

Roootin's Iranian Kitchen

*A Culinary Journey
Rooted In Tradition*



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OUR FOOD JOURNEY

Over the years much has changed in our family's food tradition; we have gone from a mostly self-sufficient life back in Iran to a more consuming life in the Netherlands. One thing has not changed, the importance of food. In my memories and experience food and family have always been intertwined. Together it led to connection, sharing, healing, joy and to bliss.

Food and the process of preparing meals was a way to slow down and feel the warmth and the security my parents had to offer. More often I find myself longing to own a piece of land where I can grow my own vegetables and herbs. I try to use traditional ways to prepare my food, and to be conscious about the foods I consume. These methods and ideas have been lovingly instilled and rooted in my being by my grandmother and my mother. Today, together with my mum, we are sharing our food journey with you.

From the Kurdish mountains to suburban Dutch life, our family's journey started in a country far away from the place we have been calling home for over thirty years. Both my father and mother come from the Kurdish countryside of Iran. They are descendants of well-known and much-respected landlords and actual warriors. Until this day the family

history forms our foundation, it has determined the way all of us walk through life: with pride, aware of our true nature and always conscious of our responsibilities in this lifetime. In times of hardship we fall back on this foundation, always reminding ourselves that we come from a line of strong men and women.

They lived close to the mountains and lived a self-sufficient life in close harmony with nature and in balance with the seasons. They took only that which was offered by their lands and animals. They had their own traditional methods for processing and conserving food. Meals were shared with the family. They lived a spiritual, pure and active life that has been passed on to all the children. Essential for this tribal way of life was the trust and the willingness to live and work as a solid community. Taking care of each other meant

This photo was taken on our family's land in 2015 from my grandfather's front porch



being involved and to participate, a way of life that still to this day exists in certain areas of Iran.

In the early '80s my family was forced to flee their home in search of their safety and that of their children. A journey by foot through the mountains led them to Turkey where they spent more than a year in a refugee camp. When my parents talk of having to flee their home country, it is a reality that is unimaginable and very difficult to process. It made us aware of the suffering of others, and empathic to their plight, strengthening our belief in the importance of creating and belonging to a loving community.

In November 1985 our family settled in the Netherlands as political refugees. The journey led to building a new life in the Netherlands, a new and completely unknown world. The first years were all about surviving the unknown and finding peace. Luckily we had a very strong food tradition, that included much more than preparing and eating a meal. The feeling of 'home' was brought back at the dining table through the dishes, with their aromatic smells and flavours. Through food they gave us, who were children at the time, a taste of home, for many years the only physical experience of Iran.

Food traditions

Growing up in an Iranian family means growing up with a strong concept of hospitality. It is very common to have dinner guests every day, often more people

than will fit on a standard dining table. The 'soffreh', a tablecloth long enough to fit all the guests, is traditionally rolled out on the floor. Family gatherings would happen weekly and all the children would help as waiters, pretending to run a restaurant.

My grandmother was the one that introduced us to the healing powers of food. No matter the ailment, she had a recipe and only using natural remedies. Looking back on it, the most important ingredient she put in her remedies, apart from her herbs, was love, and her verbalised intention to heal - the most powerful ingredient you can put into anything you're making.

Rooted in so many ancient healing systems, such as Iranian traditional medicine, Ayurveda and Unani, food has been used for their medicinal qualities for centuries. This view of food is also very common for Kurds, who have always been made aware of the healing powers of certain foods, a healthy diet and lifestyle that suits and balances each individual.

We grew up seeing our grandmother and other women of the family preparing food from scratch. It was what they knew and therefore what they practiced in the comfort of their Dutch homes. I have always noticed the women in my family staying close to their true nature, their roots and culture, but always with an open vision to learn. This has been so inspiring and has influenced me in many parts of my personal life.





Rootin the cafe

In 2017 I left my corporate life as an engineer and in many ways I was returning to my essence. One day I stumbled upon a location that would make the perfect place for the family cafe my mother and I had always dreamed of. We got things rolling and everything was unfolding in perfect order. It was a new beginning that felt very natural and it turned out exactly as we envisioned.

Every single family member played a role, but it was mum and only mum leading the kitchen, leaving me responsible for the rest of it. We created a place where we brought nature inside, with plants throughout the space. Our ingredients were from my mum's kitchen, we used honey from my dad's bee garden, on a monthly basis we would receive rose petals, spices and herbs from my aunt in Iran. We created a mural that reminded us of our village in Iran and made sure we had fresh flowers in every corner of the cafe. Our menu was Middle Eastern-inspired, and we paid equal attention to the presentation of the dishes, as to their taste.

