



Smithsonian Associates

## Feasting with Royalty: Dinner with Alexander the Great

*Francine Segan*

Monday, September 16, 2024 - 6:45 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET

### Recipes of Ancient Greece

from *Philosopher's Kitchen*  
by Francine Segan

#### Chickpea Dip with Grilled Pita

Serves 8

Alexis, the fourth century BC Greek playwright, joked “How many traps to catch bread do unhappy mortals set” referring to the many dipping appetizers served before a Greek feast. This puree makes a wonderful “trap” for warm pita or flatbreads, and is also delicious served on a bed of salad greens.

1 large onion, diced	1/2 cup olive oil
1 cup dry chickpeas, soaked overnight, rinsed and drained	
1 teaspoon dried oregano	1 bay leaf
1/2 teaspoon pepper	1 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups vegetable or chicken stock	2 large garlic cloves, chopped
Juice and zest of 1 lemon	6 Pita Bread
3 tablespoon minced fresh mint	

Sauté the onion in 1/4 cup of the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat until golden, about 10 minutes. Add the chickpeas, oregano, bay leaf, pepper, salt, and stock. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until the chickpeas are tender and the stock absorbed, about one hour. Discard the bay leaf. Allow to cool slightly. Put the mixture into a food processor along with the garlic, lemon juice, and remaining 1/4 cup of olive oil. Pulse until combined but still coarse.

Preheat grill or broiler. Broil the pita bread until warm, about 1 minute per side. Cut into triangles and arrange them around the dip.

Serve the chickpea dip topped with lemon zest and fresh mint.

#### Minted Garlic Spread

Serves 10

Here fresh mint pairs with tangy garlic to create a wonderful spread for assorted vegetables or as an accompaniment to grilled foods.

According to Greek mythology, mint was created when Hades, the god of the underworld, was caught flirting with a nymph. In a fit of jealous rage his wife Persephone turned the nymph, named Minthe, into the plant that now bears her name.

3 cups cubed crusty bread, crusts on  
3 tablespoons fruity vinegar  
4 garlic cloves, minced  
2 tablespoon honey  
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander  
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/2 cup grated Parmesan  
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil  
Salt and pepper  
1/3 cup mint leaves  
Assorted raw vegetables for dipping

Place the bread cubes, vinegar, and 1/2 cup water into a food processor. Let stand until the bread has absorbed all the liquid, about 10 minutes.

Add the garlic, honey, coriander, cumin, and cheese. Puree until smooth. Slowly add the olive oil and continue to puree until incorporated. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add the mint leaves and pulse a few times to incorporate. Serve in a bowl surrounded by raw vegetables.

### **Assorted Stuffed Figs**

Serves 6

Greek athletes were advised to eat figs as a regular part of their strength-building diet.

These dried figs, plumped in wine and then filled with either prosciutto, mascarpone, or pistachios, make for an irresistible appetizer.

18 dried figs  
1 cup white wine  
1 tablespoon mascarpone cheese  
Zest of 1/2 lemon  
2 tablespoons finely chopped pistachio nuts  
1 teaspoon honey  
2 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut into twelve 1/2-inch wide strips

In a small saucepan, bring the figs and wine to a simmer and cook until the figs are soft, about 5 minutes. Remove the figs and continue cooking the wine until very thick and syrupy, about 10 minutes. Reserve.

Cut about 1/4 inch off the tops of 6 figs and set the figs upright on a serving platter. Top each with 1/2 teaspoon of the mascarpone and sprinkle with the lemon zest.

Remove the stems from 6 more figs and halve the figs lengthwise. Put the pistachios on a plate and dip each fig half into the chopped nuts. Drizzle with a little honey. Arrange on the serving platter.

Remove the stems from the remaining 6 figs and halve the figs crosswise. Make a small indent in each fig center with the tip of your finger or edge of a knife. Roll a strip of prosciutto into a bundle and stuff into each fig half. Drizzle about 1/2 teaspoon of the wine syrup over each fig half and add them to the serving platter.

## Poppy Seed Bread of Athens

Yield: One loaf

This recipe is from *The Philosopher's Banquet*, written in the first century AD, which mentions more than 70 kinds of breads baked by the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. This wonderfully tasty bread was originally baked in a round pan so that when cooked it would form a mushroom shape. Whether you bake it in a round, square, or rectangular pan you'll thoroughly enjoy this honey and poppy seed flavored treat.

1 package dry active yeast  
1/2 cup milk, warm  
2 tablespoons honey  
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more as needed  
2 teaspoons salt  
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more as needed  
1/2 cup whole wheat flour  
2 tablespoons poppy seeds

Mix the yeast, milk, and honey in a small bowl. Let rest until the yeast dissolves and begins to foam, about 10 minutes. Combine the flour and salt in large bowl. Slowly stir in the milk mixture, 1/2 cup warm water, and olive oil. Beat for 2 minutes with an electric mixer set on medium speed. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, add the whole wheat flour, and beat until the dough forms a ball.

Lightly flour a work surface. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes, adding flour as necessary to keep the dough from sticking to the surface. Grease a large bowl with olive oil, sprinkle with the poppy seeds, and turn the dough several times in the bowl. Cover and place in a warm place to rise, about 1 hour. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Punch the dough down onto a floured work surface and place it into a lightly oiled 6 to 7 inch round bread pan. Cover and allow it to rise again for about 1 hour. Bake until golden brown, about 30 minutes. Allow to cool on a rack before slicing.