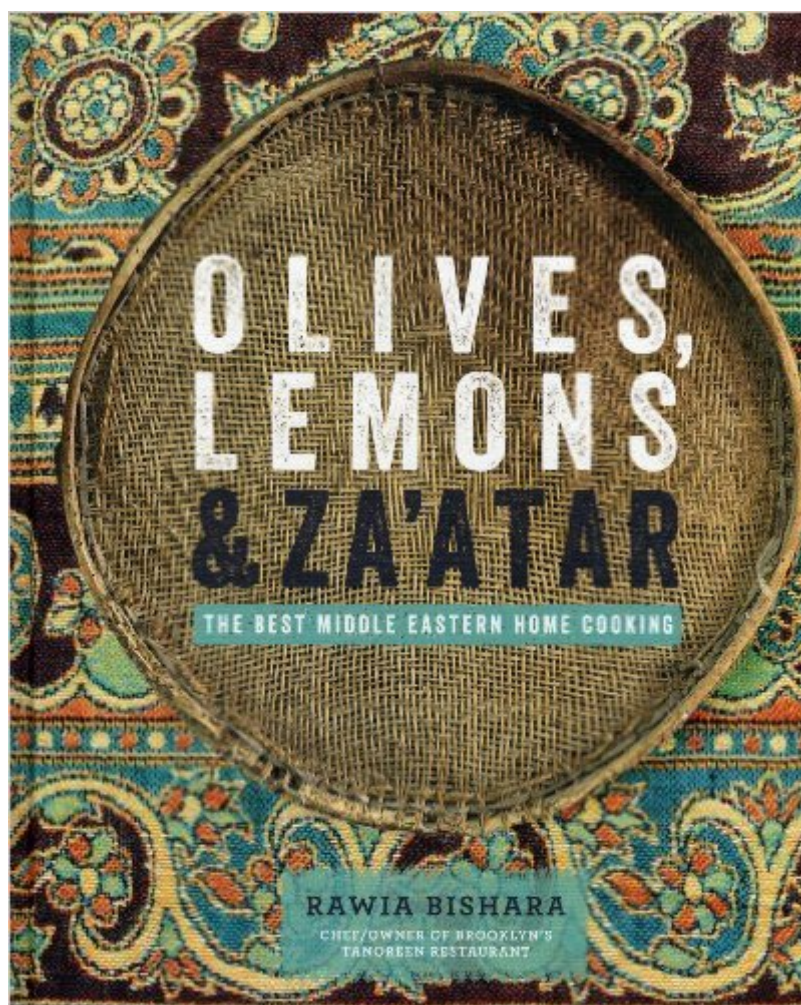


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Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking



Synopsis

Rawia, in Arabic, means storyteller. And that is what I am. I tell the stories of my life's journey, culture, and family through my cooking. A delicious meal is the greatest companion to the memories we cherish most. I was born into a food-loving Palestinian-Arab family in Nazareth, a beautiful town in the southern Galilee. Though the words "organic," "locavore," and "sustainable" were unknown then, my parents' approach qualified on all counts. My respect for the sources of food, how it is grown and prepared, originates in my early years at home. My grandmother had ceramic urns filled with fruity olive oil, pressed from the trees on her family's land picked by my aunts and uncles. My mother, too, made her own olive oil, and used the remaining "crude" oil to make soap; she also distilled her own vinegar, sun-dried her own herbs and fruits, made fresh batches of goat cheese, as well as sweet wine from our vineyards, and jarred jewel-colored jams from the bounty of the local orchards. After moving to New York, I opened my restaurant Tanoreen to honor my mother and her imaginative cooking as well as the rich Middle Eastern gastronomic culture that is rarely experienced outside the region. Tanoreen is unique because it showcases Middle Eastern home cooking as I experienced it growing up. The 135 recipes in this book celebrate tradition and embrace change. I cook without rigidly following recipes, though I do respect tradition. My dishes are based on our culture's recipes that are flexible enough to accommodate both adventurous and conservative contemporary palates. Organized by Breakfasts, Mezze, Salads, Soups and Stews, Main Courses (including vegetarian, fish, chicken, lamb and beef), Sides, Pickles and Sauces, and Desserts, in each chapter I maintain the authenticity of a dish, re-creating it as it has been made for generations; but sometimes I might opt to experiment a bit, to make the recipe more contemporary, perhaps adding a spice or offering a few shortcuts. My favorite examples of these are my preparation of Brussels Sprouts with Panko (and tahini), Spice Rubbed Braised Lamb Shank (marinated in ginger and rose buds), Tanoreen Kafta Roll, (a reconstructed classic) or Eggplant Napoleon (baba ghanouge layered between crisp eggplant and topped with basil and tomatoes). A dish like Egyptian Rice with Lamb and Pine Nuts shows this cookbook goes beyond Nazareth, and is more of a bible of Middle Eastern food, sharing my culinary journey from Nazareth to New York, with many stops in between.

