 medium aubergine, peeled and diced; or 225g/8oz pitted sour cherries (bottled will do nicely); or 225g/8oz apples or quinces, diced and fried; or 100g/4oz cooked red beans

- 1 Brown the onion in the butter in a heavy-bottomed pan. Remove the onion with a slotted spoon.
- 2 Cook meat and turmeric (and the clove or curry powder if you like), and season. Add the split peas and dried limes, and simmer, partially covered, for 45 minutes.
- 3 Add the fried onion and any of the additional ingredients.
- 4 Simmer, partially covered, till everything's cooked.
- 5 Before serving, mix the saffron with a little hot water and pour over the stew. (Don't do this if you've used the clove or curry powder.)

Serves 4

Kabooli (Iraq)

340g/12oz lamb off the bone
 450g/1lb long-grain rice
 3 large aubergines, cut in half inch slices
 4 medium onions, finely sliced
 4 medium tomatoes, sliced
 1 large green pepper, finely sliced
 2 tbsps tomato paste
 1 tbsp baharat (See p16)
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Boil lamb until tender, then drain and fry till brown.
- 2 Fry the aubergines.
- 3 Mix the rice, tomato paste and some water, and half cook it - it should still have a bit of bite.
- 4 Put the lamb in a casserole, then a layer of onions, half the aubergine, half the tomatoes and half the rice. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.
- 5 Add about 110g/4fl oz of water and the baharat and cook on a very low heat for 30 minutes.
- 6 Turn off the stove and leave the dish to rest for 15 minutes.

Serves 6

Mjdarra (V - all over with varying names and ingredients)

Do not add salt to lentils until they are cooked, or they will remain leathery.

140g/5oz brown lentils

100g/4oz long-grain rice

2 medium onions, thinly sliced

Oil

1 tbsp salt

.25 tsp cumin seeds

.25 tsp baharat (See p16) or allspice

- 1 Soak the lentils overnight in cold water, having picked them over for grit and stones. Discard any floating lentils, then drain and rinse the rest.
- 2 Cover with cold water and simmer, covered, for an hour or so. Drain.
- 3 Measure the rice in a jug or cup. Wash the rice till the water runs clear. Put the rice in a pan with a tightly-fitting lid and add water and baharat. Cover the rice and bring it to a boil. Immediately it boils, remove the pan from the hotplate and leave to stand for 35 minutes. Don't remove the lid.
- 4 Fry cumin seeds in oil for 1 minute, then sauté the onions till they are brown and caramelized.
- 5 When the rice is done, mix in the onions and lentils and either gently reheat if you're giving it hot, or let the whole thing cool. You can add more caramelised onions and a dollop of olive oil if you like.

Aubergine rolls (Judge's tongue - Iraq)

Makes about 20 rolls

2 large aubergines

Oil

Stuffing

900g/2 lbs minced lamb

1 medium onion, finely chopped

Salt and pepper

Sauce

2 tbsp oil

1 large onion, finely chopped

1 large tomato, sliced (optional)

1 large tomato, peeled and chopped

400g/14 oz tomato sauce

225ml/8fl oz chicken or meat stock

110ml/4fl oz cup lemon juice

1 tsp turmeric

Salt and pepper

- 1 Peel the aubergine, and top and tail it. Stand aubergine up on cutting board and slice vertically into thin slices.
- 2 Sprinkle the slices generously with salt and leave them in a colander for about 1 hour. Rinse off the salt and dry the aubergine slices.
- 3 **Either:** Heat about 4 tbsps oil in a frying pan and fry the aubergine slices in batches, turning once to brown both sides. being careful not to burn them and adding more oil as needed. Drain the cooked slices on paper towels.
Or (low-fat, more digestible alternative): Place aubergine slices on non-stick baking sheets brushed with corn oil. Bake in a medium oven till light brown, turning half way.
- 4 Mix together the meat, onion, salt and pepper. Divide into sausages the length and width of your little finger. Place each sausage at one end of a slice and wrap the aubergine around it.
- 5 Place the rolls in a baking dish and (optional) lay the tomato slices on top.
- 6 Sauté the onions in oil till golden, then add the chopped tomatoes, seasoning and turmeric. Add tomato sauce, stock and lemon juice to taste. Cover and simmer 15 minutes.
- 7 Pour the sauce over the rolls in the baking dish, cover with foil and bake at 200°C/400°F for an hour or so.

Serves 4

Fatoosh

All measurements are approximate...

4 pieces of pitta bread
 2 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped
 1 green and 1 red pepper, cored, seeded and chopped
 1 small bunch of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped (leaves only)
 4 spring onions, finely chopped
 1 small bunch fresh mint, finely chopped
 1 cucumber, seeded and chopped
 1 garlic clove, crushed
 Juice of 1 lemon
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F. Cut the bread into small 2.5 cm (1") pieces, and toast on a baking tray until crisp and light brown.
- 2 Mix all the other ingredients in a large bowl, season, then add the toasted bread and serve.

