



Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet

*enjoying the benefits of one of the world's healthiest cuisines
wherever you live*

Nikki Rose

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Nikki Rose is a Greek American professional chef, writer, and cultural-culinary seminar director living in Crete. She is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and worked in fine dining and journalism in the USA and France.

Chef Rose is founder of the award-winning Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries Eco-Agritourism Network. She has organized sustainable tourism-educational programs since 1997, focusing on cultural-natural heritage preservation and sustainable organic agriculture. Her website is filled with information about life in Crete and annual seminars offered by Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries.
www.cookingincrete.com



*I realized as far back as my childhood that this world possesses a good
which is dearer than life, sweeter than happiness -- liberty.*

-- Nikos Kazantzakis





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About the Author



Nikki Rose is a Greek American professional chef, writer, and cultural seminar director living in Crete. She is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and worked in fine dining and journalism in France and the USA. In the 1990's, Rose witnessed great chefs being replaced by machines producing mediocre food. To rekindle interest in the culinary arts, she organized dynamic seminars in Washington DC, featuring Certified Master Chefs and organic farmers. In Crete, Rose's teaching method is on location -- learning experiences beyond our plates. She introduces her students to noted organic farmers, vintners, chefs, botanists, and archaeologists at their workplace. Exercise is included!

Since 1997, Rose has hosted chefs, teachers, students, and journalists via her program, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries (CCS). Her focus celebrates and helps protect Crete's cultural and culinary heritage. The concepts of the frequently studied and highly regarded Mediterranean Diet originated in Crete. Chef Rose, with her CCS initiatives, demonstrates that Cretan cuisine is not just a diet, but is a way of life that has much to offer our on-going pursuit of healthy and sustainable approaches to eating. In her concise book, Rose shares her knowledge, and passion for her heritage, along with practical strategies for applying the celebrated concepts of Cretan cuisine wherever we live. Her mother was an excellent cook and organic gardener in DC before that was posh.

Prior to her distinctive career, Rose worked in OSHA and Food and Drug Law firms, global health services and arts/media. These experiences, along with pervasive mass tourism in Crete, prompted her to create educational programs that encompass environmental and cultural heritage protection-respect, and are beneficial to residents and visitors. Rose has received numerous awards from National Geographic, the United Nations and many other organizations for her success in creating sustainable travel and community-based tourism projects that bring focus to the inquiry into sustainability. She has consulted on projects in Brazil, Cambodia, USA, Cyprus, France, Italy, and Greece.

Contents

One

Application in Action:
Placing Real Food on the Table

The Main Ingredients: Easy ways to
maximize nutrients on your plate 2

Meze - Dining the Cretan Way: Begin with
a blank canvas, erase all memory of food
marketing on your plate 10

Meze is Perfect for Children 15
Food Allergies, Laboratory Food 16
Food Wars 18
Ditching the Sandwich Diet 24

Two

Following the Rhythm
of the Seasons in Crete 25

Spring and Lenten Cuisine, fasting never
tasted so good 26

Summer Bounties from Land and Sea, and
Winemaking Through the Ages 35

Autumn and Winter: Comfort Food, Wild
Greens, and Olive Oil Production 43

Biodiversity: We cannot live without it,
yet we continue to destroy it 48

Three

Cooking Techniques
and Prep Work 53

Planning Ahead:
The Benefits of Advance Preparation 55

Conserving Time and Energy 55

Cooking Techniques:
The Foundation for Imagination and
Masterpieces 60

Four

Recipes: Flavor is First,
Flash is Optional 65

Part 1: Meze with Mostly Raw Foods
Salads: An infinite category in Crete 66

Part 2: Roasted Vegetable Meze,
Favorite Dishes, Soups and Stews 95

Recipe Index: 113

Appendix: Resources for environmental
protection, organic food and
food safety information 114

Chapter One

Application in Action: Placing Real Food on the Table



The Main Ingredients of Traditional Cretan Cuisine and Easy Ways to Maximize Nutrients on Your Plate

The traditional cuisine of Crete is so simple and flavorful that recipes are rarely needed. The main ingredients are highlighted in this book. Many foods are of the rinse and eat variety (REV). This is good news for busy people. A wide assortment of these delicacies is enjoyed in a single day in rural Crete.

The following information is not meant to send you on a wild goose chase in search of the exact same ingredients. Simply use this as a template to incorporate what you have in your region of the world. The key is to think out of the box, literally and figuratively. You can enjoy a medley of fruit and vegetables every day with minimal preparation work. Dried nuts and fruits are excellent natural energy boosting snacks.

The recommendations in this book are for products of sustainable organic agriculture and sustainably harvested-sourced plants and seafood. Some commonly known wild plants in Crete are cultivated in many places in the world (asparagus, artichokes, purslane, capers, oregano, and thyme). There is usually much more flavor in organically grown plants and more beneficial nutrients, due to cultivation methods. Some frequently used ingredients are not cultivated in Crete, such as rice and cinnamon.

Cultivated Vegetables

Leafy greens: lettuces, spinach, chard, arugula, amaranth and many more

Squash varieties: eggplant, zucchini, pumpkin and many more

Cruciferous vegetables: cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli

Other seasonal favorites: heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans, broad beans, artichokes, potatoes, olives, onions, leeks, scallions, garlic, celery, beets, sweet and hot peppers

Cultivated Herbs: Parsley, dill, spearmint, rosemary, thyme, oregano, marjoram, basil, bay leaves, lavender

Wild Vegetables and Herbs (for cooking, teas and traditional medicine): Artichokes, dandelion, and many indigenous greens, capers, purslane, nettle, fennel, leeks, chicory, oregano, thyme, sage, chamomile, mint



Horiatiki (summer salad with local ingredients): Feta cheese, purslane, cucumbers, tomatoes, olives, onions

Fresh Fruit in Season: Figs, apricots, pomegranate, pears, prickly pears, apples, oranges, melons, cherries, plums, loquat, grapes, lots of lemons

Legumes: Lentils, chickpeas, fava/broad beans, butter/lima beans, split yellow peas, black eyed peas

Dried Fruit, Nuts and Seeds: Figs, apricots, raisins, chestnuts, almonds, walnuts, peanuts, sunflower seeds

Wild Mountain Snails (escargot):

A whole category of their own prepared in dozens of different ways

Fresh Seafood: Many varieties including sole, sea bream, mullet, grouper, smelts, sardines, octopus, shrimp, mussels, cuttlefish, calamari, sea urchin

Pulses/Grains: Rice, barley, cracked wheat and plenty of whole grain bread

Goat and sheep milk yogurt and cheeses: They graze on wild plants so their milk is very herbal and earthy

Poultry: Very free to roam; simply roasted or grilled, or used as flavor enhancers for stews, soups or sauces

Eggs: Used for a wide variety of omelets; hard boiled for salads; whipped for avgolemeno sauce; and used in baked goods

Meats: Lamb, pork, goat, rabbit, sausage. Wild game; hare and quail



Dried spices and seeds: There is an increasing amount of information about the health benefits of spices – cinnamon, nutmeg, anise, cumin, poppy, sesame and fennel seeds

Wine and spirits produced from grapes, fruits, honey, in moderation

OAS: Extra virgin olive oil, acid (lemon or vinegar) and seasonings is the standard “sauce” in Cretan cuisine

Simple, seasonal favorites are:

Salads can be a simple plate of sliced cabbage with olive oil and vinegar or sliced tomato and cucumber with a sprinkling of salt, and/or separate plates of marinated red peppers or beets

Simply grilled fish or meat served with a little olive oil and lemon juice

Braised greens and other vegetables enhanced with olive oil, citrus, onions and herbs or added to omelets

Meats as flavor enhancers for vegetables, pasta, rice and beans, rather than the star of the meal

Soups and Stews of fish and vegetables, meat and vegetables, beans and vegetables, whole grains and aromatics

Enjoy a little real cheese, bread and olives and you're set for a snack or a grand dinner.

There's so much more, but this will get you going for now.



The beginnings of fish soup



Gigantes (beans with carrots)



Horta (braised wild greens)



Bread has been an important part of everyday life in Crete for several thousand years. Ancient techniques to preserve and cook grains are still practiced today. Barley or wheat-based stews, flatcakes or crackers are also *bread*. Large-scale grain production in Crete is impractical (and unsustainable), although the Romans and Venetians made attempts during their long occupation(s) of Crete.

There are many varieties of sour dough, rustic, delectable breads using whole wheat, barley, chickpea flour or a combination of all. The type of appliance-oven used determines what can be produced, in addition to the baker's skill. The grains are not stripped of nutrients, as is the case in refined wheat flour production, resulting in flavorless white bread and pastas. Refined wheat bread has fallen in and out of favor over the centuries. Elitists do not necessarily have good taste.

Paximadi (barley-rusk) is produced in several different ways. It is twice-baked for a long shelf life (naturally preserved) and reconstituted with water and/or olive oil when ready to serve. It is a similar concept to modern crackers, only larger, more rustic, flavorful, and durable. Paximadi was a staple for nomads, shepherds and merchants. Variations of paximadi have been produced throughout the Mediterranean region. What was considered peasant bread is a favorite today.

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Rustic Barley Bread by Chef Manolis



Rustic Bread by Chef Manolis



Paximadi by Aspasia



Dakos - Paximadi
with olive oil, fresh tomatoes, mizithra cheese
and wild mountain oregano



Modern Cretan Bakery

Selection of fresh, whole-grain breads. There is also plenty of rustic white bread (refined wheat options).



Selection of dried breads (paximadi), breadsticks and crackers with sesame and poppy seeds.



Traditional cookies naturally sweetened with grape syrup, carob syrup, or honey (not refined or fake sugar).

What is missing from traditional Cretan cuisine (X-green revolution)?

Beef and dairy products are scarce.

An exception is butter for special occasion desserts. Crete is a mountainous island -- not fit for cows. Products from cows are usually expensive imports of unknown quality.

A Wild West industrial cattle compound would not work here. People want to know exactly where their food comes from. Factory farming would freak them out (as it should everyone).

Processed and junk food ("laboratory food"). People who enjoy traditional Cretan cuisine wouldn't touch a frozen dinner or a bag of chips. The words "artificial ingredients" are a red light.

Processed beverages ("laboratory drinks"). Soft drink companies have infiltrated Greece over the last half century and the negative impacts are obvious. Some people are still suspicious of brown muck in a bottle. Their instincts overrule marketing.

There are many foods from other regions of the world that are not part of traditional Cretan cuisine but are said to have great nutritional/medicinal value: Local sea greens and many other greens, sweet potatoes, fresh pineapple, blueberries, cranberries, brown rice, turmeric and ginger, to name a few.

The bottom line: If your food is fresh, clean and has flavor, it's easy to enjoy. According to many members of the scientific community, real food from **sustainable/organic sources** provides nutrients and energy we need.

We are part of the food chain. Whatever a cow eats or is injected with (growth hormones, antibiotics, chicken poop, or their own species and feces), we eat too. Those "ingredients" don't magically disappear before we eat them.

With all of the facts on the table about the dangers of industrial agriculture and processed food versus the benefits of real food, it is possible to enjoy and invest in these benefits without much trouble.

Meze: Dining the Cretan Way

To picture the difference between a traditional Cretan dinner table and typical Western-diet dinner table is to begin with a blank canvas. Erase visions of courses and heavy desserts. Erase all memory of Western food manufacturing PR on your plate -- of meat being in the foreground, followed by starch and a lone vegetable fighting for recognition in the background. Forget about produce out of season. Forget about fancy presentations and perfectly paired carrots. The focus is to eat good food and avoid time-consuming culinary fashion shows.

Cretan meze consists of a wide variety of small dishes. This is a great way to avoid making agonizing decisions as to what the main dish will be, “not chicken again!” It is also a way to pack flavorful nutrient-rich foods into one setting.

Cretan meze is based on a combination of simply served raw foods and cooking techniques. Preparing meze does not require hours of shopping and cooking. It can take as little time as 10 minutes, depending on what you have on hand and what prep work you can do throughout the week.

Winter in Crete is relatively mild and hopefully rainy, followed by a lovely temperate spring and long, hot summer. This template will give you an idea of what ingredients and flavor combinations Cretan cuisine can offer that you can incorporate into seasonal availability in your region of the world.

Depending on where you live, you may have access to similar seasonal ingredients for longer or shorter periods of time. The weather in your region may be very different from Crete. The foundation is tried and true flavor combinations, as well as ways to incorporate what’s in your storage cabinets -- then add your imagination.



Basic ingredient usage

Combining many ingredients that taste great together for maximum flavor and nutrient impact is key.



In Crete, olive oil is not thought of as a good fat or bad fat, it is the oil extracted from the fruit of a tree that survives in this climate and terrain -- not always easily.

The olive tree was sacred to our ancestors. For over four thousand years, communities have come together to cultivate, harvest and extract oil from the small but mighty olive. There are many ways to cultivate olives, different varieties and ways to produce olive oil. Each method produces different results.

A few farmers have built their own factories, incorporating ancient methods with new technology. Traditional and sustainable organic methods are a very small percentage of what is produced in Greece today. Less than a century of "progress" has altered time-honored agricultural practices. Most olive oil today is produced from conventionally grown olives with machinery using high heat that reduces nutritional benefits.

Olive oil is the foundation for a whole host of Cretan dishes that would not be the same without the flavor, color, texture and moisture it provides. It is not considered to be a substitution for any other fat; it is an integral part of our traditional cuisine.



Food Craving Signals

Food cravings are a fact. The more real food we eat frequently, the more intuition we have that our body is requesting certain nutrients.

For instance, if we crave foods rich in iron or vitamin C, there are reasons to act on that information. Hunger is one thing; nutrient deficiency is another. A bag of chips will not provide the iron we need but may provide an overdose of sodium or fake fat that our body does not want.

Food dissected into modern categories (carbs, protein, fat) can be misleading. It often pertains to manufactured food -- not real, unprocessed food that provides the **natural nutrients** we need.

Craving big salads on hot afternoons is one example. The nutrients and water in vegetables provide energy and hydration. How we love watermelon and honeydew melon on hot summer days! Acknowledging these signals helps us maintain optimum energy levels.



Knowing what foods or beverages give us a surge of energy helps us to avoid them when our stress levels are too high and long before bedtime.

Aside from caffeine, there's a long list of foods that cause insomnia, including sugar and heavy meats. Our bodies are working overtime to process what we ingest. Being aware that food can cause positive or negative reactions helps us to determine whether to add or subtract items from our menu.