Rootin was home, a place where we could explore our roots, share knowledge, inspire and be inspired. A place where we could welcome guests the way we were taught by our parents, from a sense of hospitality not taught in books, but derived from our culture and heritage. Our home-made food led people to our cafe, but it was the hospitality, authenticity and that feeling of belonging which made them return. This, at

least, is what was often expressed to us, and motivated us to show up every single day. We devoted ourselves to the project, found fulfillment, and after a few years felt ready to share our story in a different way. The outcome is this, our cookbook.

Rootin the cookbook

For us, food represents family and community. Food has the power to bring people together, and is essential for a good time. It is necessary to feel good, to look good, and to perform at our best. Wholesome and healthy food is medicine, and once you incorporate this in your life you won't want to go back to anything else.

We wanted to share our way of cooking with everyone, and so designed the kitchen at our cafe to be open-plan. Our customers saw us de-seeding tons of pomegranates, zesting oranges, pitting dates, baking bread and so much more. The principle of cooking from scratch and always with present awareness in the whole cooking process has been a way of living for my family. I guess it is part of the process of allowing food to nourish you as a whole on a physical, a mental and an energetic level. Food will absorb the love and energy you put into it preparing it, and this love and energy will be passed onto those who eat and enjoy it.

Over the last decade we have created a signature 'Rootin' taste, inspired by both our family's Middle Eastern roots, and also our experience of Western food culture.

We promised many of our guests at Rootin to collect our favourite recipes in a book and share it with them. During the global pandemic of 2020 we spent a lot of time at home, sharing time with family and doing a lot of cooking. As natural as it felt to start Rootin the cafe, it felt equally natural to write our cookbook.

Properly describing our cooking process, in terms of weights and timings, was a new departure for us, and quite an experience. While cooking we normally rely on intuition and experience, as opposed to weighing and measuring ingredients and working in a specific order; however, it was a pleasure to create this cookbook from scratch.

Creating the cookbook has been another family affair. From presentation and photography, to actually designing and writing the book, we did it all ourselves. We truly hope that you feel the love and energy we invested in this book, and hope you enjoy our food.

Love & Light,
Solmaz

“I want to sing like birds sing not worrying
about who hears or what they think.”

- Rumi

Our little cafe in Amsterdam; a place to share knowledge, inspire and be inspired. A place to connect, to be creative, mindful, and authentic. A place where we could learn from people from all walks of life. We were able to share our roots, traditions and warmth with everyone visiting us from all over the Netherlands and abroad, serving the best we could, and doing so with a genuine heart and smile.

The mural was inspired by the rich nature of Iran, hand painted by two amazing artists, father and son. Our father told us that our village used to be full of bee-eaters - the Kurds called them ‘the birds of the rain’, because of their rainbow colours. We were happy to create and see the ‘birds of the rain’ 30 years later in our little village Rootin, this time in the middle of Amsterdam.



HUMMUS AVOCADO TOAST

We introduced this toast because so many of our vegan customers were asking for a vegan version of our famous goat cheese avocado toast. We ended up making around 3500 of them in only 1 year.

Serves 1

1 slice rye sourdough bread
60g hummus (p.132)
1/2 avocado
1tsp dukkah
1tbsp pomegranate seeds
1tbsp chickpeas
Rootin's mixed seeds (p.38)
sprouts
fresh parsley
pumpkin seeds
orange zest
olive oil
slice of lime

Directions

Toast the sourdough bread in the preheated oven, at 200°C for 3 minutes.

Spread the toast with hummus.

Slice the avocado lengthwise and place on top of the hummus.

Add the dukkah evenly all over the toast and top with sprouts - we love broccoli & radish sprouts.

Add chickpeas, pomegranate seeds, pumpkin seeds, and Rootin's mixed seeds.

To finish, add some orange zest, fresh parsley, lime juice and a drizzle of olive oil.



GRAPE MOLASSES CRÊPE

Mum opted to offer her all-time favourite crêpe at the cafe with the grape molasses syrup that was shipped to us by my auntie from Iran, who actually produces the syrup herself. Mum surprised us with flavours that gave us all the good feels. All our guests who tried the special dish came back for at least a second time. This dish requires some attention and time, so for practical reasons we kept this one as a special, and not a standard dish on our menu.

