

BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Traveling with Jewish Taste

Trees

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



It may be a cold and snowy January here in New England, but in Israel it's the month of Shevat, and the country's almond trees are decked out in fabulous pink and white blossoms heralding the coming of spring. This Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of the Trees, is a perfect time both to plant new trees and to partake of the bounty of the land.

We can only plant trees by proxy at the moment (please remember to call your Hadassah JNF tree lady), but even if you're not hosting or attending a Tu B'Shevat seder, you can certainly enjoy the wonderful foods associated with the holiday.

It is traditional on Tu B'Shevat to eat every one of the seven biblical species mentioned in the Torah: wheat, barley, olives, grapes, figs, pomegranates, and dates, but I wouldn't suggest eating either raw wheat or barley. And while olive trees can be seen even on major streets in just about every town, they are not ready for prime time until they've been treated with brine or oil. Trust me on that one; I've actually made the mistake of trying olives straight from the tree. But the other five species grown in the Land of Milk and Honey are available in markets indoors and out.



A Tu B'Shevat sampler

By the way, that honey referred to in the Torah is much more likely to be date honey than the product of honeybees with which we are familiar here in the States.

The seven species include flavors neutral, sweet, and savory, so a complete meal is easy to imagine. Cook up a big pot of mushroom barley soup (check off one item), then whip up a loaf of whole wheat cinnamon raisin bread (two more items on the list). Serve these with a block of good cheese and a variety of olives on the side (one more). For dessert, put out a plate of chewy Smyrna figs, full and luscious Medjool dates, and sweet and tart pomegranates (these three round out the seven species).

Easy peasy, you have a Tu B'Shevat dinner that will warm you on a frigid winter's night.

For those of us with less time on our hands, wouldn't it be really neat to have a recipe that includes every one of the seven species? Dates, raisins, and figs sound like the foundation of a really dense and delicious fruit bread. But olives? Probably not a good fit. That is, that's what I thought until I happened upon this recipe that uses olive oil. Brilliant, delicious, and pareve to boot.



For Tu B'Shevat, why not build a tree made entirely of seven species mini-muffins?



Seven Species Muffins

Adapted from a recipe by Tori Avey



Ingredients:

3/4 cup golden raisins	1 1/2 cups all purpose flour (or half each all-purpose and whole wheat)
1/2 cup dried figs	1/2 cup barley flour
1/2 cup dates	2 tsp. baking powder
1 1/4 cups unsweetened almond milk	1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/4 cup applesauce	1/4 tsp. salt
1 tsp. cinnamon	3/4 cup pomegranate seeds
1/2 tsp. allspice	1/2 cup chopped pecans
2 large eggs	Paper muffin tin liners
1/3 cup light olive oil	2 tbsp. turbinado sugar
1/2 cup sugar	1/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 cup brown sugar	
1 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract	

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Remove stems from figs and discard.

Roughly chop dates and figs. Set aside.

In a food processor blend together the following ingredients until very smooth: dates, figs, almond milk, applesauce, cinnamon and allspice. The end result should be similar to the texture of apple butter or smooth fruit preserves. Set mixture aside.

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together eggs, light olive oil, sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla extract.

In a large mixing bowl, sift together flour, barley flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.

Gently mix the pomegranate seeds into the dry mixture, making sure the seeds are well coated with flour.

Make a well in the middle of the dry ingredients. Pour the fruit mixture from the blender into the well.

Add the egg mixture to the well.

Fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until the dry ingredients are just moistened and a lumpy batter forms. Do not over mix – if you do your muffins will turn out heavy and dense.

Fold raisins and chopped pecans into the muffin batter with a light-handed stir.

Line your muffin pan with paper muffin cups.

Using an ice cream scoop, divide batter equally into muffin cups, filling each cup to the top and mounding the surface slightly.

Mix the sugar and cinnamon together in a small bowl using a fork. Sprinkle about a 1/2 tsp of cinnamon sugar mixture evenly across the surface of each muffin.

Place muffins in the oven and immediately turn heat down to 375 degrees F. Bake for 25-27 minutes until the tops of the muffins are golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Let muffins cool for 10 minutes before removing from the tin and cooling on a rack.

Serve warm.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently at work on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at carolgoodmankaufman.com and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.