In Crete, there are many favorite foods and dishes that are naturally loaded with vitamins and minerals. Also, the flavor combinations can help our bodies absorb necessary minerals like iron. Certain varieties of greens are packed with iron and other nutrients. They are served with olive oil and a generous amount of fresh lemon juice, which also contains vitamin C -- helping to increase our ability to absorb iron. This is a delicious way to get nutrients we need.



Lentils and other beans are good sources of iron. A bowl of lentil soup with fresh tomatoes and parsley -- both loaded with vitamin C -- works perfectly.



Steamed broccoli and potatoes with parsley and lemon juice - the list goes on. Peppers are high in vitamin C; they add color, flavor and texture to many different dishes. Mix all of the above together with a little olive oil for a warm salad -- delicious, nutritious and easy.



While vitamin supplements-pills might help for certain reasons (always ask your doctor first), there are many reasons to get as much vitamins from natural sources as possible. It's easier to do this once you know what combinations work best and taste good too.

Supplements may provide more than our bodies need or can absorb and can build up in our system. Our bodies either try to get rid of them or store them somewhere (as in cysts), which can be dangerous and counterproductive if not used with care.

Meze is Perfect for Children

The first time I saw a Greek teenager happily eat a huge salad, I realized how unusual that is in the USA. After living in Crete for several years, I visited the USA and became acutely aware of the difference in eating habits. So much food available to Americans comes from a factory, not a garden. It was so different from the world I just left and the world my mother created for our family -- the real food world that is fun and delicious.

Over half a century of processed food marketing (PFM) locked many people into a trance. Powerful PFM weeds out real food and spins peer pressure. Communities without access to real food are now called "food deserts." OK, a problem is acknowledged. But we cannot expect corporations and government agencies to simply drop their lucrative business alliance now that it's a noted problem. Consumers sustain the system. Finger pointing sustains the trance.

A new American phenomenon is short order cook syndrome. Nuked chicken nuggets for little Suzie and mac-n-fake-cheese for Colin. Most everyone born before 1970 will tell you that adults cooked what they chose and we could eat it or go hungry. I watched children dictate their food choices and heard of their ailments that were likely caused by food (often overlooked by conventional doctors and mainstream media until many people become ill at once). I asked parents how they handled this dilemma. Parents today have a different approach to feeding their children than when we were growing up. With limited time to spend with their children, they want to avoid problems around the dinner table. One drawback is that it takes more time and money to run a diner for your family.

My mother had a full-time job, so how did she do it all? She was battling processed food marketing and we never knew what challenges she faced to protect us. We didn't have extravagant meals and my mother's budget was more restrictive than our neighbors. Her priorities were different. Now that more excellent organic farmers and chefs are in the limelight in the USA, real food life should be easier.

Food Allergies

Conventional food or genetically modified wheat, corn, soy; processed meats like hot dogs and chicken nuggets with artificial ingredients; fake fats, cheese and milk with growth hormones and antibiotics; high fructose corn syrup in cereals, granola bars, cookies, and soft drinks: These ingredients are the average child's food options in the "developed" world. Some ingredients are known to cause allergic reactions and/or serious health problems. Products from a factory are not usually real food.

In addition to what is legally included in processed food, there are food safety violations. In 2009, peanut butter contaminated with salmonella, due to **obvious** unsanitary conditions in a USA factory (PCA), killed nine people and at least 714 consumers became ill. Kenneth Kendrick, a factory employee, repeatedly notified the Texas Department of Health about the problems ignored by his employers. He had to do this anonymously, risking his career to protect the public. This is just one example of **detected** food safety violations. Corporations are run by people. No one was arrested for this crime. This is one reason to know exactly where our food comes from. Given a fresh start, literally and figuratively, children will learn to develop good eating habits that can help keep them healthy and happy.

Hidden Dangers

Why do children *ever* need to eat cereal loaded with sugar and sodium? Processed food marketing. They might enjoy plain yogurt with fresh and dried fruit and nuts, whole grain toast with naturally sweetened jams and an egg now and then. Flavoring plain yogurt at home is better than buying yogurt mixed with a ton of sugar. The fact that cereal manufacturers add synthetic vitamins may not make a difference. Consider the power of smoothies. Vitamins from natural sources are more beneficial. Making their own cereal-granola is a good way for children to get involved in cooking and discovering what they are eating. If they made their own hot dogs or chicken nuggets just as they are prepared in a factory, would they eat them?

Adults Take Note: Lead by Example

The only way we can introduce healthy foods to children is by example. Otherwise, the “your food versus our food” dilemma opens up the door for children to demand the limited amount of foods they already know and like, especially if it comes with a toy. These typically nutrient-free choices pave the way for diet-related problems to come. People spend the rest of their lives trying to break these habits, usually per doctor's orders. Children have a chance to avoid this way of life. It is not necessary to have a big family dinner every night, but parents could have meze with their children so they discover that eating is not just a thing they must do, but an enjoyable experience with company.

Children in rural Crete eat most everything adults eat – fresh fish, big salads, stuffed cabbage leaves, lentil soup -- you name it. We don't see this as often in the USA because eating fresh food has become un-cool. Children in Crete are not constant victims of PFM yet. But industrial agriculture and the junk food virus has spread to Greece and the negative impact is obvious. And many Greeks eat a lot of refined sugar in "traditional" pastries; it's now cheaper than local honey or other traditional, natural sweeteners. Soft drink consumption is rising at an alarming rate in rural areas. It's taken a comparatively short amount of time for industrial food to go global. There are lessons to learn from both sides of the ocean.

Yes, there is a correlation between increased consumption of processed grains, meats, sugars and diabetes rates in Greece today. Experts continue to confirm the obvious. It is unfortunate that there is not greater awareness of the issues. Greece imports the American/Western diet and lifestyle -- who would have guessed? With Greek celebrities and soccer stars smiling while eating a bag of chips and guzzling a soft drink on TV advertisements, it is challenging for parents to kill the junk food virus. It is selfish to promote favorite (and fee based) habits to children.

Food Wars

The first independent thing children do is eat. They need adults to help them with everything else, so eating becomes their form of personal expression or rebellion. Children require guidance to make the right decisions in life, including food choices. What is disheartening is that some adults serve children stuff they never eat (ingredients listed under Food Allergies) that you can picture clogging a child's gut. If we do not buy junk food, children will have less access to it. Out of sight, out of mind -- until they get to school?? PFM bites.

Beware of PFM food linked to patriotism. Avoiding sodium nitrite in hot dogs is not unpatriotic. I am allergic to chemically-processed meats but never knew that until I worked in Food and Drug law, where I researched thousands of reported cases that were not public information. We dislike certain foods due to adverse reactions but may not realize the cause or symptoms. In my case, when I ate a hot dog, it was like swallowing a porcupine. I could not defend my antisocial behavior. PFM bites.

Parents and children use food as a psychological weapon and bargaining tool. The age-old directive, "eat everything on your plate or you won't get dessert" can really screw up a child's head. A five-year-old cannot consume even half the amount of food as an adult. They either overeat to please their parents or have horrible memories of having to eat something they really disliked. Then the dinner table becomes a battleground – an experience to be dreaded. Children value dessert more than dinner with this bargaining tool, thinking they have to choke down something gross before they get the good stuff.

In rural Crete, big desserts are reserved for special occasions. Fresh seasonal fruit is the wonderful conclusion to a meal. People will spend \$20 on a tasteless cake and \$1,000 on a TV but hesitate to spend a dime on organic fruit. Eliminating big desserts from everyday life can be liberating. People wired on processed sugar can suffer from insomnia and other problems. Breaking the food marketing trance of frequent dessert consumption is one way to maintain control of the household.



If we learn anything from history, we know that what sustains us is precious. Civilizations have disappeared due to their unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Today, people don't migrate to the edge of the world in search of the golden fleece. They stay in one place and attempt to manipulate nature.

So many people around the world do not have access to safe and fresh food and water. In some cases, it is due to unsustainable development-agriculture or climate change. In other cases, it's based on illogical global food industry practices. Increased awareness that small-scale local organic food production is logical is helping. Who is preventing people from creating local sustainable food systems? Why is it such a challenge? Answering those questions honestly can help us implement real-life solutions.



Cretan-Style Meze Children's Way

Meze is perfect for children -- enjoying little plates of different foods. This way, there is no need to agonize over who wants what and they can eat as much or as little as they want. Children don't eat big meals like adults. They are snackers. If we show them the way to eat meze, they are on the road to enjoying the benefits of real food throughout their lives.



When I visit families in the USA, I usually end up in the kitchen -- my comfort zone. Cooking with and for adults is easy. Cooking for children is another story. My challenge began with after school snacks – not just a banana but 5 or 6 choices of their favorite fruits and vegetables. I had to have the food ready before they got home or they'd be looking for gooey fruit roll ups or energy (factory) bars covered in a chalky chocolate-like substance. If they see a bowl of fruit and vegetables from which they can grab and eat, this can curb the junk snack habit.



Children have distinct food preferences in flavor, texture and temperature. Building on that information, I introduced new but similar textured fruits, vegetables and nuts. If I just put it on the table and said nothing, they usually ate most everything. If I asked first or tried to encourage them, they usually rebelled.





Children tend to like food they can pick up and eat. While this is not great for table manner lessons and may require more wall cleaning, if they will happily gobble down a big wedge of melon as opposed to a bowl of neatly cubed fruit, that is ideal.

Children don't like foods touching other foods they are unfamiliar with or dislike. Combining fruit together may backfire if there is one ingredient on the plate they dislike.

The solution is to line up a variety of seasonal produce on small plates. Say nothing. Lead by example -- grab and eat. Then stand back and let them attack the meze. Try big wedges of melon, apple or stone fruit and orange segments. Add grapes and berries to seasonal presentations.

For vegetables: quarter cucumbers, avocado or fat carrots and toss celery stalks onto a plate. Don't serve a lot, especially if it's highly perishable. Serve a little of each to pack in a variety of nutrients and avoid waste.

Present fruit and vegetable meze before you serve anything else. There is no need to follow adult dining habits or social norms for courses, etc. Children get distracted and cannot sit for an hour at the dinner table, so you can lose your window of opportunity.

Serve produce first and children will eat more of it before they get distracted or load up on meat and starch and nothing else. Choose organic produce whenever possible. That is crucial.

Cooked Vegetables

Seize the opportunity to serve vegetables you know the children already like and add to the choices often. Don't get your hopes up and plan to eat them yourself as well. Try steamed asparagus or broccoli with a little olive oil and lemon juice. If they like garlic and onions, add them too.

Roasted potatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, acorn squash, spaghetti squash are all options that most children like. Add vegetables to other foods they like or might like, given the opportunity.

Tzatziki can be the ultimate "house sauce." It works great on sandwiches, with shish kabob, and raw or cooked vegetables.

Whether you make pizza at home or order out, add a few vegetable toppings from your fridge or dry storage. Serve vegetable meze before the pizza.



Pasta – most children love pasta and can easily get hooked on the stuff with heavy (and fake) cheese sauce. Here's a chance to incorporate some vegetables into the mix, or a little real cheese, garlic and parsley.

Rice or whole unprocessed grains are often overlooked. If more than half the world's children eat it frequently, try it, they might love it.

Meze Ideas: Lunch at Home or Work

Since I grew up in the USA, I crave a sandwich now and then. It's usually local cheese with a tomato and fresh onions. My Greek friends laugh at the sight, calling it "the stupid American sandwich." While everyone else is enjoying a wide variety of dishes in a civilized way – with plates and forks, I'm in fast-food mode, stuck with a sloppy mound of food in my hands, with bits of it dropping everywhere. In the end, I have to put it all down and eat it with a fork. So the notion that eating a sandwich is easier and faster is debatable, unless it has a limited amount of ingredients and therefore a limited amount of flavor or nutrients.

Greece's famous urban grab-and-go food -- the gyro, is just as sloppy and equally low in nutrients today. The original version is a grilled meat combo with tzatziki (yogurt, cucumber and garlic sauce), fresh tomatoes and onions tucked into delicious thick pita bread. Gyros are now usually processed meat from a big revolving cylinder (gyro) and stuffed with fried potatoes. While it can be great on occasion, having a salad with these sandwiches might be a good idea.

Sandwiches from commercial outlets might contain hidden dangers like processed meat, cheese and sauces loaded with chemicals. The habit-forming accompaniment is inevitably processed potatoes or corn chips that also contain artificial ingredients and risky laboratory fat. The word "artificial" on a package of food is a glaring red light. The fact that artificial ingredients are mixed with natural products does not mean that even a pinch is safe to eat. Sandwiches cannot hold enough vegetables in wrap form or otherwise. The ingredients squish out of their container and wind up on your hands, chin and lap. Eating food on plates with forks is liberating. It also saves on napkin costs and laundry. In the long run, it saves time.



Egg salad with tomatoes, olive oil, parsley, and barley paximadi

Ditching the Sandwich Diet

For lunch, the following can be prepared in about 5 minutes: A plate of quartered hard boiled eggs, tomatoes, cucumbers and avocado, a handful of radishes, marinated artichoke hearts, peppers and olives. A little fresh bread, crackers or walnuts can complete the meze. It is not possible to cram all of these nutritious, colorful ingredients into a sandwich, as much as Dagwood tries.

If there is truly no time to eat lunch, a sad state of affairs these days, then keeping a supply of fresh and dried fruit and nuts around is a good alternative to a chips and soda break. Working though lunch accomplishes nothing more than a cranky person with a foggy mind. Employers take note.

Chapter Two

Following the Rhythm of the Seasons in Crete



Spring and Lenten Cuisine -- fasting never tasted so good

After the gray isolation of winter subsides, there is a sudden and dramatic burst of music and color in the countryside. The land is vibrant with purple, red, yellow and white wild flowers such as irises, orchids, poppies, daisies, sage, thistles, and capers. The delicate blossoms of almond trees cast shadows on the landscape and present a brilliant foreground for the dominating canvas of the sea.

The music of nature is magnified by a chorus of sparrows, bees and roosters, joining the sheep and goats with the delicate percussion of bells – the pulse of rural Crete. The sheep and goats diligently explore the rocky paths and gorges, feasting on the abundant horta selection. Their presence is so much a part of Crete's landscape that it would be impossible to imagine life without them and the products they provide to us. The chorus and the landscape are one in the same.

In the vegetable gardens, the hard work of humans is beginning to materialize. Homes are surrounded by seedling plants in different stages of development; on the verandas, in the alleyway and any available space in between with the right temperature, sunlight and protection from predators, which is usually netting secured on top of an old crate.