Makes 1 crêpe

Non-stick skillet 24cm Ø

2 eggs
2tbsp flour
40ml milk
30g ghee
50ml grape molasses
30ml warm water
pinch of salt

To garnish
pistachios (chopped)
raw almonds (chopped)
grated coconut
rose petals
orange zest

Directions

In a bowl, beat the eggs with a whisk, add flour, milk and mix well until smooth.

Mix the molasses with warm water and put aside.

Heat 20g of the ghee in a nonstick pan on medium heat. Allow it to melt and make sure the bottom of the pan is fully greased. Pour the batter into the pan and reduce heat. Cook for some minutes until set and not runny anymore.

Add the remaining 10g ghee into the pan and flip the pancake. With a spatula, cut the pancake in 8 triangles. Pour the molasses all over the pancake and cook for some more minutes. You will notice the molasses turning a bit more syrupy.

Transfer the pancake onto a plate. Top with pistachio, raw almonds, grated coconut, rose petals and orange zest.





SPINACH FETA FILO PIE

Makes 15 pieces

**470g, 1 package filo pastry
for baklava**

450g spinach

50g fresh parsley (*chopped*)

50g fresh mint (*chopped*)

50ml sunflower oil

2tbsp sesame seeds

100g feta cheese

50g walnuts

2tsp ground paprika

1tsp black pepper

pinch salt

Egg mixture

2 eggs

150ml milk

1tsp baking powder

100ml sunflower oil

To garnish

rose petals

walnuts

toasted black sesame seeds

Directions

Put the spinach in a large pot, and let it steam until soft, making sure to toss now and then. Take the spinach off the stove, drain and squeeze out all of the excess liquid.

Heat 50ml sunflower oil and toss with the spinach. Add the mint and parsley and all the spices and bake for about 3 minutes and set aside to cool down.

Now combine the egg, milk, sunflower oil and baking powder, and stir well with a whisk into an even mixture.

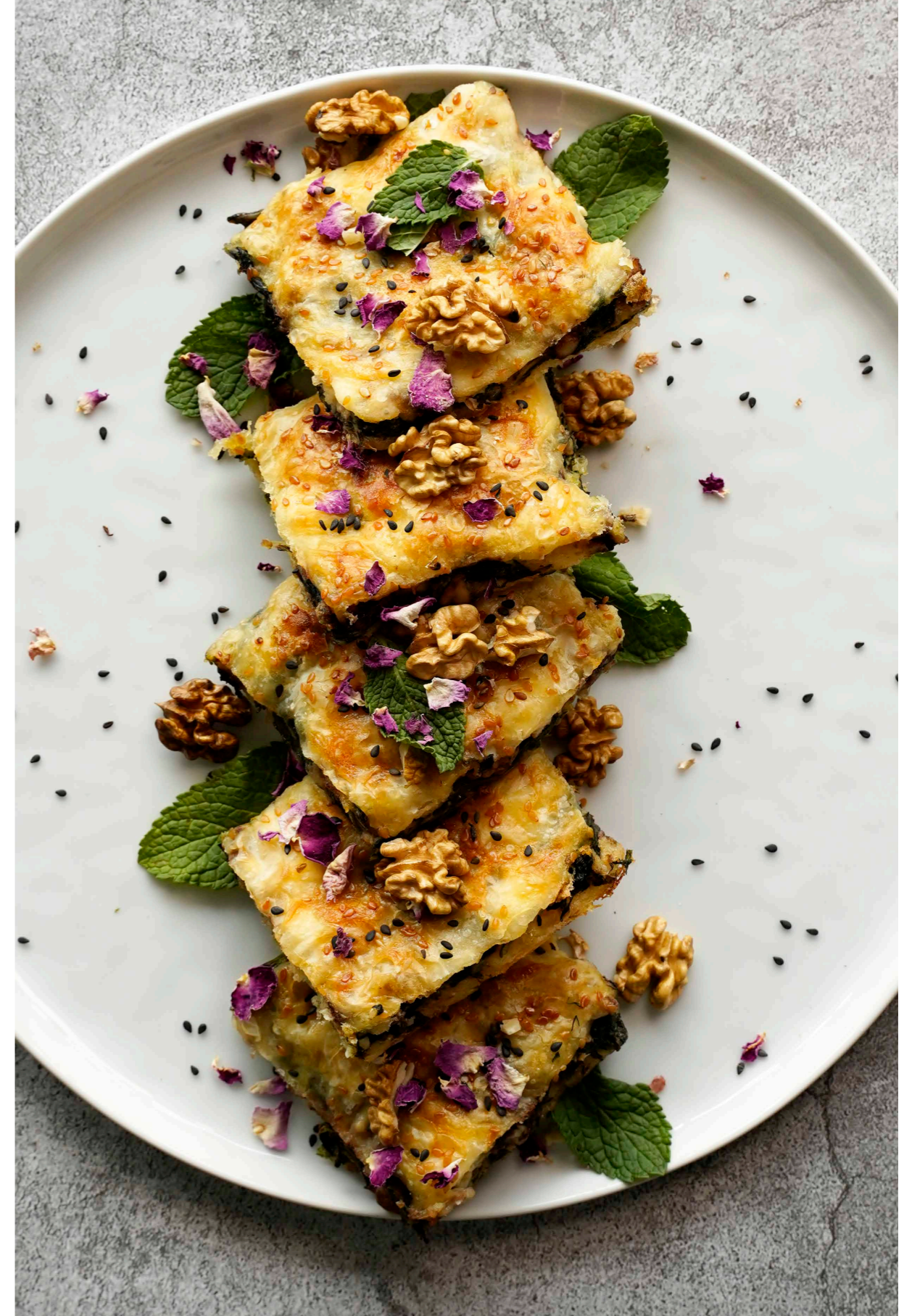
Meanwhile preheat the oven to 180°C.

