

# kosher comes of age

*Working within kosher cooking's limitations, chefs get creative.* / BY ROBERT WEMISCHNER

## COLD CHILI-SEARED SALMON WITH PEACH/STRAWBERRY SALSA

Daniel Hahn, CEC, CCA, Executive Chef // Beth Sholom Village // Virginia Beach, Virginia

YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

½ cup brown sugar  
1 t. dried dill  
½ cup chili powder  
4 (5 oz.) portions fresh salmon  
1 cup roasted yellow corn  
½ cup black beans  
1 fire-roasted red pepper, diced  
1 cup diced strawberries  
1 cup diced peaches  
1½ cups pineapple juice  
2 T. olive oil  
Salt, to taste  
1 jalapeño, fine chopped  
2 T. fresh chopped cilantro

**Method:** Mix brown sugar, dill and chili powder; coat tops of salmon portions. Bake salmon at 350°F for 5 minutes. Let cool in refrigerator. For salsa, mix together: roasted yellow corn, black beans, red pepper, strawberries, peaches, pineapple juice, olive oil, salt, jalapeño and cilantro.



**I**n a new era of kosher cooking, food, faith and creativity meet on the plate. Chefs on both coasts and many points in between are gaining new audiences while remaining well within the traditions and strict prescriptions of this age-old way of cooking. Kosher adaptations of ethnic cuisines, from Asia to Mexico, also figure prominently in the contemporary kosher dining scene.

Kosher food is divided into three main categories: meat, which includes poultry processed according to strict rules; dairy-containing foods; and pareve foods, which includes fish with fins and scales, eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains. Meat and dairy may not be cooked or eaten together. A kosher kitchen out of which meals are prepared for catering functions, for example, must have separate sets of dishes, utensils and cookware, and separate preparation areas for meat and dairy.

Foods from the pareve category can be used as ingredients in either meat or dairy dishes, and can be eaten with meat- or dairy-containing dishes. A restaurant can serve a menu that has meat and fish dishes with pareve items, but no dairy. A dairy restaurant can serve fish with pareve items, but no meat.

## following the rules

Creating menus with these rules in mind can be a challenge, but according to Moshe Wendel, chef/proprietor of Pardes, New York, limitations can often be a spur to culinary inspiration and innovation. “Beginning with a foundation of classical French training and serving as a kosher food supervisor has helped me tremendously to develop the kind of contemporary kosher experience that Pardes represents,” he says.

The restaurant’s offerings run the gamut from smoked fried chicken and blueberry waffles to cabbage soup with apple salsa, peanut/corn nut dust and a cinnamon/coconut mousse. The menu is strictly kosher, with both traditional and nontraditional elements, made possible because of the expanding pantry of certified kosher items available. With a healthy dose of creativity and ingenuity, and an occasional reliance on foods acting as analogues to what would be verboten, Wendel is taking kosher to a new level.

Dov Popack, who has taken his cues from New York’s polyglot population, opened Fiya, a Caribbean restaurant, in Brooklyn. Using vegetables, fish and meat analogues such as seitan, and cooking in an open kitchen, he has fashioned a menu that reflects his fondness for the immigrants from those sunny isles and for the spice-laden dishes traditional to their homelands.

PHOTO CREDITS Left, Daniel Hahn; opposite, Staci Valentine/reprinted with permission from *The Seasonal Jewish Kitchen*





## BLOOD ORANGE AND OLIVE OIL POLENTA UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE

*From The Seasonal Jewish Kitchen: A Fresh Take on Tradition (Sterling Epicure, 2015), by Amelia Saltsman*

YIELD: 12 SERVINGS

4 blood oranges  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  cup packed light-brown sugar  
1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  cup cornmeal (not stoneground)  
1 t. baking powder  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  t. salt  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more, as needed  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup + 3 T. granulated sugar, divided  
3 eggs  
2 T. Cointreau  
1 T. fresh lemon juice

**1)** Preheat oven to 350°F. With microplane, grate zest from two blood oranges; reserve. Juice remaining oranges; reserve. Cut both ends off zested oranges; cut each orange crosswise into  $\frac{1}{8}$ - to  $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch-thick rounds. Cut all but one slice in half; discard center pith.

**2)** Sprinkle brown sugar evenly over bottom of flameproof/ovenproof 10-inch skillet; sprinkle with 2 T. orange juice. Heat skillet over medium-low heat until most sugar bubbles. Remove from heat.

**3)** Starting at pan's outer edge, lay halved orange slices in melted sugar with "scalloped" edge of each slice touching pan edge. Fit as many orange slices as possible into circle, pinching corners as they are set in hot sugar. Make sure slices with "prettier" side are placed face-down in sugar. Arrange remaining halved orange slices in concentric circles toward center, finishing with reserved whole slice in center.

**4)** In medium bowl, sift together flour, cornmeal, baking powder and salt. In electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment, on medium speed, beat together olive oil and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup granulated sugar until thickened and golden. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition, until mixture is thick and creamy-gold, 3-5 minutes, total. Beat in zest and 1 T. orange juice. On low speed, add flour mixture in three batches, beating after each addition just until blended.