A menacing looking delectable thistle, the artichoke, is just about to make its way to our plates. This is not the globe variety where the thorny leaves are safely curved inward. It is the opposite -- the leaves are sprayed out in a threatening, defensive curve. People have managed to avoid injury by cutting them off at the stems, which are also delicious. A prized spring meze is raw artichoke hearts with lemon juice.

Also coming up on the menu are greens such as amaranth, which can take over the garden if you let it, and as much of a variety of lettuce as you have seeds passed down from your ancestors. The first sign of the cherished zucchini blossom is showing, which we fill with aromatic rice in the same way as young grape leaves (dolmades). We'd put zucchini flowers in a vase if they were not so delectable.

Fava/broad beans are coming along, which we eat raw as a snack, straight out of the pod. Cucumber plants are thriving with their gorgeous bright yellow blossoms. There are many different varieties of cucumbers here that I've never seen before. Fennel and spearmint on the garden's perimeter are taking off without any help but must not be permitted to venture far, as they can invade the area. The parsley, dill and celery are doing well after much pampering and protective measures. The wild horta nearby could overpower their territory overnight.

Spring onions, garlic, radishes, and basil are strategically placed among their companions, acting as both food and insect repellant. Small shoots representing six different varieties of heirloom tomato plants, peppers, eggplant and cabbage await their debut in the summer.

The bugs, birds, rabbits and weeds are forever competing with us for our wonderful array of good food. High winds and drought also top the list of threats. Nurturing the soil for these bounties to thrive is explained in several excellent books. [See the Appendix.] Suffice it to say that soil health has everything to do with plant health and since we are part of this chain -- human health and the health of our planet.

Every plant in our garden that survives the tough journey with us and makes it to our plates is priceless. The last thing we plan to do is bury it under a complicated, overpowering sauce.

In the hills and mountain plateaus, shepherds and cheese makers (which were once one in the same, but that's not always feasible today) are preparing mizithra, a favorite fresh cheese, along with aged cheeses like kefalotiri and graviera.

The type and variety of cheeses made by Crete's artisans are as individual as each cheese maker. The common ground between them is that their flocks enjoyed a wide variety of wild plants in the countryside -- in their unique ecosystem. When the products of this food chain arrive on our plates, the results are flavorful meats, herbal cheeses and rich, tart yogurt.

While the wild plants in Crete's remaining remote areas are seemingly free of industrial pollution, our safe and wonderful food sources are at risk because industrial pollution exists globally. It is not confined to the air, land and water where industry exists, including industrial agriculture in Crete.



Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet



The beginnings of
graviera cheese



Graviera



Feta Cheese
on top of Horiatiki



Yogurt and Purslane Dip



Anthotiro (Whey and Cream)



Staka - Warm Goat's Milk Butter
Thickened with Flour. Yum!

From the bounties of spring, we enjoy the season's cuisine leading up to Pascha (Easter). The traditional Lenten fasting period of 40 days is like many other religious festivals around the world today. The devout follow the doctrines and others enjoy the delicious recommendations when it works for them.

During Lent, foods are slowly deleted from the recommended daily fare. No food from creatures that have blood in their veins is allowed. That includes fish, cheese, butter, yogurt, and milk. No wine is allowed on certain days (rarely observed now, thankfully). During Holy Week, even olive oil is cut from the list. This might seem like an unappetizing 40 days of torture. But Greek cooks are practiced in the art of making wonderful meals from what appears to be nothing to eat in the house.

The concept of fasting is that of cleansing the body of rich foods and possibly dangerous foods like impure meats and fat. There are also some age-old doctrines regarding feasting on meats -- our first nutrition, food safety and sanitation rules. The Minoans had strict rules about the protection of natural resources and edible plants, which are sadly not followed today.

The guidelines of the ancients and religious institutions evolved into state recommendations (our health and safety authorities of today, some of whom are not protecting our health and safety). But rural activities, feasting and fasting are ingrained in religious doctrines. It stands to reason that the church strove to keep the congregation healthy -- as food safety advisers. Fasting became part of life.

Doctrines evolved into traditional meals prepared during annual holidays. But around the world, what was considered clean, safe food in previous centuries might not be today, due to new types of pollution and contamination.

Lent – fasting never tasted so good

The period leading up to Pascha includes a two-week feast before 40 days of fasting begins. Now referred to as Carnival to go with the global flow, the celebrations conclude on Clean Monday (there is no Fat Tuesday in the Orthodox religion).

Clean Monday coincides with the coming of spring. Anyone with the means flocks to the fishing ports to enjoy a seafood feast. There is a tradition of flying kites on this day. It is a glorious time for children.

Following Lenten dining rules, the list of seafood without blood is deliciously long here: Octopus, calamari, cuttlefish, clams, mussels, shrimp, sea urchin. Steamed shellfish is enjoyed with fresh lemon juice. No sauces, butter or even olive oil is added during Lent or any other time.

Why mess up a good thing?



Makis grilling octopus -
no fancy equipment required



Fresh octopus is not easy to come by even in Crete these days due to overfishing problems -- not caused by local small-scale fishers but by huge illegal boats. Octopus is delicious grilled and served with a few teaspoons of olive oil, lemon juice or vinegar and a generous amount of dried oregano from the mountains.



Typical additions to Lenten meze are snails, of which there are dozens of recipes. Some favorites are snails braised with olive oil and rosemary, or added to barley spiked with tomatoes and aromatics. Seasoned rice in edible containers feature prominently – grape leaves, zucchini blossoms, and whole zucchini, tomatoes or sweet peppers.

Then there is horta (greens) – there are so many ways to enjoy wild and cultivated greens. Horta is typically just boiled or braised and served with lemon juice and olive oil. It is also combined with potatoes and other vegetables or beans -- that can be a meal in itself. Horta is also tucked into pastry pockets or sheets (phyllo), sometimes with fresh cheese, then baked or fried.

Dried beans are also star dishes on Clean Monday and throughout Lent – mashed fava-broad beans or split yellow peas (both called fava) served with olive oil and spring onions, as well as bean and vegetable stews.

The further into spring this movable feast occurs, the more options there are from the gardens.

Photos: CCS Cooking Classes





The basics: Oregano and Lemon



Kolokitha - Zucchini



Fresh calamari



The beginnings of spanakopita



Maria making homemade phyllo



Maria's incredible spanakopita

Summertime Bounties from Land and Sea

As the days grow longer and the vibrant colors of spring begin to fade, the landscape changes to reveal a survival of the fittest plant world. By August, when the land has not been quenched by a drop of rain for three months or more, the island takes on a different personality – of rugged harshness, as if the rocky soil from which the olive trees command is sizzling along with the cicadas invading the territory.

Clinging to the foothills of the domineering limestone mountains, a patchwork of small family plots of alternating olive groves, vineyards, vegetable gardens span the horizon. Narrow, tiered gardens protected within rock walls clutch the hillsides. Large stretches of flat land in Crete are rare, aside from a few plateaus, so residents make do with what they have by ingeniously cultivating whatever they can wherever they can. The higher up in the hills you go, the more stunning abstract work you'll discover, with vineyards zigzagging steep hills. The mountains are also where water tables might still exist. Archaeological discoveries provide important clues.

It's easy to determine what plants can survive without help from humans -- gigantic fig trees have taken over homes in abandoned villages and prickly pears, our natural firewall, tower over old stone donkey paths. Oregano, marjoram, fennel, thyme, capers, rosemary and sage are thriving in the warm and dry hills and rocky cliffs.

Gorgeous caper plants with their delicate white petals and pink sprays appear like magic in places like a rock wall on the second floor of the Minoan Palace of Knossos. How their roots managed to wedge their way from the soil through the rocks is a mystery to me. Their spicy leaves are tossed into salads and their buds are dried in the sun. Dried capers mashed with a little olive oil are an indescribable taste of earth and sun. While most of us know the taste of capers preserved in brine, the sun-dried version is a different and wonderful flavor, respecting the source.

In small villages hidden between winding mountain passes and gorges are gardens packed with plants utilizing every inch of earth -- vibrant red, green and yellow peppers, scarlet heirloom tomatoes, glistening purple eggplant, orange zucchini blossoms, okra, melon and a sea of green beans, lettuces, cucumbers, dill, parsley, onions and garlic. The onions and garlic serve a dual purpose, guarding their companion plants as natural bug repellants. Varieties of basil (not for culinary usage) are also guarding the property.

It was not until the late 19th century that some New World crops were successfully cultivated in certain regions of Greece and integrated into everyday cuisine. Tomatoes, potatoes, sweet and hot peppers are a few examples. Other produce that is now considered Greek staples arrived in much earlier eras, such as cucumbers, eggplant, apples and citrus from the East. Foreign trade dates back to the Minoan period. Later in time, Alexander the Great and a succession of explorers, traders and raiders introduced exotic foods to Cretan cuisine. Many foreign plants were considered dangerous until someone risked proving otherwise. Now they thrive in gardens of Crete as if they existed here since the beginning of time.

Fruit and nut trees lining gorges that were once riverside operations for Venetian-era flour mills are fair game. Trees that can handle the climate flourish on their own and in areas near natural springs. Figs, apricots, prickly pears, lemons, oranges, plums, walnuts, almonds and sometimes chestnuts and pomegranate thrive in warmer regions. From the bounties of the earth, a host of simple or complex dishes can be enjoyed. Each ingredient is free to shine on its own. There's no need to alter an already delectable gift from nature.

At dawn, small brightly painted yellow or blue fishing boats named Maria or Eleni are chugging toward the docks. Weary fishermen are returning home from a night at sea with hopefully enough of a catch to delight local diners and pay their rent. The seafood selection varies by region and over fishing problems now, but includes swordfish, sea bream, red mullet, sole, smelts, sardines, shrimp, calamari, cuttlefish, octopi, sea urchins, lobster, or mussels.

Fishermen and spear fishermen skilled enough to find octopi in their aquatic hideaways immediately tenderize their collection on the shore. This is a fascinating spectacle for visitors. First the meat is pounded on the rocks then swirled around and rinsed in the sea until it releases its soapy white film. For the traditionalist, it is crucial to tenderize octopi on the shore and salt water retains the flavor. Octopus can be braised in its own buttery-scented juice or hung in the sun to dry and tossed on the grill. Served with a little olive oil, lemon juice and oregano and a shot of raki, fresh octopus salad is the ultimate summer meze.

Up in the cool mountain sanctuaries, the goats and sheep are nibbling on my horta and maneuvering across new freeways for more food or to rest on the asphalt. By custom, lamb is simply grilled or roasted and is a seasonal dish for feasts in the spring -- Easter. By June, their horta supply literally dries up in the summer heat. Fresh milk supplies are scarce until winter -- the rhythm of traditional shepherding.

Summer is the time to enjoy an abundance of refreshing raw fruits and vegetables with cheeses and bread and a little seafood on occasion, since it can be an expensive treat unless you are or know a fisher. It is too hot to cook or eat heavy meals with temperatures at 95F/35C for months, unless you own a taverna and need to prepare feasts for crowds. A plate of sweet-ripe heirloom tomatoes and cucumbers with a little graviera cheese and rustic bread is one of my favorite lunches.



In certain regions of Crete, there are still a few traditional tavernas that fire up their outdoor wood-burning ovens and pack them with lamb, goat, pork, chicken, potatoes and other delicacies like *gemista* -- stuffed tomatoes or peppers, and roasted vegetable medleys such as *briam*.



This might be done only on Sunday to cater to the local community and customers from the cities. It is expensive to fire up a big oven, so it's best to know if you will have enough guests to enjoy the results. Mountain tavernas with tree and grapevine canopies are a cool retreat from summer heat.



I love this cooking method because you place food in the oven, seal the door shut and roast until done. The trick is to prepare the different cuts of meat and vegetable dishes so that they are done at the same time or can hold in the oven without drying out or losing their flavor. This requires expertise -- knowing the timing, moisture and fat required for each dish. The results are fantastic. This process can be replicated in modern-home ovens to an extent (see Recipe chapter for ideas).



Photo 1: Briam beginnings from Nikki Rose's garden
Photos 2 -3: Niki Marazaki's Taverna, Kera, Lassithi
Photo 4: Gorgeous Roast Pork, Milia Ecolodge

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet



The Committee
(losing grazing land)



Prickly Pear



Fagria (breem)



A glorious day with Manolis,
family and friends



Professor Haggis at Azoria
in the banquet hall (Archaic period)



CCS Cooking Class
with Chef Manolis



Village of Anogia
Grilled lamb coming up!



Foraging for snacks,
plums from our neighbors



The young man is already a
star traditional Cretan dancer!



Natural Sweeteners

In Crete, wild flower honey, particularly our prized wild thyme honey, is widely used in sweet and savory dishes, homemade cheese-spearmint pies, fruit preserves, teas and natural medicine.

Beekeeping is a highly-respected and risky practice, frequently noted in ancient texts. Our ancestors also enjoyed honey-vinegar salad dressing, an original regional sweet-sour sauce.

We also use petimezi, a wonderful syrup made from grapes. It's a true natural sweetener for pastries, sauces and salads. Back in vogue is carob syrup, used like petimezi.

Beekeeping and preparation of these syrups requires great skill. They are priceless works of art dependent on our protection of our biodiversity.





Wine has been produced in Crete for over 4,000 years. There were times in history-occupation of the island when residents were prohibited from producing wine. There are many indigenous grape varieties and new additions. Cretans utilize the vine, fruit and leaves for cooking, natural sweeteners, fuel and cultural activities. Today, a growing number of innovative organic vintners in Crete are creating excellent wines that complement our cuisine and climate -- a fantastic experience.



Ancient Minoan Villa and Winery



View from the Villa



Production Equipment



Modern Wine Production



Modern Wine Cellar
[Family Vintner, Antonis Dourakis
during a CCS Seminar]



The fantastic results

Autumn and Winter

While the sun is still shining, there is no indication that summer has ended. Until the clouds appear to soften the landscape and our nerves, and the rain washes away the dust that has accumulated on the plants like a terra cotta seal, it is still summer. No one in rural Crete complains about rain, quite the contrary. Without rain, we have nothing -- no horta, gardens, wine, cheese or lamb. The rainy season is something we anticipate, cherish and enjoy indoors or out, or somewhere in between, like a raki-making shed or olive oil factory.

We might exist for five months without a cloud in the sky. The rainy season brings a dramatic, dynamic, yet comforting feeling and vibrant green hues to the stark, parched landscape. I've never known people to love rain as much as Cretans. I grew up in a city and had no concept of how weather affects the foods I enjoy and the lives of farmers that have to deal with bad weather regardless of my eating habits. Thunderstorms in Crete are spectacular and beautiful, with gigantic lightening bolts splicing the sky, shaking the house like an earthquake.

