



Hummus im Bassar and Pita

MAKES 12

Throughout the Middle East and Greece, people argue about the origin of hummus, the garlicky chickpea spread that is a staple on nearly every table. Some say it's the national dish of Israel, and I must admit I've had the best hummus of my life in Israel. There are even restaurants, called hummusiya, that specialize in the delicacy. Once you've made your own hummus with dried chickpeas and tahini, you'll never buy it at the supermarket again. It is most often served as a meal in itself, not just a dip to snack on (although I enjoy it with falafel and pita). Hummus im bassar, which translates as "hummus with meat," is a platter of creamy hummus covered with spicy ground beef or lamb. I make the meat topping while the chickpeas are cooking so it's warm when I spoon it over the hummus. Im bassar can be served any time of the day, including breakfast, and if there's any spicy meat leftover I love to add it to an omelet. It's most important to use good-quality Israeli tahini, a silky paste made from Ethiopian sesame seeds that is used for many sauces, not just hummus.

INGREDIENTS

HUMMUS (makes 3 cups):

2 cups dried chickpeas
1 onion, peeled and cut in half
5 cloves garlic, minced
1/3 cup tahini
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons salt
olive oil

PITA (makes 8-10):

1 1/2 cups water
2 teaspoons instant dry yeast
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons olive oil

3 1/2 cups flour (bread flour is best)

SPICY GROUND LAMB (serves 4-6):

10 ounce ground lamb
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon sweet smoked paprika
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1 teaspoons dried za'atar or dried oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon white vinegar
2 tablespoons butter
1 yellow onion, minced



2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts

PROCESS:

Hummus:

In a large pot, place dried chickpeas and cover with plenty of cold water, at least 2" above the chickpeas. Add onion and bring to a boil. Simmer until the chickpeas are tender, about 2 hours. Remove onion pieces, and drain chickpeas, reserving the cooking liquid. Set aside 1/4 cup of the chickpeas for garnish. Place remaining chickpeas in the bowl of a food processor, along with 1 cup of the cooking liquid. Add garlic, tahini, lemon juice, and salt. Process until smooth, adding more liquid or water until the desired consistency is reached. Taste to see if more salt is needed. Pour into a bowl and drizzle olive oil over the top. Add reserved chickpeas and serve.

Spicy Ground Lamb:

In a bowl, combine the ground lamb, garlic, paprika, cumin, cinnamon, allspice, za'atar, salt, pepper, and vinegar. Mix well and cover with plastic wrap. Let sit in refrigerator for at least thirty minutes. Meanwhile, heat a large skillet and melt the butter. Add the onion and sauté until soft. Add the lamb mixture and cook, breaking up the meat into small pieces, until just cooked through, about 4 minutes. Top with pine nuts and serve.

Pita:

In a large bowl, put the water, yeast, sugar, olive oil, and salt. Mix well. Add flour, one cup at a time, and mix until dough comes together. You may need to add a little more flour if it is too sticky to handle. Dough should be soft and able to form into a ball. On a floured surface, knead dough for 5 minutes, adding flour if necessary. It's important the dough is not too firm, but a bit sticky. You can mix and knead the dough in a standing mixer with the dough hook if you prefer. Place dough in a greased bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise for one hour, or until doubled in size. You can put in refrigerator and leave overnight, but it will need to come out and sit at room temperature for thirty minutes before you work with it. Turn out dough on a floured surface and divide into 8 or 10 balls. Flatten each ball into discs, about 1/4" thick and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Let pita discs rest for 10 minutes, then bake for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and place pitas in a bowl. Cover immediately with cloth towels to keep the steam in, and keep pita soft. Serve warm or at room temperature.