**5)** Pour batter evenly over orange slices; gently smooth top. Bake cake until golden-brown, top springs back to touch and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, about 25 minutes.

**6)** While cake is baking, make soaking syrup. In small pot, stir together remaining orange juice, remaining 3 T. granulated sugar, Cointreau and lemon juice. Bring to a boil over medium heat; cook until mixture reduces to consistency of maple syrup, 3-5 minutes, reducing heat as needed to prevent burning.

**7)** Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 5 minutes. Run thin-bladed knife around inside edge of pan to loosen cake sides. Invert serving plate over cake, invert pan and plate together, lift off pan. If fruit sticks to pan, loosen, place on cake. While cake is hot, use fork or bamboo skewer to make holes without going all the way through. Spoon or brush some syrup over cake. Allow to soak in; spoon or brush on more. Repeat until all syrup used. Allow cake to cool completely before slicing.



## yes, it's kosher

Mexican cuisine, so much a part of the Los Angeles dining scene, is the inspiration for Katsuji Tanabe's Mexikosher. The brisket cooked in duck fat is reminiscent of pork carnitas, with the beef and duck fat together giving that unctuous richness that pork fat does in the traditional Mexican confit.

Tanabe, who was raised in Mexico, says, "In the restaurant, I cook for myself according to my tastes, relying on spicy salsas to give zing to my food. I don't dumb down the food in any way. I like to say, 'kosher picked me,' and, as a result, I feel embraced by the kosher community eating tacos for the first time.

"I am influenced by the seasons and cook everything from scratch. It's a creative, take-no-prisoners approach to kosher food, without any apologies about producing a less-than-authentic ethnic cuisine."

## keeping kosher affordable

Daniel Hahn, CEC, CCA, who has spent 10 years as head of foodservice and catering operations for Beth Sholom Village, a retirement facility in Virginia Beach, Virginia, says his main challenge is sticking to a strict budget. "Kosher simply costs more, but I still manage to operate the foodservice at a 26% food cost," he says. No small feat considering that he pays \$7-\$8 per pound for the brisket of traditional Jewish cooking, more than double the non-kosher wholesale price.

Hahn, who also has classical training, says, "Drawing on that professional training, for a special treat I do my own in-house smoked salmon and whitefish, curing the fish first and then cold-smoking it. But that kind of food is not allowed for all our event attendees, because our facility is not glatt kosher, the highest level of kosher certification."

Even though facilities, tools and equipment are properly cleaned and inspected for kosher food preparation, and the kitchen maintains separate production areas for meat and dairy preparations, when the most orthodox attend events, Hahn uses outside suppliers for meals that these customers consider strictly kosher. And, he provides one-time-use plates and utensils to ensure that they will be consuming foods untainted by previous use.

## delicious first, kosher second

Jeffrey Nathan, chef/owner of Abigail's, New York, likens his role as a chef cooking kosher to that of an artist. "The artist's palette is only limited by his or her imagination. You can make a black and white picture as magnificent as a vividly colored oil painting," he says.

Nathan says he didn't set out to create a kosher restaurant, per se. "Instead, I wished to have a restaurant whose dishes would have flavors that speak for themselves, use good ingredients and offer modern American cuisine that just happens to be kosher.



### ORECCHIETTE WITH BROCCOLI RABE AND SAUSAGE

From Jeff Nathan's *Family Suppers: More Than 125 Simple Kosher Recipes* (Clarkson Potter, 2005)

YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

1 lb. orecchiette pasta  
½ cup olive oil  
12 garlic cloves, thinly sliced  
½ t. hot red pepper flakes, or more, to taste  
½ lb. veal, turkey or Polish sausage, cut on diagonal into ¼-inch-thick slices  
1 lb. broccoli rabe, well-rinsed, coarsely chopped  
1 t. dried oregano  
½ cup + 1 T. fresh lemon juice  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

**1)** Bring large pot of lightly salted water to a boil over high heat. Add pasta; cook until al dente, about 8 minutes.

**2)** In large skillet, combine olive oil, garlic and red pepper flakes. Cook over low heat, stirring often, just until garlic begins to brown, about 3 minutes. Add sausage; increase heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage heats through, about 3 minutes more. Stir in broccoli rabe and oregano. Add ½ cup water; cover partially with lid. Cook, stirring occasionally, until broccoli rabe is barely tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in lemon juice; season with salt and pepper. Keep warm.

**3)** Drain pasta; return to pot. Add broccoli rabe/sausage; mix well. Serve hot.

*Note:* For dairy variation, omit sausage; serve pasta with freshly grated Parmesan cheese. For pareve variation, omit sausage and cheese.

I also knew that a kosher clientele would not be coming in to order brisket and chicken soup, both dishes that, if served in a restaurant, could never measure up to the memories of the versions they ate at grandma's."

Abigail's menu is broad, and includes everything from sushi to elegant treatments of braised dishes, in particular, the cuts of beef from the forequarter that benefit from longer cooking.