The first activity in autumn is tsikoudia making (raki), a distilled spirit from grapes, produced throughout the Mediterranean region in similar ways (grappa, arak). The pulp of grapes after they have been pressed for wine (grape must), is fermented for a month or two before being distilled. The distilling process takes a long time. When families bring their batch to the licensed village factory-still, they host feasts for the occasion -- in great company while they wait for the results.

Raki plays an integral role in Cretan culture and natural medicine. It is a welcome and farewell drink; combined with fruits to make wonderful liquors; and used in tonics for sore throats, stomach aches and many other ailments. It is used in pastry dough to make it flaky and is a great cure for bashfulness. A lot of Cretan meze is a perfect accompaniment to raki.



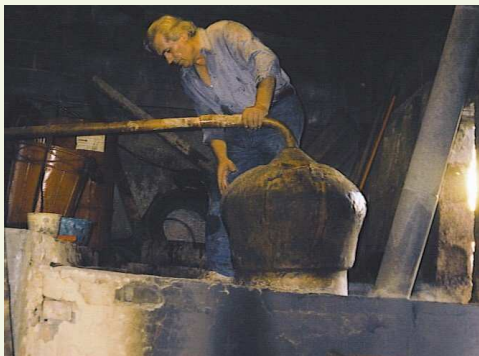
The Olive Harvest

There are different microclimates in Crete. The time to harvest olives depends on the type of olive, rainfall, farmer-producer preferences and location of the groves. Varieties are harvested as early as November or as late as February. The weather and pests are of constant concern.

The olive harvest is a community activity. Families and cooperatives bring their harvest to a village factory. Some equipment is more modern than others, which does not necessarily mean it is better. Most factories use centrifugal or synolea methods. Organic production is slowly increasing (maintained or revived). But not all organic production and pressing methods are created equal. Traditional-style stone milled, cold pressed olive oil is more labor intensive with lower yields and noted to be better for our health and environment. This method is rare today.

This job creates a hungry crowd -- working outdoors in cool weather, wrestling with sacks of olives and barrels of olive oil. Simple comfort foods of the season abound. Quick snacks are on hand as well as heartier fare to celebrate completion of the task. Roasted vegetables, meats, fish, chestnuts, piles of pears, raisins, walnuts, peanuts, and blocks of cheese are mainstays. Hiding under a layer of ash within fireplaces or wood burning stoves are ember-baked potatoes to just break in half and eat.

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet



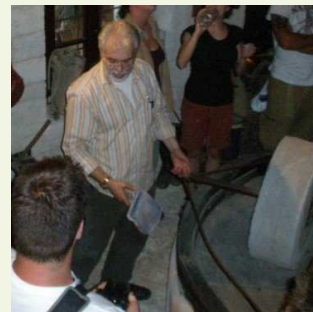
Tsikoudia (Raki) Production



Ancient Olive Tree
(circa 2nd Century AD)
Eastern Crete



Ancient Olive Mortar
(circa 2nd Century AD)
Eastern Crete



Venetian-Era Olive Press
in operation until 1960 AD.
Venetians occupied Crete
from 1217 to 1669 AD.
[Yiannis, Fabrika Eleni]



Olive Harvest, 2010 AD
Small-Scale Organic Production



Modern Centrifugal System
conventional mass production



Modern Stone Milled, Cold Press
Organic Olive Oil Factory
innovative incorporation of
ancient production methods
[George Dimitriadis, Biolea]

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet



Horta - An Integral Part of Traditional Cretan Cuisine

Horta is a general term for edible wild greens. A single variety or combination can be served raw, boiled or braised and seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice or vinegar and salt. Depending on the variety, it is enjoyed cold, hot and/or at veranda temperature. ***Horta is an important part of Crete's biodiversity.***

Horta is incorporated into many different meat, fish and bean dishes. Lest we forget, cultivated plants originate from wild varieties. They do not grow everywhere all of the time. Familiar greens are dandelion, mustard, peas, fennel, arugula, leeks, watercress, parsley, many types of lettuce and chicory, oregano, thyme and dill.

Our horta selection depends on the season and location. Some varieties grow only on Crete (endemic). Horta is also used in delectable pitas (pies), teas, liquors and natural medicine. Read Hippocrates for information.



Horta is *not* always collected by knowledgeable people that understand the consequences of irresponsible over-harvesting. The ideal locations are remote regions far from freeways, overgrazed areas, unsustainable development-agriculture and tourist resorts where toxic chemicals soak the land and sea beyond the farms, gardens, swimming pools and golf courses.

We can live without more unsustainable tourism-development, but can we live without biodiversity-horta? It is a crucial local source of nutrients that can only be sustained by our protection of our environment. Continued unsustainable development causes rapid loss of our priceless natural resources.

Pages 49-50: CCS hikes. Locations will not be disclosed by this author.

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet





The Sea of Crete, Mirabello Bay. Industrial olive cultivation spans the valley below. What is not obvious from this view is the level of depletion of fresh water and biodiversity, and agro-chemicals flowing out to sea. This bay hosts world-famous luxury hotels. It also hosts a dwindling population of seafood and small-scale local fishers.

Photo 2 - Vantage point where the south and north coasts of Crete are visible. The large white structures are greenhouses. This agricultural production has caused soil degradation and depletion of fresh water resources in just a few decades. Production continues unabated.

Photo 3 - Professor Donald Haggis at an ancient settlement excavated in the 1980's. Discussion on the contrast in ancient agricultural practices and settlement locations.

The good news is that more residents are maintaining agricultural traditions (page 52).





Chef Dimitris in his family's organic vegetable garden. Dimitris is a frequent chef-instructor for CCS Seminars.



Chef Manolis in his organic vegetable garden. Manolis and his wife, Katerina, are frequent chef-instructors for CCS Seminars.



Professor Donald Haggis at the archaeological site of Azoria. Wild oregano and many other plants have been discovered during his excavations and still exist today.



Yiorgos Hatzydakis - Vamos community-based sustainable tourism co-founder, presenting a great gift from the farmer to a CCS seminar participant.

Chapter Three

Cooking Techniques and Prep Work



Cooking Equipment

For best results in preparing recipes in this book

Use heavy stainless steel for:

Pots and pans
Sharp knives
Colanders and sieves
Whisks, spatulas, ladles

Use stainless steel or glass for:

Mixing bowls
Storage containers

Basic Utensils:

Wooden cooking spoons
Wooden cutting boards (requires upkeep for food safety).
Strong rubber spatulas (so that you don't end up eating bits of them).

Cooking appliances:

Standard oven/electric or gas range
Simple outdoor grill using chemical-free wood; without toxic lighter fluid

Handy but not mandatory:

A small food processor-grinder-blender

*If you already have a clay pot for roasting, that's fine but don't race out and buy one for recipes in this book

Measurement converter tool:

www.food.com/library/calc.zsp

Not recommended:

Aluminum, Teflon or plastic (when heating or storing hot foods).
Microwave ovens are not used in the preparation of traditional Cretan cuisine. Please research safety problems related to cookware and microwaves.

Planning Ahead: The Benefits of Advance Preparation

If we walk into a restaurant, we expect our roasted chicken, soup, salad and whatever else we order to magically appear before us within 15 minutes or less. Of course, that is not the actual time it takes to prepare. How does this magic happen in professional kitchens and how can we apply this in our home kitchens?

Consider that recipes are not a separate entity. Meal planning begins with sourcing food and taking advantage of fresh and local options to utilize what is available. Fresh food at peak season is usually less expensive and always has more flavor. If we think of cooking as a continuation of what we can prepare at the moment and for the future, what we can store and how we can combine flavors together, then we can take advantage of what professional chefs learn – advance preparation (prep work).

Prep work is not to be confused with what is sometimes considered dreaded leftovers. There is no reason to force leftover chicken to work with leftover fish in some sort of surprise. Advance prep is a pre-calculated, efficient way to use your time wisely in the kitchen, plan ahead and enjoy the experience. What you make on Sunday can be brilliantly transformed into a very enjoyable dish on Tuesday.

Conserving Time and Energy - an hour in the kitchen

Say you have an hour to spare and plan to roast something. If you have a few racks in the oven, consider packing it with other ingredients that can be used later in the week as part of a meze or the foundation for another dish. This also conserves your energy and natural energy (gas, wood) used to cook your food throughout the week.



Roast pork, potatoes, peppers



Roasted red peppers



Melitzanosalata - eggplant salad

Food that takes an hour or less to roast:

- > Whole fish, small whole chicken or pieces and other smaller cuts of meat
- > Tomatoes, onions and garlic for pasta or pizza sauce and soup bases
- > Whole eggplant (for melitzanosalata)
- > Beetroots for salad or separate meze
- > Sweet peppers for salads, meze and a variety of dishes or garnish
- > Whole potatoes (for salads or rustic vegetable sauté)
- > Roasted (pre-cut) potatoes and/or carrots
- > Acorn squash, spaghetti squash and other large squash varieties
- > Roasted garlic (a whole head wrapped in foil)
- > Briam (vegetable medley)

Refrigerate if not serving this day; shelf life 3 to 4 days, depending on the item



White bean soup



Steamed Broccoli and Potatoes



Spring Pasta with Zucchini

Since you'll be waiting for the food in the oven, consider using your stovetop for additional prep work, such as:

- > Parboil or steam vegetables until barely tender, for quick salads or soups later
- > Precook a pot of dried beans (remember to soak the night before)
- > Boil a pot lentils for cold salad or quick soup (no need to soak overnight)
- > Make fava using yellow split peas (no need to soak overnight)
- > Boil a few whole potatoes for salads, quick stews, or soup thickener
- > Precook a pot of grains (brown or wild rice, barley, whatever you like)
- > Precook pasta to al denté stage (then toss with a little olive oil)

Refrigerate all of the above until ready to use - optimum shelf life is 3 days.

While you are in the kitchen, you could clean some lettuce or greens for later use. Dry them in a salad spinner or gently roll separated leaves in a clean, lint-free towel or chemical-free paper towels. Store them loosely wrapped in a towel inside a container that allows air to circulate. Depending on the green, they can last for up to a week in the refrigerator. Pull out as much as you need for salads, pastas, or grain dishes. Ask the people selling your produce for ideas.



Prep work provides a foundation for several different meals you can quickly prepare during the next two to four days, depending on the shelf life of the ingredients. [See recipe chapter for ideas.]



For example, to create a rustic pasta or rice dish: make a sauce with a little chicken stock, precooked chunks of chicken, vegetables and beans. Bring to a simmer, add the cooked pasta or rice and let the flavors meld for a few minutes. Add fresh herbs to brighten it up and dinner is ready in 10 minutes. Serve with a simple lettuce salad and enjoy.



There is no reason to have a heavy, hot meal every night (western diet myths), especially after a long day at work and if you plan to get some sleep soon.

If you have enough meze around – a couple of different fresh or cooked vegetables, a plate of olives, almonds, walnuts, or a little good cheese and bread, that can be a sufficient and enjoyable meal.

Freezer storage ideas:

Fresh bread: If you know you won't be able to finish a loaf of bread within a day or two, slice it and freeze it. Use it for toast within a month. You can also cut it into croutons or process into breadcrumbs. Whole loaves of bread freeze well. Seal in foil and when ready to use, rewarm in a moderate oven for 10-15 minutes.

Berries freeze well. They are best used as purée (instead of bottled jam), for smoothies or mixed with yogurt and/or granola. Rinse them first and gently dry them on a clean towel. Store in airtight containers in small batches and freeze up to 3 months. They defrost in about 2 hours at room temperature or can be defrosted in the fridge overnight. Use within 3 days.



Many fresh or cooked fruits and vegetables freeze well. The supermarket freezer section provides clues. It's better than letting food go bad if you know you won't be able to eat it in time. Most items can be frozen for several months. Research the options. Combining what you have on hand in fresh and preserved states provides opportunities to add more flavor, variety and nutrients to daily meals. Organic produce acquired at peak freshness can easily be the star of a meal.



Photos: 1) organic strawberries, 2) pickled wild hyacinth bulbs with fresh dill at Agora Cafe in Archanes, 3) Baker in Chania



Cooking Techniques

There is only one way to roast a chicken: Using moderate and dry heat. There is only one way to braise, boil or grill a chicken. All other details are up to our imagination. Knowing the basic rules of cooking techniques provides the foundation for successful results. Before we consider recipes, it is beneficial to review the basics of cooking and food science.

Cooking and baking, in particular, is a science. You need the right level and type of heat, fat, moisture, and complementary ingredients to create ideal results. I don't know why anyone ever recommended roasting or grilling chicken without its' skin. Chicken needs fat to taste good and retain moisture -- it makes sense to use the natural shield and flavor enhancer it came with, rather than using something else. It's unlikely that weight gain can be attributed to chicken skin consumption -- there are many other foods that could be consumed in moderation instead.

It's a good idea to refer to old standard cookbooks to review basic cooking techniques, cuts of meat, roasting charts and other tips that have been buried under flashy "new" ideas that may or may not make culinary sense. The tried and true is key in most cases. Cooking techniques have not changed over the centuries. Only cooks have changed or rearranged the standards based on knowledge of the foundations. With that knowledge, it's easier to confidently experiment with fresh approaches. One thing to change when using cookbooks from the industrialized world is the ratio of meat to vegetables. Reverse it and you've generally got traditional Cretan cuisine (less meat and more vegetables). And make time to research modern industrial agricultural practices -- we are what we eat.

Steaming Vegetables

The short list of vegetables that steam well: Artichokes, Asparagus, Broccoli, Carrots, Cauliflower, Green Peas, Fresh Beans

Steaming organic vegetables is considered to be a healthy cooking technique. More nutrients are retained, rather than discarded with the water if you boil them. However, you still have to add flavor (fat and aromatics) to steamed vegetables or it is a bland experience. You won't see this technique used in Crete. Vegetables are usually boiled, braised, roasted or fried. Most of these methods retain more nutrients than boiling and discarding the cooking liquid.

A standard in Crete is to simmer greens in a little water and serve with a little cooking liquid, olive oil and lemon juice. Many nutrients are fat-soluble, meaning that our bodies are not able to absorb the benefits of vegetables without olive oil. A thin aromatic tomato sauce is another base for cooking a variety vegetables.