Line a baking tin with a baking sheet. Grease the baking sheet with the egg mixture and place the first pastry sheet on top of the sheet. If the pastry sheet is larger than the baking tin, you can fold it inward. Alternate this folding inwards on different sides, to keep it equal in height. Brush over the egg mixture, then top with another sheet. Continue this process until you have used 7 sheets.

On the top spread the spinach mixture equally, and crumble the feta cheese and the walnuts on top of it.

Top with the remaining pastry sheets, making sure to grease each sheet with the egg mixture, also on top of your final sheet.

Score the top into 15 pieces and cut all the way through the pastry. Brush the egg mixture in between the pieces as well. Top with sesame seeds and bake for 20-25 minutes until golden. Serve either warm or cold, both are equally delicious. Garnish with rose petals, walnuts and black sesame seeds



IRANIAN RICE CAKE

Serves 5

Non-stick stockpot
20cm Ø

275g basmati rice
500g chicken thigh
75g ghee
1 large onion (100g, sliced)
2 eggs
150g Greek yogurt
1tsp ground turmeric
1tsp ground paprika
1/2tsp ground black pepper
2tsp salt
1/2tsp ground saffron infused
in 150ml boiled water
15g barberries (soaked)
1.5l boiled water

To garnish

pistachios (chopped)
pomegranate seeds

Directions

In the morning prepare the rice in advance according to the same principle as described in 'Iranian steamed rice' (p.186 step 1).

Soak the barberries for 20 minutes in cold water. Then melt the ghee in a saucepan and set aside.

Cut the chicken thigh fillet into long strips. Add 40ml ghee in a non-stick skillet and add the onions. Sauté until translucent, then add the chicken with a teaspoon of salt and all the spices. Allow to cook for 10 minutes on medium heat.

Drain the barberries and add them to the chicken. Now pour 50ml of saffron-infused water onto the chicken. Give it a good stir, place the lid on top of the pan and allow to simmer for 30 minutes on a low heat. Stir occasionally.

Meanwhile, break two eggs into a large bowl. Add the Greek yogurt, and 60ml of saffron-infused water. Mix until well combined, using a whisk. Then set this mixture aside.

Continue with the rice: fill a big pot with 1.5l water and bring it to boil, add 1tsp salt and the drained rice. Stir a couple of times and let it cook for about 5-6 minutes. The rice should be 'al dente'.

Drain the rice and then add 2/3 of the rice to your yogurt mixture. Make sure to mix well. Now, with a brush cover the bottom and the sides of your pot with melted ghee (1tbsp). Now pour the rice/yogurt mixture into your pot, make a small well in the center and save a small bowl of the rice/yogurt mixture separately for later.



In the meantime, your chicken is cooked. Add your saffron-infused chicken and the barberries on top of your rice, in the well. Make sure you stay 1cm away from the sides.