Amelia Saltsman, author of *The Seasonal Jewish Kitchen: A Fresh Take on Tradition* (Sterling Epicure, 2015), is committed to living what she calls "a seasonal life." In her book she includes many dessert options that are pareve and can therefore follow a meat-centered meal. She says that when it comes to dessert, where butter might be considered essential, use as the starting point in cakes or other baked goods flavorful oils, instead, Mediterranean-style. "This is just one way to present something delicious at the end of a kosher meal."



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## MIDDLE EASTERN MEATBALL AND VEGETABLE SOUP

Faye Levy, Author: *1,000 Jewish Recipes* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000); and *Healthy Cooking for the Jewish Home: 200 Recipes for Eating Well on Holidays and Every Day* (William Morrow Cookbooks, 2008)

YIELD: 6-8 SERVINGS

7 cups water + more, if needed  
Salt, to taste  
2 medium potatoes, peeled, cut in chunks  
½-1 cauliflower, divided into medium florets  
2 carrots, sliced  
2 green or yellow squash, halved, sliced  
1 onion, chopped  
2 carrots, diced  
1-2 small celery ribs, diced  
1-2 T. chopped gingerroot  
2 garlic cloves, chopped  
Parsley stems, as needed  
1 t. ground cumin  
1 t. turmeric, divided  
1 t. ground pepper, divided  
¾ lb. lean ground beef  
¼ cup chickpea flour

1 small onion, coarsely grated (about ½ cup)  
2 T. finely chopped parsley  
½ t. salt  
2 cups baby spinach leaves or coarsely chopped large spinach, stems removed  
3-4 T. chopped green onion

1) In stew pan, bring 7 cups water to a boil with a pinch of salt. Add potato chunks; cook, covered, for 15 minutes. Add cauliflower and sliced carrots; return to a boil. Cook for 3 minutes. Add squash; return to a boil. Cook for 3 minutes, or until all vegetables are just tender. Remove vegetables with slotted spoon.

2) Add chopped onion, diced carrots, celery, gingerroot, garlic and parsley stems to vegetable cooking liquid. Bring to a boil. Cover; simmer over low heat for 30 minutes. Add cumin, ½ t. turmeric and ½ t. pepper.

3) In medium bowl, combine ground beef, chickpea flour, grated onion, chopped parsley, salt, ½ t. pepper and ½ t. turmeric. Knead until thoroughly mixed. Shape mixture into meatballs, 1 T. for each one. Add one by one to simmering soup. If not enough broth to cover meatballs, add ½-1 cup hot water, pouring near side of pan. Cover; cook meatballs over low heat for 45 minutes, or until soup is well-flavored. If soup is too thin, uncover for last 15 minutes of cooking; if too thick, gradually add ¼-½ cup hot water.

4) Just before serving, add spinach to soup; heat for 1 minute, or until wilted. Return cooked vegetables to soup. Taste; adjust seasoning. Serve soup sprinkled with chopped green onion.

## upscale kosher

Levana Kirschenbaum, longtime restaurateur and an authority on healthy Jewish cooking, believes that as in any cuisine, working with extremely good ingredients, you will come up with something good. “And, by using only kosher ingredients, limitation becomes a resource,” she says. “Flavors will be purer, and chefs in the best, most imaginative and contemporary kosher restaurants point with pride to the banner of in-house-made foods.”

Back when Kirschenbaum opened Levana, New York, which closed after 32 years, she says it bucked the trend of upscale steakhouses, both kosher and non, that were expensive but little else. “Not marked by great workmanship, these restaurants were largely undistinguished. And so it is in the kosher arena. I don’t agree with modern for modern’s sake, which forgets the wisdom of the old-timers. We were the pioneers, serving upscale kosher foods that endure and are honest.”

Following the wisdom that plant-based diets are the healthiest and can be wholly nutritious if carefully curated, Kirschenbaum goes against the stream of traditional kosher food that can be centered on high-fat meats. Instead, she advocates a diet of vegetables, fruits and grains, but not to the exclusion of meats, including beef and lamb.

“I love the way people eat in Israel, where, in many restaurants, meat-based proteins are served in small amounts relative to the healthy array of side dishes,” she says. “Fostering conviviality and a feeling of contentment, side dishes are served generously and then replenished as needed. People need not leave hungry from a vegetable-intensive meal.”

Faye Levy is a longtime food writer and author of cookbooks that include *Healthy Cooking for the Jewish Home: 200 Recipes for Eating Well on Holidays and Every Day* (William Morrow Cookbooks, 2008). “Good food is good food, whether kosher or not, but there are all degrees of observance,” she says. “Some of those who are strictly observant will only eat in establishments where they know the reputation of the rabbi who certified the restaurant.”

She adds that in the U.S., there is interest in foods that are analogues of items forbidden by the kosher rules. “But people who never grew up eating shrimp don’t find the appeal of eating something that is an analogue of shrimp, even though there are more restaurants using these kinds of substitutes,” Levy says. “But with restaurants able to serve both fish and dairy-based foods, or meat and fish, there’s plenty of variety to go around.”

An estimated 25% of American Jews identify as kosher, and many non-Jews buy foods that are certified kosher from certifying authorities, deeming them cleaner, healthier and more humanely produced, worth the higher price. The end result is that kosher dining is heating up. ■

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