When steaming vegetables, consider that: 1) you have to add fat and seasoning; 2) some vegetables cook faster than others or impart their dominant flavor. Not all vegetable types should be steamed together. Broccoli will overpower asparagus, for instance. Bearing that in mind, combine vegetables that taste good together. Start steaming tougher vegetables like cauliflower and carrots first, then add delicate vegetables later, like asparagus and peas. Cooking time depends on your tastes, although recent studies suggest that al denté (still slightly crunchy) vegetables retain more nutrients. There's also carry-over cooking, meaning that the vegetables will continue to cook after you've taken the pot off the fire. Once you remove steamed vegetables from the pot, they get cold fast.

In Crete, the al denté concept is not common. If people want crunchy vegetables, they just eat varieties in their pure form off the plant -- raw. Soft cooked vegetables are preferred here. It's likely based on traditional cooking methods. Even though people have modern appliances now, traditional cooking methods still rule.

We don't have natural gas lines (but some people use propane ranges) and electric stoves are not used everywhere, especially in remote regions.

So if you have a wood burning stove and are preparing meals based on the amount of fuel you have and energy you must save, you're likely braising vegetables on the stovetop while roasting something in the oven. This might all be done during cooler hours of the morning in the summer or after a long day working on the farm. The simple difference in lifestyle and appliances drives traditional cuisine. Short-order cooking is reserved for restaurateurs.

The technique of "shocking" boiled vegetables (by placing them in ice water to keep them from cooking any longer) is fine if you're a restaurant chef with a giant pot of precious asparagus. The bigger the batch, the more danger of rapid carry-over cooking. Shocking vegetables might defeat the purpose of nutrient-flavor saving. Consider cooking them slightly under al dente and let them soften on their own.

Braised Vegetables: Braising or roasting vegetables is easy street. You can prepare them in advance and rewarm when ready to eat. They are perfectly palatable at veranda temperature, so there's no rush to gobble them down. They will keep for up to 3 days in the fridge and can be transformed into other meals with beans, whole grains, chicken, etc. In Crete, braised or roasted vegetables can be the star of meze.

Fried Vegetables: Another popular technique in Crete, for fritters and sliced zucchini, eggplant, and potatoes. They are quickly fried in just enough olive oil to coat the pan. Most varieties, aside from potatoes, are lightly floured first. Call it "shallow frying." The vegetables are not submerged in olive oil (not deep fried); they are bubbling on the surface, which is enough to make them deliciously crispy.

Grilled Vegetables: This is not a Cretan technique but I love grilled vegetables, especially zucchini and eggplant with a simple marinade. Recipes coming up!

Photos on the next page: Horta collecting with Chef-Author Katerina Hamilaki, during a CCS Seminar. Fried wild carrot flower cooking demo. Amazing!

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet





Thistles abound in Crete's countryside, including edible varieties. The trick is to find them before your neighbors. They are a prized meze. Artichokes are also widely cultivated for commercial and home use. They thrive in Crete's climate and feature prominently in seasonal dishes. During the winter, we collect wild varieties of thistle stems. We braise them with other vegetables and/or meat. In the spring, the more familiar artichoke appears. It's the opposite shape of the cultivated globe and amazingly pungent with the scent of herbs that share the territory.

We trim artichokes down to the heart and eat them raw with lemon juice. It's a favored snack with raki too. They are also preserved in olive oil and vinegar or frozen. Globe artichokes are a common cultivated variety in other corners of the world. I use artichoke leaves as a serving spoon for tzatziki (a chips and salsa concept). But you can only eat the meaty base of an artichoke leaf. The tough upper leaf is not edible. However, the leaves are also dried and used in medicinal teas.

Recipes



Part 1: Meze with Mostly Raw Foods

The category of salads is infinite in Crete



Cabbage Salad

The simple things in life are often the best. To me, cabbage salad is one of them.

Ingredients

1 medium cabbage, cleaned and cored
3 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
1/4 teaspoon salt

Variation

1/2 medium-size green cabbage
1/4 small purple cabbage
1 cup fresh arugula, chopped
3 spring onions, chopped
2 tablespoons parsley, chopped
a pinch of crushed hot chili pepper
3 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon salt

Preparation

Slice cabbage into thin strips, place in a large mixing bowl, add remaining ingredients, toss together. Marinate in the refrigerator for 1 hour before serving.

*Serves 4 people, depending on other meze.
Good for 2 days under refrigeration.*



Purple Cabbage, Walnut and Orange Salad

This semi-sweet and crunchy combination is the ultimate.

Ingredients

1 medium purple cabbage, cored and sliced into thin strips
 2 oranges, cut into segments
 2 spring onions, chopped
 1/4 cup walnuts, roasted and chopped
 1/4 cup raisins
 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
 2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
 1 teaspoon wild flower honey
 a pinch of salt

Preparation

Place all ingredients in a large mixing bowl, toss together. Marinate in the refrigerator for 1 hour before serving.

*Serves 4 people, depending on other meze.
 Good for 2 days under refrigeration.*



Mixed Greens and Carrot Salad

One of many memorable dishes with good friends at the gorgeous Milia Ecolodge in the White Mountains of Crete (a variation).

Ingredients

- 1 pound fresh mixed greens such as romaine, arugula and dandelion
- 1 small red onion, sliced
- 2 large carrots, shaved
- 1/4 cup dried cherries, softened in a cup of warm water
- 2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
- 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons sesame seeds, toasted

Preparation

Place all ingredients except sesame seeds in a large bowl and gently toss together. Whether you are serving family-style or on individual plates, sprinkle sesame seeds on top just before serving. Serves 3 to 6 people, depending on appetite and other meze.



Marouli (Romaine Lettuce) with Fresh Dill

This is a prime example of letting simple and subtle flavors of spring shine on their own. On taverna menus in Crete, this is just called Marouli.

Ingredients

1 head of Romaine lettuce (aka Kos)
 4 spring onions, chopped
 2 teaspoons fresh dill, chopped
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1/2 teaspoon white or red wine vinegar
 a pinch of sea salt

Preparation

Clean and dry lettuce leaves. Roll them into a cylinder and slice into 1/4 inch strips. Gently toss together with the other ingredients. Eat the salad just as you would spaghetti -- roll it around your fork.

Romaine lettuce is called Kos in Greece. This might be because it was first discovered or cultivated on the island of Kos by the Romans or for the Romans.



Horiatiki (Greek Salad)

"To horio" simply means *the village*. When you are in a Greek village in the summer and eat horiatiki, you get what's growing right in front of you. The primary ingredients are tomatoes, cucumbers and sometimes feta cheese. Variations are as numerous as there are gardeners and cooks. Believe it or not, Greeks do not order "Greek salads." That is an export term. Horiatiki is strictly a summer dish, when beautiful and intensely flavorful tomatoes are harvested. Use unwaxed cucumbers so you don't have to peel them.

Basic Horiatiki Recipe

2 or 3 tomatoes, quartered or chopped (see example)

2 cucumbers, sliced 1/2 inch thick

1 small green pepper, sliced

1 small onion, sliced

2 tablespoons olive oil (or more to taste)

1 teaspoon red or white wine vinegar

a pinch of sea salt (feta is salty enough)

Topping: A generous slice of feta cheese

1 teaspoon good-quality dried oregano

Preparation: Mix all ingredients together. Top with feta and oregano. Add a little purslane if available.





Nikki Rose-Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries Study Tour
for university professors and students

Cooking class including horiatiki variation 2011!

Roka Salata (Arugula)

My favorite salad at Kritamon Restaurant by Chef-Owner Dimitris Mavrakis. Chef Mavrakis is from a long line of organic farmers, producing and foraging for superb ingredients. He's also an instructor for Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries Seminars.

Salad Ingredients

1 pound Roka (small and large variety mix)
1 cup tomatoes, chopped
1 pear, sliced
2 teaspoons toasted walnuts, chopped
4-5 sun-dried tomatoes, sliced
½ cup malaka or mozzarella cheese, cubed
¼ cup graviera or Parmesan cheese, grated

Vinaigrette

1 cup olive oil
2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons grape syrup (petimezi), honey
or carob syrup
1 clove garlic, mashed
5 basil leaves, chopped
½ tea sea salt
black pepper, freshly ground

Combine all salad ingredients except the grated cheese in a large bowl.

To make the vinaigrette: Mix all ingredients in a blender until thick-emulsified.

Gently combine the salad with 1 cup of the vinaigrette. Top with grated cheese.

Use only 1 cup of the vinaigrette and reserve the rest for later. It will keep for a month stored in a cool, dry place.



Building a Salad for Dinner - Summer Salad Template

Thinking out of the western diet PR box -- a heavy, hot meal is not the only dinner that is "real." This template serves 3 to 4 people, depending on their appetite.

The first thing to do when building a salad is to assess the flavor of your ingredients. If the tomatoes or cucumbers are bland, marinate them first for 30 minutes in olive oil, herbs and onions (listed below). That is also your salad dressing. Stir a few times before adding the other ingredients. Use vinegar or lemon juice sparingly; it can overpower the flavor of vegetables and good olive oil.

3 medium potatoes, boiled in their skins until tender, cooled, peeled and cubed
3 hard-boiled eggs, quartered
1 cup of green or purple cabbage, sliced into bite-size strips
2 cups of lettuce, sliced into strips (like fat linguine)
2 medium tomatoes, quartered
1 large cucumber, sliced
1 medium onion, sliced
1 small hot chili pepper, minced (or a pinch of dried red pepper)
2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice or white wine vinegar
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
1 teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and black pepper to taste

Place all ingredients in a large bowl. Toss together and enjoy! Serve with whole grain bread and a slice of real cheese if you like. Homemade croutons would be great too (your own variation of paximadi). Add your imagination -- what is in season or your pantry, like beans, avocado, walnuts, olives, marinated peppers or artichoke hearts.

Bean Salads

We eat a lot of peas/beans in Crete. Some varieties are used for fritters (split yellow peas) and added to vegetable or meat dishes. Some beans are mashed and served with bread (Cretan equivalent of butter). We also use chickpea flour for rustic breads. I like beans as the star of a salad. Certain beans make ideal medleys with certain herbs. Fresh black-eyed peas with fresh dill is a fantastic combination. Lentils have a very robust flavor, so they hold up to powerful seasonings and garlic. Prepare about 30 minutes before serving to let the flavors meld. Bean salads will keep under refrigeration for 3 days.

Black-Eyed Pea Salad

2 cups cooked black-eyed peas
1 medium tomato, diced
4 spring onions or 1 small onion, sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
1 tablespoon fresh dill, chopped
1 small chili pepper, minced or a pinch
of dried red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
a pinch of salt

Preparation:

Mix all ingredients together. Enjoy!



Lentil Salad with Peppers and Scallions

We enjoy a lot of lentil soup in Crete during the cooler months. But when the weather is warmer, I also like lentils as part of a cold meze. You can use any beans you like for this dish or combine a few together.

Ingredients

1 cup dried lentils
 2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
 1/2 teaspoon red wine vinegar
 1 sweet bell or wax pepper, diced
 1/4 cup olives, pitted and diced
 3 scallions, chopped
 1 clove garlic, minced
 3 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
 1 teaspoon dried oregano, crushed
 a pinch of hot chili pepper (optional)
 Salt and black pepper to taste

Variations/additions

2 teaspoons sun-dried tomatoes, minced
 1 tablespoon fresh oregano
 any variety/color of sweet pepper

Preparation

Rinse lentils in a colander and remove any debris. Boil the lentils until tender (about 30 minutes depending on the type). Drain, transfer to a bowl and immediately add the olive oil and a pinch of salt. Place in the refrigerator until cool.

Add the remaining ingredients and refrigerate/marinate for at least 30 minutes before serving.

Goes great with a little bread, feta cheese and sliced tomatoes!



Fava is a classic bean purée that has become a Greek mystery among curious passersby, including visiting food writers. There is no great mystery as to the origins of this plant (*vicia faba*). But fava beans are called *koukia* in modern Greek and also called broad beans in English. In Crete, we eat fresh fava beans straight out of the pod as a snack. Fresh and dried varieties are peeled, boiled, mashed and seasoned with olive oil and onions.

There is another wonderful bean purée using split yellow peas that is easier to prepare because no peeling or overnight soaking is required. The prized variety is cultivated on the isle of Santorini. Today and possibly in ancient times, “fava” can simply mean mashed beans. If you ask me, I think the easier version became known as fava just to keep us guessing.

Depending on what region of Greece you are in, when you order fava at a taverna, you may get a purée of *koukia* or “fava Santorini.” In western Crete you will likely be served *koukia*. Both versions are delicious.

Fava (variations)

The concept of making bean purée is similar to rice pilaf. Additional steps are required to make the beans tender, palatable and less apt to cause a gurgling stomach. You want the beans to absorb most of the cooking liquid and retain their flavor and texture. Then you can mash or purée them. Always rinse beans and remove any debris before cooking.

Fava Bean Purée

1 cup dry fava beans (aka broad beans)
2 Tablespoons EVO olive oil
½ teaspoon salt
1 small onion, chopped
½ lemon, juiced

In a medium stockpot, soak the beans overnight in 4 cups of water. Drain, rinse and remove the shells with a pairing knife. Return beans to the pot with 4 cups of fresh water. Bring to a boil, lower heat and simmer 30 minutes. Drain and rinse.

Return beans to the pot with 2 cups of water, bring to a boil, lower heat and simmer, stirring frequently, until most of the water is absorbed (about 30 minutes). Remove foam as it accumulates on the surface. Serve warm or cold with remaining ingredients.

Split Yellow Pea Purée

1 cup split yellow peas
2 Tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 small onion or 4 scallions, chopped
1/2 teaspoon salt

Boil beans in 4 cups of water for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and steep for 1 hour. Drain, rinse and return to the pot with fresh water just to cover. Simmer, stirring frequently, until liquid is absorbed. Mash or purée. Serve with remaining ingredients.



Tzatziki -- Yogurt and Cucumber Sauce

Tzatziki can be enjoyed with many dishes, from a simple slice of bread, in place of artificially-flavored sandwich spreads, or as a sauce for fresh vegetables, grilled vegetables, fish, lamb or chicken. It is delicious and versatile. This recipe is good for a crowd as part of meze or can be used for other culinary treats during the week.

Ingredients

32 ounces plain organic yogurt
2 cucumbers, peeled and grated
3 cloves garlic, mashed
6 scallions, minced
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
2 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped*
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
A pinch of salt

*You can use fresh spearmint instead of dill for a different, refreshing bite.

Note: Some Greek-style yogurt is strained. It is thicker than most brands. If using unstrained yogurt, drain it first. The yield will be about 1/4 cup less, which will not effect the results. Cucumbers should also be drained to release some of their juice.

