

# New culinary possibilities for Passover

*Persian chicken and chickpea balls spice adds twist to seder*

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*Given that the holiday spread tends to be vast anyway, it's an opportune time to add a twist to the traditional Passover menu. While tradition is important, we are now free to expand our repertoire a little to encompass the culinary customs of the extended global Jewish family. Victor Calzada / El Paso Times*

Passover, the festival commemorating the Israelites' journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, is upon us. In preparing for it, Jews around the world are focused on two things. The first is cleaning all traces of leavened foods from the house. From cupboards to pockets, out go the crumbs. The second focus is cooking — a lot — for a feast of traditional foods to be consumed at the seder, the ritual meal.

Each and every food item on the table during the reading of the Haggadah, (“telling”) has symbolic meaning. From the unleavened bread called matzah that recalls the haste with which the Hebrews had to leave Egypt, to the haroset that represents the mortar the Hebrew slaves used for their masters' building, to the horseradish root that recalls the bitterness of slavery, these foods illustrate the story. Over the centuries, additional foods have been added to the ritual. Persian Jews hit each other with scallions to represent the whips used to punish the slaves, while feminists have added a Miriam's cup of water to sit alongside Elijah the Prophet's wine goblet.

But what's for dinner? Virtually all the dishes served at a typical seder have deep and sentimental resonance for the participants. Our grandmother's chicken soup or Aunt Ruth's brisket bring warm

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memories and are absolutely expected year after year. But not every family has the same memories. Over the centuries, the Jewish people have been dispersed around the world, from India to Indiana. Whether due to the Assyrian conquest of Israel in the 8th century BCE, the Roman conquest in 70 CE, the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, the Russian pogroms, or the Holocaust, the Jews have wandered the globe.

And while they've wandered, they've developed many and diverse traditions, especially as they relate to food. One of the most interesting customs has to do with what foods are permissible to consume on the holiday. For eight days, Jews must abstain from all leavened, fermented products made from the five principal biblical grains: wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats.

Sephardic Jews, those exiled from Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition, became accustomed to eating legumes, corn, and rice during the holiday, while Ashkenazic Jews from Northern and Eastern Europe did not, even though those foods were not expressly forbidden in the Torah. But in 2015, the Conservative movement overturned the prohibition on those foods, opening up a vast new culinary territory, one that is a boon for vegetarians and, more important, a bonding among the different branches of the extended family.

So, given that the holiday spread tends to be vast anyway, it's an opportune time to add a twist to the traditional Passover menu. While tradition is important, we are now free to expand our repertoire a little to encompass the culinary customs of the extended global Jewish family.

### **Persian Chicken and Chickpea Balls (Gundi)**

Makes about 18 meatballs

#### **For the Meatballs:**

- 8 ounces ground turkey
- 8 ounces ground beef
- 2 cups roasted chickpea flour
- 2 medium yellow onions, grated
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons water

#### **For the broth:**

- 1½ to 2 quarts chicken soup
- 4 medium boiling potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- Salt to taste

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1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed  
Sprigs of fresh dill

**Directions:**

In a medium bowl, combine all the meatball ingredients, adding enough water to form a mixture that is smooth but not sticky.

Refrigerate until firm, at least 3 hours.

Using moistened hands, shape into smooth 1-inch balls.

In a large pot, bring the chicken soup to a boil.

Add the potatoes, lemon juice, turmeric, and salt and simmer for 30 minutes.

Add the gundi and chickpeas, cover, and simmer until the gundi are tender, about 40 minutes.

Garnish with fresh dill.

<https://www.telegram.com/story/lifestyle/2021/03/27/persian-chicken-and-chickpea-balls-add-twist-passover-meal/4802482001/>