Serves 4, or more or less

Green pies (Syria)

Pastry

4 tsps dried yeast
 1 tsp sugar
 225ml/8fl oz lukewarm water
 450g/1lb plain flour
 Oil
 Salt

Filling

2 small onions, finely chopped
 1.5 tsp salt
 450g/1lb fresh spinach (or silverbeet, if you can get it)
 .5 tsp flaked chilli pepper (optional)
 Juice of 1 lemon
 Oil
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Add the yeast and sugar to the water in a bowl or jug, and leave it for 10 minutes.
- 2 Put the flour in a large bowl. Add a dollop of oil, the yeast mixture and a good pinch of salt, and work into a dough. Knead for a few minutes, then leave the dough to prove in a covered bowl in a warm, draught-free place for an hour.
- 3 While the dough is rising, sprinkle the onion with salt in a large bowl. Wash and chop the spinach, and mix it into the onions. Put it to one side for a few minutes to start wilting, then knead the mixture between your hands until it is watery. (Leaving the bowl on a sunny window-sill for an hour does the same thing.) Squeeze the spinach mixture dry, and put it in a clean, dry bowl. Add the pepper, chilli, lemon juice and a dollop of oil and mix well.
- 3 Thump the dough to get the air out, then place walnut-sized lumps of dough on a baking tray, cover them with a tea towel and leave them to rest for 15 minutes.
- 4 Roll each lump into a circle, put a blob of spinach in the middle, moisten the edge to make it stick together, and fold it into a half-moon. Place them on a non-stick baking tray.
- 5 Bake at 230°C/450°F for 25-30 minutes.

Miscellaneous

Pickled aubergine (Syria/Lebanon)

Bliss. My food bill has plummeted since discovering how to make this. On the other hand, my local Lebanese deli may go bankrupt. They keep in a fridge for two or three weeks.

1 pound of small aubergines
 1 tbsp chopped walnuts
 4 cloves garlic
 Cayenne pepper, paprika or finely minced red chilli pepper
 2 tsps salt
 Oil

- 1 Poach the aubergine till soft, then drain them and let them cool.
- 2 Slash the aubergine lengthways to within half an inch of the stem end and leave them to drain thoroughly.
- 3 Crush the garlic with salt and mix with the walnut. Add as much pepper or paprika as you can handle.
- 4 Divide the mixture by number of aubergines you've prepared and stuff them with it.
- 5 Put the aubergines, stem ends up, in a sterilised jar with a tightly-fitting lid and leave overnight, covered.
- 6 Add oil to cover and seal the jar. Leave in the fridge for a fortnight before eating.

Cured olives

Olives
 Vinegar
 Olive oil
 Salt

- 1 Cut or bash each olive to crack its flesh.
 - 2 Soak the olives in cold water for 10 days, changing the water daily.
 - 3 Soak them in brine for a day.
 - 4 Wash the olives, pack them in jars and cover with olive oil.
- If you like your olives tangier, add a dash vinegar to the oil. You can also add coriander or cumin seeds, orange zest or dried chillis for flavour.

Pickled aubergines (Iran)

2 kgs/4lbs small aubergines
 450g/1lb herbs (mint, parsley, coriander and basil), washed and - important - completely dried
 Good-quality white vinegar
 Salt and pepper

- 1 Bake the aubergines in a medium oven for 20 minutes, then let them cool and peel them.
 - 2 Leave them in a colander overnight, generously sprinkled with salt to get rid of the bitter liquid.
 - 3 Chop them very finely.
 - 4 Add a splash of vinegar, and boil for three minutes.
 - 5 Mince the herbs and mix them into the aubergine with salt (careful not to overdo it) and black pepper.
 - 6 Pile it into warm, sterilised jars, and add enough vinegar to cover the mixture. Stir it well and cover.
 - 7 Leave for a couple of months in a cool, dark place.
- If the cutlery you use to serve this is not spotlessly clean, the pickle will go nasty very quickly.

Hummus

150ml/5fl oz tahini
 Juice of 3 lemons
 1 or 2 cloves fresh garlic, minced
 180g/6oz chickpeas, boiled till tender, and some of their cooking water
 Salt and pepper
 Oil
 Parsley

- 1 Put tahini, lemon juice, water and garlic in food processor. Blend until smooth. Gradually add cooked chickpeas until thick. Taste to correct seasoning. Refrigerate.
- 2 Before serving, drizzle with oil and garnish with finely-chopped parsley.

Strained yoghurt (Labneh - all over)

Place cheesecloth in a sieve over a bowl. Pour the yoghurt into the cheesecloth and drain for a few hours or a day.

You can make something like cream cheese by adding salt to the undrained yoghurt.

You can serve this on its own, or with chopped herbs (chives, dill, minced garlic, mint, flat parsley, tarragon, or spring onions) stirred in. It's fabulous with roasted vegetables and zhug (See opposite page)

Yoghurt drained without added salt makes a dead easy pudding with honey and a sprinkling of cinnamon.

Hilbeh (Yemen)

Great - and hugely antisocial - dip for bread or falafel or for jazzing up almost anything. Keeps in the fridge for a week or so.