Preparation

To strain the yogurt: Line a large, fine-mesh sieve with cheesecloth and place over a deep bowl with a 2-inch clearance to drain. Place the yogurt in the cheesecloth, cover and refrigerate overnight (or at least two hours).

Place the grated cucumbers in a sieve over a bowl, add a pinch of salt, cover, refrigerate to drain for two hours.

Combine all ingredients and refrigerate until ready to serve. Garnish with dill, parsley, cucumber slices, or black olives. Best made 2 hours in advance. Good for 3 to 4 days under refrigeration.

Yogurt Sauces - Variations

Tzatziki is not the only great yogurt-based sauce enjoyed in Crete. There are several others. Here are a few examples.

Almond-Yogurt Salad

Courtesy of Chef Dimitris Mavrakis

16 oz strained sheep or goat milk yogurt
 1 cup almonds, roasted and chopped
 1 teaspoon fresh mint, minced
 2 teaspoons fresh parsley, minced
 1 teaspoon fresh louisa (verbena), minced
 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 2 teaspoons olive oil
 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Mix all ingredients together.
 Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Garnish with herbs or other ingredients used to make the dish. Keeps for 2-3 days under refrigeration.

Yogurt-Purslane Salad

Adapted from the fabulous Chef Stephania's recipe at Katalagari Country Suites

16 oz strained yogurt, as above
 2 teaspoons fresh lemon zest
 2 teaspoons olive oil
 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
 1 cup of chopped purslane



Melitzanosalata - Eggplant Salad

Melitzanosalata is a purée that can be prepared in several different ways. The eggplant can be grilled, which produces an intense, smoky flavor. It can also be roasted, which creates more subtle results. We grow several different varieties of eggplant in Crete. A long, thin variety sometimes referred to as Japanese eggplant, is what I normally use for this recipe. It's less bitter and spongy and I'm not a fan of the technique of salting and rinsing eggplant before I cook it.

1 large eggplant or 3 medium Japanese eggplant

1 tablespoon crushed garlic

2 tablespoons EVO olive oil

1 teaspoon white wine vinegar

2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped

salt and pepper to taste

Grilled: Pierce eggplant skin in a few places with a knife. Grill over a medium fire, turn occasionally until very soft (about 15 min).

Roasted: Preheat oven 375F /190C. Coat whole eggplant with a little olive oil, pierce the skin with a knife in four places. Roast on a baking sheet until it is very soft and deflated (about 1 hour).

1. Let the eggplant cool. Remove and discard the stems and skin. Coarsely chop and set aside.

2. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the garlic paste, olive oil, vinegar and spices.

3. Add the eggplant and mash with a fork and break up strings. You want it to be chunky (if not, you can put it in a blender).

4. Place the salad in the refrigerator until ready use. It will keep for up to 3 days.

Let the flavors meld for at least ½ hour before serving. Serve cold or at room temperature as part of meze with rustic bread or toasted pita triangles. Serves 6 to 8 people.



Eggplant in our organic garden in Crete



Results of hard labor



Eggplant in the traditional wood-burning oven



Melitzanosalata

Horta - Greens have always been popular in Crete!

As I mentioned earlier, horta is a general term for wild greens. Varieties that are cooked are often boiled in just enough water to achieve desired results. It is more of a braising technique and the golden vitamins are retained. Not all greens taste great together. It's a matter of preference. Familiar cultivated greens that work great for this recipe are chard, kale, collards, beet, or dandelion. For the purpose of availability outside of Crete and modern preferences, the following is a guideline for about 4 servings.

4 pounds of greens, cleaned, drained and chopped

1/4 cup olive oil

1 medium onion or 3 leeks, chopped

4 cloves garlic, minced

1/4 cup parsley, chopped

2 lemons

pinch of salt and pepper

The tougher the green, the longer it takes to cook. When cooking more than one variety, add in stages. Simmer chard until done, then add parsley at the last minute. Do not add salt or lemon during cooking; it will turn bright greens brown. Use stainless steel (non-reactive), do not use aluminum.

1. Drain the clean greens but do not dry them thoroughly. The water that clings to their leaves is your braising liquid.

2. In a large stockpot over medium heat, sauté the onions and garlic in olive oil until soft (not brown).

3. Add tougher greens first. They might not fit into the pot at once. Stir until wilted and add more. Simmer until tender (about 10 minutes), stirring frequently. Add a little water if the greens become dry before they are done.

4. Add delicate greens and simmer 3 minutes more.

5. Serve in a bowl with a little cooking juice, lemon, olive oil, salt and pepper.



Wild Pea Shoot, Crete
Nikki Rose-Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries (CCS)
botanical hike



The Princess and the Pea! Hike with Botanist,
Manolis Avramakis, during Nikki Rose-CCS seminar
for USA university professors and students.



Wild variety of asparagus, discovered during
CCS botanical hikes



Aspasia's precious collection of wild asparagus.
Nikki Rose/CCS Study Tour
for university professors and students

Fresh String Bean and Zucchini Stew

Many vegetable stews in Crete begin with a formula: Sauté aromatics, add vegetables, water and simmer until done. We have a lot of gorgeous varieties of string beans here (not all of them are green!). When you have vegetables straight from the garden (or farmer's market), the flavors are fantastic. This is my variation of a boiled vegetable dish. It is also a template for Greek-style string beans.

2 Tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 medium zucchini, sliced on the bias
2 medium tomatoes, chopped
1 pound fresh string beans, strings removed of course
4 small potatoes, parboiled until just tender, then peeled
1/4 cup parsley, chopped
1 teaspoon dried oregano
black pepper to taste
1 cup chicken or vegetable stock

Note: I parboil the potatoes because I don't want to overcook the other vegetables that take much less time. Their great individual flavors are lost by overcooking.

In a medium stockpot, sauté the onions and garlic in olive oil until golden. Add the zucchini and sauté 5 minutes more. Add remaining ingredients and bring to a gentle boil. Lower the heat and simmer until the vegetables are tender (about 5 minutes).

Serves about 4 people as part of meze.



Fresh String Bean Salad

Some of my favorite meals have been created out of sheer laziness or lack of time. I like to find ways to retain individual flavors of vegetables I'm privileged to acquire straight off the plant. One-pot dishes are great but flavors can be lost due to high heat or overcooking. I want to eat good food even though I'm just as busy as everyone else. Chefs need breaks from the office too.

My neighbor, Eleni, is a professional organic farmer. She gave me a sack of gorgeous string beans. I could have prepared them in the traditional Greek way -- braised with aromatics. But they were so precious, I tried something different.

1 pound string beans, strings removed
of course
2 Tablespoons EVO olive oil
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1 medium tomato, diced
¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
1 teaspoon high-quality dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
freshly cracked black pepper

Fill a pot with ½ inches of water. Bring to a boil. Add beans, lower heat and simmer until tender (about 5 minutes). Drain and reserve.

Return the pot to low heat and gently cook garlic in olive oil for 2 minutes just to take the raw edge off. Remove from heat. Add beans and remaining ingredients. Tastes great warm or at room temperature.



Steamed Artichokes with Latholemeno (olive oil-lemon sauce)

A simple way to prepare artichokes is to steam them whole

Equipment: Stainless steel pot with steamer (to fit as many artichokes as you plan to cook).

1 large globe artichoke per person
2 or 3 lemons, halved

Latholemeno sauce, whisk together:

1 cup olive oil
1 lemon, juiced
2 tea fresh parsley or dill, chopped
Salt and pepper

Fill a large bowl with cold water and the juice of one lemon. Cut one-quarter inch off the tops of artichokes. Cut the stems to level the base. Cut the thorns off of each leaf with stainless steel scissors. Place chokes in the water to prevent discoloration while preparing the rest. Steam until tender (about an hour).

The artichokes are done when an inner leaf can easily be removed. Place them upside down on a rack to drain for a few minutes. Serve hot or cold with latholemeno sauce.

Note: If you are serving artichokes to small children, serve the heart only and keep the remainder of the artichoke out of their reach (for obvious reasons).





Aspia - Raw Artichoke Preparation
(CCS Cooking Class)



Cooking class, continued



Manolis - Demonstrating another prep technique



Results - Raw artichoke hearts with lemon and salt

Braised Artichoke Hearts (a template)

The foundation for your imagination

2 or 3 artichokes per person
2 or 3 lemons, depending on the batch
olive oil, chopped parsley, salt to taste

Remove leaves and the choke. Pair the artichokes down to the heart (see photo). Place hearts in lemon-water as described in the Steamed Artichoke recipe.

In an ample-size stockpot, fill with water halfway and bring to a boil. Add the hearts and the juice of one lemon. Lower the heat and simmer until tender (about 30 minutes).

You can simply serve the hearts with a little olive oil and lemon juice. You can also combine them with aromatics, vegetables or meats. Fresh peas and dill is one fantastic option. Here is where your imagination shines through.



Artichoke Heart and Bean Stew

Serves 3 to 6 people, depending on whether this is a main dish or part of meze

There are as many variations of artichoke stew as there are cooks. This is my template using favorite combinations of cooked artichoke hearts and beans (prep work). In Crete, a typical bean used for this dish is fresh fava (koukia). Save the artichoke leaves for tzatziki dipping spoons or just eat them as they are. You can also use small, whole artichokes (check market freezer section). Many varieties of cooked beans can be frozen (or found in markets) and require minimal cooking time, like black-eyed peas or lima beans. This recipe can be modified in many ways, depending on your preferences and ingredients available.

2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 medium onion or 2 leeks, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 medium tomatoes, diced
(or 16 oz can of Roma tomatoes)
4 pre-cooked artichoke hearts,
quartered
1 cup pre-cooked beans (black-eyed
peas, limas or white beans)
1 cup parsley, chopped
½ cup rich vegetable stock
Salt, black and chili pepper to taste

1. Using a large stockpot or sauté pan over medium heat, sauté the onions in olive oil with a pinch of salt until golden. Add the garlic and sauté 2 minutes more.
2. Add the remaining ingredients and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce heat to low, cover the pan and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Great with good bread and cheese, a plate of olives or a simple salad.

Steamed Broccoli (a template)

Serves 3 to 6 people, depending on who's eating and what else you are serving

1 large head of broccoli cut into 6 segments, including trimmed and peeled stems
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion or 6 scallions, chopped
½ cup parsley, chopped
Salt, black pepper and a pinch of hot chili pepper to taste
2 lemons, quartered

Steam broccoli until it just begins to soften, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and remove the lid. Meanwhile, in a pan large enough to hold the broccoli, sauté onions in olive oil until soft, not brown. Add parsley, spices and broccoli. Remove from heat, cover and let the flavors meld for 2 minutes. Serve immediately or remove the lid to avoid carry-over cooking. Reheat when ready to eat. Enjoy with a generous splash of lemon juice.

For more color, flavor and vitamins, add a handful of fresh or marinated bell pepper or chopped olives. To make it a meal: Sauté sliced green or yellow squash with the onions until tender. Add a cup of pre-cooked beans, peas or diced potato, pasta, rice or other grains and a pinch of herbs. Simmer until hot. Then add the broccoli. Add a little water or vegetable stock if the mixture becomes too dry.

Quick pan-steam: If you don't have a steamer or cannot be bothered with one: In large sauté pan, bring ½ inch of water to a boil. Add broccoli, lower heat and simmer uncovered until slightly soft. Drain (most of the water will evaporate). Add olive oil, scallions and seasoning. Proceed with serving ideas above. Some vitamins may be lost but if time is short, this is a good option.

Steamed Vegetable Medleys

Estimate 2 cups of vegetables per person. Use what is in season or in your freezer

- Cauliflower divided into large pieces
- Broccoli divided into large pieces, tough stems peeled and sliced
- Carrots sliced on the bias about 1 inch
- Asparagus, tough stems peeled, sliced on the bias
- Fresh or frozen peas or beans

Standard accompaniments:

EVO olive oil: about 1 tablespoon for every 2 cups of vegetables

Scallions or onions, sliced: 2 tablespoons for every 2 cups of veg

Parsley, chopped: 2 tablespoons for every 2 cups of veg

Lemon juice, salt and black pepper and minced chili pepper to taste

Options to add just before serving for color and an extra dose of vitamin C: fresh tomatoes and/or sweet peppers, chopped

1. Steam tough vegetables first (cauliflower, broccoli, carrots) until slightly tender
2. Add delicate vegetables and steam 3 minutes more, depending on variety
3. Transfer vegetables to a large bowl and immediately add the olive oil and seasonings. Serve with lemon juice and enjoy!

Gigantes - Butter Bean Stew

Gigantes (giant beans) is a classic Greek dish. Butter beans is the familiar name. They are shaped like lima beans (from Peru) except they are larger, light golden with a softer skin and sweeter taste. White beans work for this dish too. You can either oven-braise the beans or cook them on the stovetop.

1 pound butter beans
1 large onion, diced
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 celery stalks, diced
3 carrots, sliced
4 medium tomatoes, diced
1 lemon, juiced
½ cup olive oil
4 cups chicken or vegetable stock
1 bay leaf
1/2 cup fresh parsley, chopped
1/8 cup fresh dill, chopped
salt & pepper to taste

1. Soak the beans overnight in a stockpot of water. Drain, rinse and add fresh water to cover.
2. Simmer over medium heat for 30 minutes, drain, rinse and reserve.
3. In the stockpot, sauté onions in olive oil until golden.

4. Add garlic, carrots, celery and sauté 5 minutes more.
5. Add remaining ingredients except for the herbs. Bring to a boil, lower heat and simmer until tender (about 1 hour).
6. Add herbs and cook 5 minutes more.

Serve hot or at RT. Keeps for 3 days under refrigeration.



Omelets

Omelets can be the star of a meal. Very free-roaming chickens provide organic eggs for our enjoyment. In Crete, omelets are prepared like a frittata, with vegetables in season like wild asparagus. We slice them like pie and savor with a salad. Omelets are wonderful with tomatoes or yogurt on the side, or cooked with feta cheese.

Basic technique for 2 to 4 people:

2 tablespoons EVO olive oil *
 2 medium potatoes, thinly sliced lengthwise
 or 2 medium zucchini, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick
 or 2 cups asparagus, sliced into 2-inch pieces
 or 2 cups spinach, chopped
 or...whatever vegetable you like with eggs
 6 eggs, whipped with the following:
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon each of salt, black pepper, and turmeric
 Fresh parsley, chopped (to taste)

In a 10-inch sauté pan: Sauté 2 cups of vegetables until tender. Add eggs and seasonings you like. Sauté until eggs are golden brown. Turn the omelet over using a plate or pot cover. If there is not enough olive oil in the pan to keep eggs from sticking, add a little more before returning the omelet to the pan. Sauté until eggs solidify and turn golden brown.

