

## CULTURE &amp; ARTS

## TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

## Feed a Crowd Around The Giving Table

By Carol Goodman Kaufman / Special to the BJV



A couple of months ago, I got an email from our intrepid editor, Albert Stern. He asked if I would be interested in reviewing a new cookbook. As an enthusiastic cook and, more so, a voracious eater, of course I agreed. I completely put it out of my mind until, just days before leaving the country, the book arrived in the mail (more on our trip to Spain and Portugal in the next issue). We returned home just in time to celebrate Thanksgiving and, fortuitously, the holiday weekend turned out to be the perfect time to try out recipes on a (mostly) willing crowd.

Naomi Ross has produced a beautifully illustrated and designed collection in *The Giving Table*. Dedicated primarily to entertaining, cooking for a large crowd, and what she calls "culinary chesed." Ross has developed unique twists on some classic dishes, as well as some new and creative ones.

My original intent was to try one dish from every section of the book, but alas, the press deadline loomed. I did manage to sample six chapters. And I was not disappointed.

First up was Tropical Quinoa Mango Salad. Served warm, the bland canvas that is quinoa was sweetened by the mango, given some punch by lime juice, jalapeno pepper, and scallions, crunch by Persian cucumbers, and some depth with cumin.

Next on the agenda was Roasted Kabocha Squash Soup. This recipe made enough for twelve servings, reflecting the book's goal of feeding a crowd. On first taste, the soup was okay, nothing to write home about. But we all agreed that on subsequent days, the flavors melded, and it improved at every tasting.

When Sunday came around, it was time to check out the cookbook's brunch section. I gritted my teeth and made Ross's frittata. Let me be blunt: I have never liked frittatas. I find them dry and tasteless. Same for omelets. But this frittata was different. It was a work of art. Layers of vegetables not only allowed the eggs to stay soft, but they added a variety of colors, textures, and flavors. Sautéed onion, sweet potato, peas, spinach, balsamic roasted grape tomatoes, and goat cheese all combined to make a delicious dish. And it tasted even better the next couple of days (I obviously made too much even for our big group).

One of her instructions was a puzzling, but an experienced cook can simply work around them. For example, in this recipe, Ross tells the cook to pour in the beaten eggs, followed by the chopped spinach. She then says to poke the spinach under the eggs. If layers are wanted, why not just add the spinach and pour the eggs over it? The resulting layers worked out beautifully.

The family departed after leaving a pile of sheets, towels, and the occasional Lego, so it was time to get back to cooking for two. For a dish that can serve as either an entree or a hefty side, I chose Pomegranate Glazed Eggplant. True to its description, it was a simple dish to prepare, and it provided many different flavors

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and textures. Served over rice (or couscous) and topped with a drizzle of tehina, chopped peanuts, and parsley, it made for a satisfying meal. Or two.

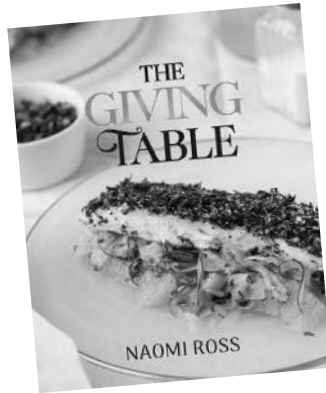
Then, in atonement for all the holiday desserts, it was time for fish. I chose Pan-Seared Tilapia with Chili Lime Butter for an easy mid-week dinner. Not only was it a snap to prepare, but delicious to boot. Like quinoa, tilapia is a fairly bland fish, dependent on seasoning. The chili lime butter, augmented by shallot and salt, was enough to give it a kick without overwhelming the palate. And of course, that tiny pat of butter made everything better.

Since we don't really eat red meat, I skipped over a few sections to get to the dessert chapter. (So much for the sugar detox.) I chose Bourbon Almond Dippers, mainly because I happened to have maple syrup, pecans, and bourbon in the house, which meant I didn't have to brave the cold and wind to get to the store.

This recipe makes for a very sticky dough that was a bit hard to handle. And because it was so loose, it didn't produce an even log. Although the dough contains cinnamon, the cookies were a bit bland by themselves, so needed a glaze — but not the one provided in the recipe. The bourbon in it almost knocked our socks off while it overwhelmed the maple syrup in the mix.

In addition to her recipes, Ross provides useful background information, some biblical, about the dishes. She also rates each one as to its difficulty, ranging from "easy-peasy" to "worth the wait."

All in all, this cookbook provided some great dishes big enough to serve a sizeable gathering of family or friends.



### Layered Vegetable Frittata

Serves 6

From *The Giving Table*, reprinted with permission of the author. "A frittata is a one-pan Italian egg dish (similar to an omelet) that incorporates lots of vegetables into the mixture. Sauté vegetables, add beaten eggs on top to cover, and then transfer to the oven to finish cooking and to brown cheese on top. "Frittata Frittata" is how my father-in-law's extra-chunky layered version has affectionately come to be known in our family. This version has a few extra simple steps that set it apart: pre-roasting some of the tomatoes separately intensifies their sweetness, and par-cooking the hard sweet potato beforehand ensures it will be tender and ready in time."

Prep Time: 20–25 minutes

Cook Time: 35–40 minutes

Difficulty: Worth the wait

Gluten-Free/Pesach friendly

Do Ahead: Can be made a day ahead. Refresh in a 350°F oven uncovered until warmed through.

#### INGREDIENTS:

12 eggs	1 medium sweet potato, par-cooked (pierced and microwaved for 5 minutes), peeled, and sliced into ¼-inch thick rounds
1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided	
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, divided	
10–12 grape tomatoes	1 cup (6 ounces) frozen peas
¼ cup balsamic vinegar	1 packed cup chopped fresh baby spinach or kale leaves
2 teaspoons sugar	1 (4-ounce) log goat cheese, crumbled
2–3 Tablespoons olive oil	
1 large onion, thinly sliced	

#### DIRECTIONS:

Prep eggs: Preheat oven to 400°F. In a large mixing bowl, beat eggs together with ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper; set aside.

Pre-roast tomatoes: Toss tomatoes with balsamic vinegar and sugar, and place in a small baking dish. Place in oven and roast until tomatoes are almost ready to burst and liquid has reduced to syrup, about 12–15 minutes; set aside.

Sauté: Meanwhile, heat oil in a large oven-safe skillet (12-inch) over medium-high heat (this pan will be used to cook the whole dish). Add onions and season with remaining ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Sauté onions until translucent and soft, about 5–6 minutes.

Layer: Reduce heat to medium. Layer slices of sweet potato over onions. Add beaten eggs. Add peas, sprinkling evenly; then add chopped spinach. Using a spatula, gently bury the spinach leaves evenly beneath the eggs. Scatter roasted tomatoes over the top and drizzle with the reduced balsamic liquid. Sprinkle crumbled goat cheese evenly over the top.

Bake: Remove from heat and transfer pan to the oven on the middle rack. Bake for 20 minutes or until all liquid is set and cheese is slightly browned on top. Remove from oven. Cut frittata into wedges and serve..

*Carol Goodman Kaufman has just published the second picture book in what is planned as a series about nature for young children. Written under the name Carolinda Goodman, Pirate Ships and Shooting Stars is written in rhyme, and its lively stanzas encourage young children to use their imaginations when looking up at the sky. From rainbows to constellations to pictures in the clouds, Kaufman believes there is much to see if only they lift their eyes.*

*In addition to her work for children, Kaufman also writes under her "real" name about food history (including for the Berkshire Jewish Voice), and her first novel, a murder mystery, will drop soon.*