1 large bunch coriander, leaves only, chopped

2 tbsps fenugreek seeds

1 tsp peppercorns

1 tsp caraway seeds

8 green cardamoms, seeded

2 tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped, or 1tbsp tomato puree

2 chillies, seeded

1 head of garlic

Handful of sage leaves

1 lemon

Salt and pepper

Oil

- 1 Grind the peppercorns, caraway, cardamom seeds, chillies, garlic, sage leaves and lemon juice into a smooth paste. Add chopped tomato.
- 2 Grind the fenugreek. Put it into a small bowl, cover with cold water and leave for half an hour. (It becomes slightly gelatinous and swells. Fenugreek also makes wonderful sprouts, if you like that sort of thing.)
- 3 Drain any remaining water off, and add to the spicy mixture.
- 4 Put the coriander leaves and the rest of the ingredients into a blender with just enough oil to make a thick paste.

Zhug (Yemen)

Another killer Yemeni dip, though lighter on the garlic. If you dilute it with olive oil, it makes a very decent marinade for meat.

1 large bunch coriander, leaves only, chopped

3 green chillis

2 red chillis (bird's eye or other killers)

Seeds from 8 green cardamoms

2 tsps caraway seeds

6 garlic cloves

Fresh lime juice

100l/3.5 fl oz oil

Salt

1 Seed the chillis.

2 Liquidise till it's a threatening green gunk.

Yoghurt balls (Syria)

Labneh (See p15)

Olive oil

- 1 Roll the labneh into balls the size of a large walnut, lay them on a baking tray in a single layer and refrigerate overnight. (For this it's best to use labneh which has been strained for at least 24 hours.)
- 2 Put the balls in a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid and cover with olive oil. You can add a few sprigs of herbs or a chilli to add flavour. Keep the jar covered in the fridge.

Serve on bread with a little oil drizzled over the balls.

Hawayil (Yemen)

Spice mix for jazzing up boring stews.

3 tsp peppercorns

1.5 tsp caraway seeds

.5 tsp saffron

.5 tsp seeds from green cardamoms

1 tsp turmeric

1 Grind all ingredients except for the turmeric.

2 Add the turmeric, mix and store in an airtight jar.

Baharat (Iraqi spice mix)

Fabulous rubbed into meat an hour before you cook it, and it wakes up any stew.

2.5 tbsps paprika
 1.5 tbsps black peppercorns
 1 tbsp of coriander seed and cloves
 1.5 tbsps cumin seed
 Seeds from 10 green cardamoms
 1in piece of cassia bark or cinnamon
 Freshly ground nutmeg

1 Grind and keep in an tightly-lidded glass jar out of direct sunlight.

Spice mix

1 tablespoon cumin
 1 tsp cardamom
 .5 tsp allspice
 .5 tsp coriander
 .5 tsp cloves
 1 tsp freshly ground pepper
 1 tsp red pepper flakes, ground
 .5 tsp ginger
 1 tsp turmeric
 1 tsp salt
 1 tablespoon paprika
 1 tsp cinnamon

Shake together and store in a glass jar out of direct sunlight. Use to season rice, lentils, meats, etc.

Puddings

Umm Ali (“Ali’s Mother”)

A sort of luxurious Middle Eastern bread-and-butter pudding or *pain perdu*.

285g/10oz cooked puff pastry
 55g/3oz pistachio nuts, chopped
 55g/3oz flaked almonds, toasted
 2 tbsps lemon juice
 200ml/8fl oz milk
 170g/6oz castor sugar
 Pinch of cinnamon
 1 egg, beaten
 2 tsps rose water
 200ml/8fl oz single cream

- 1 Grease an ovenproof dish and preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F.
- 2 Crumble the pastry into the dish and add the nuts and lemon juice.
- 3 Bring the milk, sugar and cinnamon to just below the boiling point, then slowly add the egg.
- 4 Pour the custard mix over the pastry, and sprinkle with rose water.
- 5 Pour the cream over the top and bake for about 30 minutes, until golden.

Serves 6.

Rice pudding (Iran)

200g/7oz short-grain rice
 100ml/4fl oz rosewater
 2 litres/3.5 pints of milk (or milk and water)
 150ml/5fl oz cream
 Jam (rose-petal jam is wonderful with this)

- 1 Wash and drain the rice.
- 2 Cook until rice in a small amount of water till it is slightly softened.
- 3 Add milk and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the milk is absorbed and the rice has thickened.
- 4 Add the rosewater and cook for another minute.
- 5 Add cream and serve with jam.

Serves 4

Orange cake

This is a wonderful bitter-sweet cake, and almost infallible.

1 large orange

250g/9oz caster sugar

200g/7oz ground almonds

55g/ 2 oz plain flour

1 tsp baking powder

3 eggs

- 1 Boil the orange for an hour. Chop it in chunks and fish out any pips, then whizz it in a food processor.
- 2 Beat the eggs and sugar till they are mousse-like and much increased in volume.
- 3 Fold everything else in, and gently pour into a greased and lined tin (spring-form will make life considerably easier).
- 4 Bake in an oven pre-heated to 180degree C/350F for about an hour, less in a fan-assisted oven.
- 5 Cool on a wire rack.