*Note: If making a potato omelet, use 4 tablespoons of olive oil, and sauté until done. Drain all but 2 tablespoons of the oil and proceed with the recipe.



Part 2: Roasted Vegetable Meze, Favorite Dishes, Soups & Stews





As I mentioned earlier, I love the concept of traditional Cretan oven-roasting. Place food in the oven, seal shut (as Babbis is doing here with sand-paste) and walk away for a few hours until it's done.

This technique requires knowledge of ratios of moisture and fat to portion sizes for each dish, to achieve optimum results.



Chef-Owner, Niki, (Babbis's mother) presenting the results: gorgeous roast pork and potatoes, gemista (stuffed tomatoes and peppers) and other delicacies tucked into the oven. This technique can be replicated in modern ovens, to an extent. A few favorites coming up!

Roasted, Marinated Peppers

A refreshing and colorful meze or accompaniment to many dishes

3 sweet red bell peppers, stems removed
(or a combination of yellow and orange)
2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 Tablespoon vinegar
1 clove garlic, minced
salt & pepper

To roast: rub with a little olive oil, roast at 400F until the skin starts to blister (about 1 hour). Set aside to cool.

To grill: rub with olive oil, grill until the skin starts to blacken and blister. Place in a bowl and cover. Set aside to cool. If using different colored peppers, use separate bowls for each color.

1. Remove the skin, seeds and ribs. In most cases, there's a problem spot where the skin won't budge. Don't worry, it's edible.

2. In a bowl large enough to fit the peppers, whisk the olive oil, vinegar and seasonings. Add the peppers, cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Keeps for 1 week. Tastes great with brian and/or lamb chops. To add more color and nutrients to other dishes, slice the peppers and serve with vegetables such as steamed broccoli or roasted asparagus.



Roasted Potatoes

A simple and delicious dish

3 medium baking potatoes, scrubbed
or 12 new potatoes (the size of an egg)
3 tablespoons EVO olive oil
2 teaspoons dried oregano and/or thyme
or 2 tablespoons of fresh herbs, chopped
(oregano, thyme, rosemary)
1 teaspoon dried cumin
a pinch of cayenne pepper
½ teaspoon salt and black pepper

1. Preheat oven 375F
2. Cut the baking potatoes into large dice; or cut new potatoes in half.
3. Place in a large, heavy roasting pan. Coat with olive oil and seasonings.
4. Roast about 1 hour, occasionally shaking the pan (not stirring the potatoes). Let the potatoes caramelize (stick to the pan slightly). Gently scrape them off the bottom if necessary.



Note: For best, crispy-brown results, avoid agitating the potatoes. If not serving immediately, remove from the oven and re-heat when ready. Serves about 4 people. In the unlikely event of leftovers, refrigerate. Toss cold potatoes with mustard-vinaigrette, serve as is or with other vegetables.

Roasted Carrots

and other roasted vegetable ideas

Using the same technique as roasted potatoes, there's a long, delicious list of other vegetables to enjoy. They can be placed around the perimeter of a chicken already roasting in the oven, or just roasted on their own.

8 medium carrots, peeled and cut on the bias about 1 inch (see photo)
2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
2 teaspoons dried thyme, crushed
½ teaspoon dried cumin
½ teaspoon salt and pepper

1. Preheat oven 375 F.
2. Place carrots in a roasting pan large enough to line them in a single layer with room to breathe.
3. Mix with olive oil and spices.
4. Roast until golden brown (about 30 minutes). Turn them occasionally. Let them caramelize without much stirring.

As meze, serves about 4 people. Try with horta and good wine if you like!

Other vegetables that are fantastic using this technique: asparagus, sweet potatoes, turnips, summer or winter squash, especially butternut and acorn squash. Depending on the veg, they can be cut into chunks, strips (like fries) or rounds (chips). Children tend to love these vegetables because they are crispy. Experiment with other herbs and seasoning. Butternut squash with a little honey is excellent!



Roasted Beets

Beets are very popular in Crete. They are wonderful with meze of horta and sardines. They are usually boiled and served with olive oil and vinegar or home-canned. I also like roasted beets -- a treat from a Spanish chef-pal. The unique, earthy-herbal flavor of beets is wonderful with fresh onion, garlic and oranges.

2 bunches of beets (allow 2 medium-size beets per person)

3 Tablespoons EVO olive oil

(reserve 2 Tablespoons for later)

1 medium red onion, sliced

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

a pinch of salt & pepper

5. Add remaining ingredients, toss together. Serve warm, at RT or cold.

Serves 4 to 6 people as meze. To re-warm: sauté beets in olive oil for a few minutes. Add remaining ingredients. Keeps for 3-4 days under refrigeration. Also great in salads.

1. Preheat oven 375 F

2. Remove beet greens and reserve for horta later. Rinse and scrub beet roots and drain.

3. In a large baking pan, add the beets and coat with olive oil. Arrange them in a single layer with room to breathe.

4. Cover the pan with foil, roast until tender (about 1 hour). Cool, peel and cut into quarters.



Briam -- Roasted Summer Vegetables

Briam represents the bright and intense flavors of summer

3 medium Japanese eggplant, halved then sliced ¼ inch thick (see photo)
4 medium zucchini and/or yellow squash, sliced ½ inch thick
2 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed
4 medium tomatoes, chopped
1 large onion, halved then sliced
6 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons vegetable stock or water
¼ cup EVO olive oil
1 tablespoon ground cumin
1 tablespoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon hot red pepper
1 cup parsley, chopped (reserve ¼ cup for later)
1 cup basil, chopped (reserve ¼ cup)
Salt and black pepper to taste

Certain vegetables take longer to roast. Just cut them into smaller pieces.

1. Preheat oven 375F

2. Place all ingredients in a heavy baking pan large enough to hold them in a single layer. Mix together.

3. Bake until tender and lightly browned (about 1 hour). Shake the pan occasionally. Gently release vegetables that stick to the pan with a spatula. Turn them occasionally but do not stir.

4. Add herbs. Serve hot or at RT.

Goes great with broiled fish or lamb chops. Also a meal on its own.

Serves about 6 people as part of meze.



Grilled Vegetables

Summer squash varieties are wonderful for grilling. Cut them into thick slices and marinate first. You can also grill red onion slices or whole sweet peppers for a flavorful and colorful accompaniment. This is a general guideline for 4-6 people.

3 small Japanese eggplant, sliced lengthwise
3 small zucchini, sliced lengthwise
3 small yellow squash, sliced lengthwise

Basic Marinade:

½ cup EVO olive oil
¼ cup parsley, chopped
¼ cup basil, chopped
2 cloves garlic, mashed
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon black pepper

Garnish ideas:

1 small red onion, sliced
parsley and basil, chopped
1 tomato or sweet red pepper, chopped
Olives, sesame seeds or crumbled feta

In a large bowl, whisk the marinade ingredients. Add vegetables and mix. Marinate at room temperature for an hour, mixing occasionally. Reserve the marinade. Grill the vegetables over medium fire until bubbling and brown. Place them on the perimeter of the grill, not directly above fire/heat. Serve with reserved marinade and garnish.



Quick Vegetable and Sausage Stew

A Salute to Prep Cooks and Stir-Fry Techniques

During winter, I crave something in between soup and stew that is not too thick or thin, and not so heavy that I have to recline soon after dinner. Stews usually take over an hour to prepare -- this is when prep work is ideal. I prefer a higher ratio of vegetables. That is the opposite ratio of most Northern European/USA stews, but is the formula for many Cretan stews. Since fresh veg options are minimal in winter, my template combines a few cooking techniques to create stews full of flavor and texture. Replace the potatoes with pasta and you have a great sauce template. Omit the meat and this is a vegetarian template.

3 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 medium onion, halved and sliced
1 medium bell pepper, halved and sliced
3 cloves garlic, chopped
½ teaspoon each dried cumin, turmeric and thyme
a pinch each of salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper
½ cup sausage and/or mushrooms, diced (or pre-cooked chicken or pork)
2 medium potatoes, boiled in their skins until tender, peeled and cubed
1 cup pre-cooked vegetables like roasted carrots or frozen veg that cook quickly
1/4 cup parsley and/or other delicate greens like spinach, chopped
1/2 cup thick, organic vegetable or chicken stock

In a stockpot over medium heat, sauté onions in olive oil and salt until golden. Add sausage, mushrooms, bell pepper, garlic and spices, sauté 3 minutes. Add potatoes and sauté 2 minutes so they absorb the aromatics and glisten. Add the remaining ingredients. Simmer for 5 minutes to let the flavors meld. Serves 2 to 4 people, depending on whether this is a meal or part of meze.

Rich Chicken-Vegetable Soup

(fast track without sacrificing flavor)

I love homemade organic chicken-vegetable soup. Where I live in Crete, there is no such thing as canned chicken stock. Salty cubes are available at markets, but they are no substitute for the real deal. Although chicken stock is easy to make, when I'm in the USA and don't have time, this is my solution. There are options in markets now for rich, organic chicken stock. It can be used for many other dishes.

3 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
2 medium carrots, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ teaspoon salt, and black pepper to taste
1 teaspoon dried thyme
2 medium-size chicken breasts or 4 thighs, skinned, boned and diced
1 quart rich chicken stock
½ cup parsley, chopped (reserve half for later)
1-16 ounce can of white beans, rinsed and drained
½ cup rice or ½ pound of thick egg noodles
1 lemon, juiced (reserve for serving)

In a stockpot over medium heat, sauté onion, carrots and garlic until golden (5 min). Add chicken, sauté until golden (5 min). Add remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, until the rice or noodles are cooked (10-20 min). If the soup seems too thick, add a little stock. Add parsley and lemon juice. Serves about 4 people, depending on whether this is a meal or starter.

Avgolemeno Soup (chicken soup with egg-lemon froth)

The key to this recipe is fresh and organic ingredients. Avgo means egg.

1 medium organic chicken (about 4 pounds)

1-1/2 quarts of water

½ cup small grain rice

½ teaspoon salt

3 large eggs, separated

1/2 cup fresh lemon juice

To make the stock:

1. In a large pot, simmer the chicken in water and salt until done (about 1 hour).
2. Remove the chicken, divide into serving pieces, cover and keep in a low oven.
3. Add the rice to the stock and simmer until tender (about 20 minutes).
4. Remove from the heat but keep warm.

Meanwhile, prepare the avgolemeno:

1. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg yolks until smooth.
2. In a large bowl with a towel underneath, whip the egg whites to soft peaks.
3. Gradually whisk the yolks into the whites, then whisk in the lemon juice.
4. Continue whisking while adding one ladle of hot stock in a very slow stream. This process of “tempering” the eggs prevents them from curdling. Repeat with one more ladle of hot stock.
5. Gently pour the egg sauce over the soup. Swirl the pot but do not stir. You’re objective is to prevent the air bubbles from breaking, and form a nice blanket of froth. Do not bring the soup to boil, that will curdle the eggs.
6. Serve immediately with chicken and lemon wedges. Serves 6 people.

Lentil Soup on the Lighter Side

For me, this soup is dinner. This version includes complementary ingredients. Lentils stand up to other powerful flavors. They are a good source of iron, and vitamin C enhances absorption. My objective is to retain individual flavors. Omit the meat and it's vegetarian.

2 tablespoons EVO olive oil
1 large onion, diced (reserve 3 tablespoons for later)
1 cup fresh mushrooms, diced
2 medium carrots, diced
1 medium bell pepper, diced (reserve 2 tablespoons)
½ cup robust organic sausage, diced
4 cloves garlic, minced (reserve 2 teaspoons)
1 teaspoon each of dried cumin, thyme and oregano
½ teaspoon fresh chili pepper, minced (or a pinch of dried)
2 medium tomatoes, diced (reserve ½ cup) or 16 oz can whole tomatoes, crushed
½ cup lentils (any variety available)
¼ cup uncooked rice (or pre-cooked brown rice, wild rice or barley)
½ cup red wine
5 cups rich beef or vegetable stock
1 bay leaf
Salt, black pepper and fresh parsley to taste

In a stockpot over medium heat, sauté onions until soft (3 min). Add mushrooms, carrots, bell pepper, sausage and sauté until lightly browned (5 min). Add the garlic and sauté until you can smell it (you don't want it to brown). Clear a space in the bottom of the pot, add the cumin and leave it for 15 seconds. Add the remaining ingredients, and bring to a gentle boil. Lower the heat, cover, simmer until lentils are soft (about 30 min). Remove from heat, add the reserved vegetables. Serve with toast (paximadi is perfect with lentils!), horta or salad. Serves 4 to 6 people.

Potato Soup with Mushrooms and Greens

Potato-based soups are another favorite. Over the years, I've experimented on variations that suit my changing palate, address and availability of ingredients. This recipe incorporates flavor memories of a few countries in each luscious bite without the heaviness of a butter-cream formula. The comforting aroma of potatoes and onions is complemented by other ingredients for balance and texture. The organic sausage is from a well-known source. It's simply minced lean pork and veal with spices and vinegar. Any mild organic sausage will work, or use chicken thighs. Avoid heavily smoked sausage; it will overpower other ingredients. The vegetarian version is excellent too; just use robust vegetable stock.

2 tablespoons of EVO olive oil
2 medium onions, chopped (or 6 large leeks, chopped)
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup fresh mushrooms, diced
½ cup mild organic sausage, diced (use any meat you prefer)
OR 2 fresh chicken thighs, skinned, boned and diced
4 medium baking potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 teaspoon each dried thyme and turmeric
6 cups chicken stock
½ cup parsley, chopped (save half for garnish)
½ teaspoon each of salt, black pepper
a pinch of hot chili pepper
1 cup fresh greens, chopped (such as spinach, chard or kale)

Potato Soup, continued

1. In a heavy stockpot over medium heat, sauté onions in olive oil and a pinch of salt until golden.
 2. Add mushrooms and sausage, sauté until their aroma fills the air. Brown them lightly to develop an aromatic base (about 5 minutes).
 3. Add garlic, sauté 2 minutes.
 4. Add potatoes, stir to absorb the other flavors for 3 minutes.
 5. Add stock and remaining ingredients except the greens. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally until potatoes are soft (about 30 min). Add more stock if it becomes too thick.
 6. Using a potato masher, ladle or spatula, mash some of the ingredients against the bottom and sides of the pot. This creates a thick soup-stew without being heavy.
 7. Add greens, simmer until tender (3-10 minutes, depending on the greens).
- Garnish with parsley, oregano or thyme. Serve with whole grain toast or paximadi.