Now put the remaining 1/3 of the rice without yogurt on top of the chicken, but again stay away from the sides. You want to fill the sides of the pan with the small bowl of the yogurt/rice mixture that you saved, like a ring around the cake. This way you will be able to create a crusty cake. Now flatten the surface with the back of a spoon. Finish by pouring the remaining saffron-infused water, along with the melted ghee, on top of the rice. Cover the pot with a lid wrapped in a clean kitchen cloth. Allow to steam for 75 minutes on a low heat. If the sides have turned into a crusty golden layer the rice cake is ready.

To serve the rice cake, invert the pot over a serving plate. Garnish with pomegranate seeds and pistachios.



POMEGRANATE WALNUT STEW

Serves 5

800g chicken thighs
(cut in two parts)
1 large onion *(120g, grated)*
100ml olive oil
150g walnuts
4tbsp pomegranate molasses
1tsp ground turmeric
1tsp ground paprika
1/2tsp ground black pepper
1tsp salt
500ml boiled water

To garnish

orange zest
fresh parsley leaves
pomegranate seeds
walnuts *(chopped)*
ground cinnamon to taste

Directions

Prepare the walnuts by using a food processor to cut the walnuts until finely ground.

In a large non-stick skillet, heat 50ml of olive oil over medium-high heat. Gently place the chicken pieces in the pan, and sprinkle them with 1tsp of salt. Cook until golden brown on both sides for about ten minutes. Remove the chicken from the heat, and set aside.

Add 50ml of olive oil to a non-stick stockpot on medium heat. Add the onions and sauté until translucent. Stir in the spices and the ground walnuts. Give it one stir and add the boiled water.

Allow the water to boil on a low heat for 10 minutes or so, then add the pomegranate molasses and let it simmer for 5 minutes.

Now add in the chicken to your stockpot and allow the stew to simmer gently for 40 minutes covered with a lid on a low heat. Make sure to stir regularly.

Garnish with fresh parsley, orange zest and pomegranate seeds. Add cinnamon to taste and serve the stew with Iranian steamed rice.

TOBLERONE PECAN CHEESECAKE

Baking tin 24cm
Oven temp. 180°C
Oven time 50 Min
Makes 8-10 pcs.

200g digestive biscuits
150g unsalted butter
250g mascarpone
250g ricotta
3 eggs
150g white sugar
150g toblereone

Glazing

100g toblereone
100ml caramel sauce (p.218)
40g pecan nuts

Directions

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Grease the baking tin and line with baking paper.

Put the biscuits in a food processor and mix well. Transfer them to a bowl. Melt the butter over a low heat, pour it onto the digestives, and combine them.

Press this mixture onto the bottom of the baking tin. Press well with your hands, you want this layer to be evenly distributed.

Now place it in the refrigerator for a while. In the meantime, finely chop the toblereone using a sharp knife.

Combine the eggs and the sugar. Mix these ingredients in a large bowl using a hand mixer. Then add the mascarpone and ricotta and continue mixing until you get a smooth paste.

Take your baking tin out of the fridge and pour the mixture over the biscuits. Then add the 150g toblereone pieces in the mixture, with your hands dip them in and spread evenly.

Put in the oven for 50 minutes. If the outside bakes too quickly because of your oven, cover with aluminium foil. Then turn off the oven and let it sit for 25 minutes before taking it out.

Let the cheesecake cool down and then place in the refrigerator.

For the glazing

Pour the caramel on top of the cheesecake, adding the chopped toblereone onto the caramel sauce. Break the pecan nuts with your hands, and place on top to finish off.



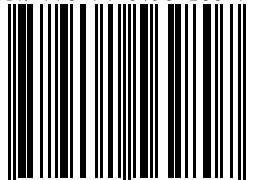
Rootin's Iranian Kitchen

Rootin's Iranian Kitchen offers a close look into the kitchen of an Iranian family, showing how they used traditional Iranian influences to create their signature Rootin taste. Combining traditional Middle Eastern influences with Western food culture, they came up with a cuisine which reflects their roots. The recipes in this book have been carefully created by mum and daughter, and range from aromatic stews packed with Middle Eastern spices, to avocado toast with za'atar, and mum's delicious sweets and bakes.

Rootin's Iranian Kitchen brings together the essentials of Iranian cuisine, the healing properties and social aspects of food, with insights into the joy and process of creating food from scratch, to inspire you to cook with love and passion.



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