Whole Grain Toast

4 thick slices of fresh (or fresh-frozen) whole grain bread
3 teaspoons EVO olive oil
1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
a pinch of salt and black pepper

Preheat oven 350F. Line bread slices on a cookie sheet or large baking pan. Drizzle olive over them. Sprinkle with spices, rub one against the other to coat both sides. Bake until dry and browned so they retain their crispiness in the soup. Break into pieces and add to soup in stages. This toast can also be a base for quick "pizza."

Grilled Fish with Latholemeno (olive oil and lemon sauce)

Fresh fish, simply grilled or roasted, is a pure taste of the sea. Delicious results can be achieved with whole fish for single portions or larger varieties to share. Whole grilled fish retains its flavor and moisture. Grilling fish perfectly is an art. The more you respect the species you are working with, the more of an expert you will be. I also like to roast whole fish or fillets -- coat with olive oil, cover the pan and roast at 450F. Cooking time depends on the fish. Not all of us live near waterways to witness what has just been sustainably harvested. At the market, ask the people selling your fish. They should know. Fish should be so fresh that when you look into its clear eyes, you could swear it blinked at you. The gills should be muted red. If you press the flesh and it feels mushy or leaves a dent, eat something else.

½ pound fish per person, scaled and gutted
(snapper, bream, grouper)
1 cup EVO olive oil (and extra to coat the fish)
½ cup fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped
½ teaspoon sea salt

Prep grill for medium heat with a rack 6 inches above. Whisk olive oil and lemon juice until thick. Add dill. Have your accompaniments ready. Fish waits for no one. Make 2 diagonal, ¼ inch deep slits in flesh of the fish on each side. Brush with olive oil. Grill for 4 to 6 minutes until the juice in the cavity starts to coagulate. Gently turn the fish over. Grill 3 to 5 minutes. Don't forget carry-over cooking. Remove from fire, de-bone. Serve with latholemeno.





In some regions of the world, certain types of fish have fallen out of favor. Due to over-fishing and toxins in our waterways, I hesitate to recommend one variety over another. Not all fish farms are created equal or sustainable. We are what we eat -- what fish ingest, we ingest too, including toxins like mercury. Is any level of toxins safe for any species? The bigger the fish, the more toxic buildup.

What I can say is that we love small fish varieties in Crete. Sardines are great grilled or roasted. Whitebait, mackerel, calamari and other seafood is simply shallow fried in olive oil. As long as these varieties exist in our sea, we will enjoy them.

Many seafood varieties are extinct or endangered due to pollution and over-harvesting. If we think about the fundamentals of our food chain, it boils down to acknowledging that humans are usually responsible for obliterating food sources -- ours and that of many other species. We can prevent unnecessary loss of our planet's food supply. It is for our own benefit to implement solutions immediately.

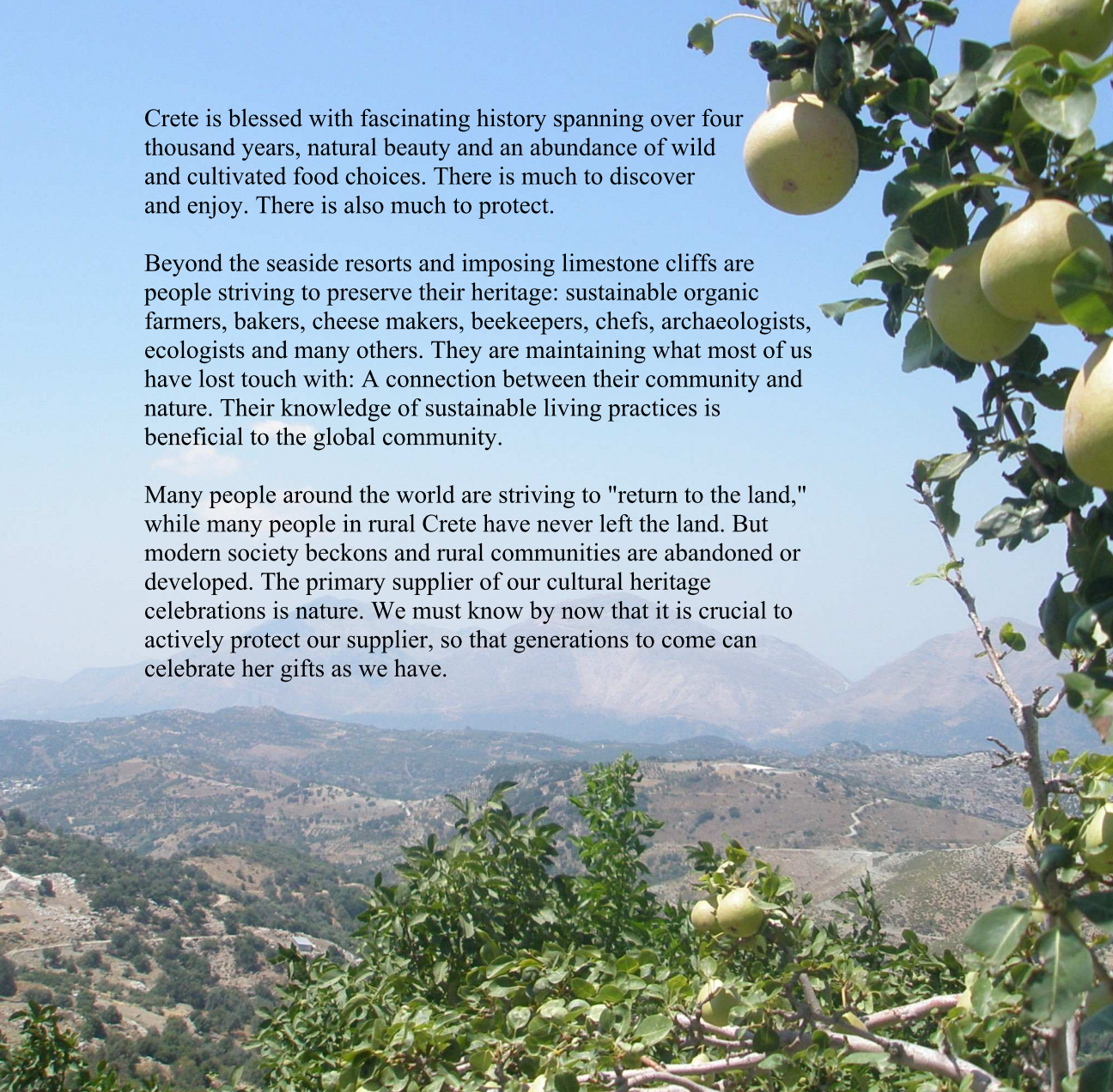
Traditional grilling techniques in Crete are fascinating and delicious. Alas, they are impractical for most people today, particularly due to scarcity of fuel (trees). For those that carry on these traditions, it is truly a labor of love -- that we truly appreciate.

One technique is *ofto* (photo 1). Large cuts of meat are grilled vertically on the perimeter of the fire. This grilling technique works indoors as well (photo 2). Manolis's bread oven is above-left. An efficient kitchen.

Another grilling method is *antikristo* (photo 3), where the fire pit could be gigantic for a party of 1,000 people or a small circular model. Skewered lamb or goat surrounds the perimeter of the fire. When it's cooked on one side, it is moved to the other.

Grilling large cuts of meat works well if you are partying with a couple hundred neighbors, as we often do in Crete. It was also practical for our ancestors, since grilling small cuts of meat for a crowd requires more prep space, time, butchers and cooks. One thing we usually do is serve grilled meat with lemon and oregano. Elaborate sauces are unacceptable.



A scenic view of a Cretan landscape. In the foreground, a tree with green leaves and several large, round, green fruits (likely pomegranates) is visible. The background shows a vast, hilly landscape with mountains under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Crete is blessed with fascinating history spanning over four thousand years, natural beauty and an abundance of wild and cultivated food choices. There is much to discover and enjoy. There is also much to protect.

Beyond the seaside resorts and imposing limestone cliffs are people striving to preserve their heritage: sustainable organic farmers, bakers, cheese makers, beekeepers, chefs, archaeologists, ecologists and many others. They are maintaining what most of us have lost touch with: A connection between their community and nature. Their knowledge of sustainable living practices is beneficial to the global community.

Many people around the world are striving to "return to the land," while many people in rural Crete have never left the land. But modern society beckons and rural communities are abandoned or developed. The primary supplier of our cultural heritage celebrations is nature. We must know by now that it is crucial to actively protect our supplier, so that generations to come can celebrate her gifts as we have.

Recipe Index

*listed in order of appearance
in addition to recipe ideas shared throughout this book*

Cabbage Salad, 67
Purple Cabbage, Walnut and
Orange Salad, 68
Mixed Greens and Carrot Salad, 69
Marouli with Dill - Romaine Lettuce, 70
Horiatiki - Greek Salad, 71
Roka Salata - Arugula, 73
Summer Salad - Template, 74
Bean Salads - Variations, 75
Black-Eyed Pea Salad, 75
Lentil Salad with Sweet Peppers
and Scallions, 76
Fava, General Info, 77
Fava Bean Purée, 78
Split Yellow Pea Purée, 78
Tzatziki - Yogurt and Cucumber
Sauce, 79
Yogurt Sauces - Variations, 80
Almond-Yogurt Salad, 80
Yogurt-Purslane Salad, 80
Melitzanosalata - Eggplant Salad, 81-82
Horta - Wild Greens, 83-84
Fresh String Bean and Zucchini Stew, 85
Fresh String Bean Salad, 86
Steamed Artichokes with Latholemeno, 87

Raw Artichoke Preparation, 88
Braised Artichoke Hearts - Template, 89
Artichoke Heart and Bean Stew, 90
Steamed Broccoli - Template, 91
Steamed Vegetable Medleys, 92
Gigantes - Butter Bean Stew, 93
Omelets, Variations, 94
Roasted Vegetables, General Info, 95-96
Roasted Marinated Peppers, 97
Roasted Potatoes, 98
Roasted Carrots
and other roasted veg ideas, 99
Roasted Beets, 100
Briam - Roasted Summer Vegetables, 101
Grilled Vegetables, 102
Quick Vegetable and Sausage Stew, 103
Rich Chicken-Vegetable Soup, 104
Avgolemeno Soup, 105
Lentil Soup on the Lighter Side, 106
Potato Soup with Mushrooms
and Greens, 107-108
Whole-Grain Toast, 108
Grilled Fish with Latholemeno, 109
Seafood - General Prep Ideas, 110
Grilling - General Info, 111

Appendix: Resources for environmental protection, organic food and food safety information. Short list. Updates are on Nikki Rose's website. www.cookingincrete.com/Links

Online Resources to Find Real Food (USA and Global)

Local Harvest.com (USA)
Food Routes.org
Edible Communities.com
Heritage Foods USA.com
Int'l Fed. of Organic Agricultural Movements IFOAM.org
Organic Consumers Association, organicconsumers.org
Growing Power.org, founded by Will Allen (USA)*

Farming, Food Safety, Labor (books and online)

The Jungle, Upton Sinclair (1906)
Silent Spring, Rachel Carson (1962)
Joel Salatin, Farmer, Activist, polyfacefarm.com*
Eliot Coleman, fourseasonfarm.com*
Aldo Leopold (and Foundation), leopold.iastate.edu*
Peliti, Seed Savers-Farm, Greece, peliti.gr*
How to Grow More Vegetables, John Jeavons, growbiointensive.org*
Biodynamic Growing Guide, aracariaguides.com*
Vandana Shiva
Micro Eco-Farming, Barbara Berst Adams*
This Organic Life, Joan Dye Gussow*
Wendell Berry, Author and Farmer*
Fields of Plenty, Michael Ableman*
Tom Philpott, Grist magazine and other publications*
Seeds of Deception, Jeffrey Smith
Appetite for Profit, Michele Simon
Food Politics, Marion Nestle
Fast Food Nation, Eric Schlosser
Stuffed and Starved, Raj Patel
The Legacy, David Suzuki
The Omega Diet, Lifesaving Nutritional Program Based on the Diet of the Island of Crete, A. Simopoulos, J. Robinson
The Omnivores' Dilemma, Michael Pollan
Recipe for America, Jill Richardson

*Noted Farmer-Authors

Real Food Advocacy Groups

Environmental Working Group, ewg.org
Food Democracy Now.org
Pesticide Action Network
Center for Media and Democracy, prwatch.org
Government Accountability Project, whistleblower.org
Chef's Collaborative
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Soil Association (UK)
Food & Water Watch
William Marler, Esq., Marler Blog.com
Underground Wellness.com
La Via Campesina, viacampesina.org

Food Origins, Preparation, Nutrition

Mediterranean Diet, Initial Research:
Ancel Keys, Serge Renaud, Michel de Lorgeril
On Food and Cooking, Harold McGee
The Way to Cook, Julia Child
The World's Healthiest Foods, George Mateljan
The Penguin Atlas of Food, Erik Millstone, Tim Lang

Tourism: Sustainable, Responsible (which should always include organic agriculture/sustainably sourced food)

Publications Nikki Rose has contributed to or is featured in:
National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations
ECOCLUB.com
The New Agritourism, B. Adams
Le Guide Des Destinations Indigenes, S. Blangy
Lonely Planet Guidebook to Crete, V. Kyriakopoulos
The Jungle Effect, Daphne Miller
30 Secrets of the World's Healthiest Cuisines, S. Jonas, MD, S. Gordon
Meet and Eat in Crete, Dining Guide, meetandeatguides.com
World Tourism Forum for Peace and Sustainable Development: Case Study, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries
World Travel and Tourism Council
United Nations-CBD International Year of Biodiversity Success Stories
National Public Radio, Mediterranean Diet Feature

Dedicated to The Committee
With much love to my wonderful brothers, sister, nephews
and family that extends beyond the bloodline and galaxy



The renowned traditional healthy cuisine of Crete is not a phenomenon. It's a matter of respecting the land and sea -- the gifts nature provides. Every chef is only as great as their ingredients. The foundation of Mediterranean Diet concepts is fresh, organic food and a clean environment. That foundation is at risk in Crete and around the world. Everything on Earth depends on our protection of our environment -- the source of precious clean food and water.

So many people have visited me in Crete, looking for secret ingredients in our cuisine that they can bring home with them. But in many cases, they need not search any further than their own local resources for wonderful, sustainably harvested-produced food. The benefits of traditional Cretan cuisine are more than ingredients -- the recipe begins with enjoying flavors of the seasons with good company.

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet helps us find ways to connect with dedicated people that provide our delicious safe food and simply enjoy the benefits and flavor.

-- Nikki Rose