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Customer Reviews

I'm familiar with food from this region and was really excited about trying out some of her recipes. The cookbook is beautiful. Unfortunately, I found problems with some of the recipes I tried. I *have* to think that this is something to do with the editing and not the real recipes because in some cases, the instructions just seem wrong. Examples (1) The recipe for split pea soup (shorabit bazzela, page 89) says to add **15 cups of water** when the soup only contains 2 cups of dried split peas (and only 1/2 tsp salt). Even if you add 10 cups of water, you'll end up with a really watery, bland soup - not the slightly thickened soup shown in the picture. I had to reduce the liquid A LOT and add more salt to make it look and taste right. (2) Beet salad (salatet shamandar, page 69) was too oily even with half the oil added and the instructions, which say "toss to coat", will not reproduce the beautiful salad in the picture. (3) Rice and vermicelli pilaf (page 182) says to use 1 lb of vermicelli. I used 12 oz and it was too much. There is also no way that 1 lb vermicelli, 4 cups rice, and 9 cups water will fit in a "medium pot". I had to switch over to the biggest pot I have. (4) Okra with tomatoes (bamyia belzait, page 180) came out ok except I added half the lemon juice and half the oil but that's just personal taste, I suppose. (5) The hummus recipe (page 36) was good but I did add less garlic and lemon juice which is just a personal taste thing. I regularly use other people's recipes without a problem but I had to struggle with the ones in this book. If you follow the instructions exactly, you will run into some issues. I highly recommend checking it out from the library first, if you are thinking of buying it.

Full disclosure - I have been a loyal customer of Rawia's incredible Tanoreen restaurant since the old days when it occupied a tiny storefront. It remains a favorite of my friends and family and "must" for any visit with us. It defined the "Brooklyn" brand long before the hipsters got hold of it. When Rawia shared with us that a cookbook was in the works, I was very excited. And the fruit of her

labors does not disappoint. The book is as beautiful and warm as the woman and I cannot wait to start cooking and experimenting. Somehow, I doubt that my versions will move those at my table to the stunned silence that overtakes guests at Tanoreen, but I will give it my best. Some things worth noting: while the recipes look well-written and fairly precise, options are given for cooks with limited access to some of the specialty ingredients and suggestions are given for playing with the flavors. (I like books that understand the limitations of a home kitchen). Wonderful tips pepper the book throughout, along with personal stories and memories that give great color to the book and make it very readable. So far, I made the scrambled eggs with halloumi, to great success. I'll never be the great chef that Rawia is, but no matter where life takes me, I love that I have a piece of Tanoreen to take with me.

There are some really good recipes here, the Arabic bread, the feta salad, the hummus, for example. But often the recipe amounts are huge, particularly for the desserts. The flower-scented custard...requires a cup of cornstarch and a teaspoon of mastic (I have never used more than a couple of grains of mastic, which is very bitter when used to excess). Even the bread requires 6 cups of flour, and you wind up making bread all day. If you have a small family and don't entertain a lot, be prepared to scale down the amounts A LOT!

I've been going Tanoreen for years and the food is so good and is literally the best homemade Middle Eastern food. If you are ever in NYC, I highly recommend that you dine at Tanoreen at least once. I was super excited when Chef Rawia released this cook book. The photos are stunning and her stories about her family and the foods of the Levant are great introductions to the food and culture of the region. The recipes include some of my favorite dishes from Tanoreen including the Brussels sprouts, chicken getting, and stuffed cabbage. They are easy to follow and Rawia also provides detailed information on the spices and common ingredients that you will need. Most if not all can easily be found at a Middle Eastern grocery store, Whole Foods, or .com. So far, I've cooked several recipes from the book and my family and I found them to be delicious. The lentil and butternut squash stew, kale and shallots, fattoush, beef and white bean stews, seasoned garlic sauce, and the lentil soup are delicious. I look forward to diving into the other recipes and you and your family will certainly be satisfied with this cookbook, which is now one of my favorites.

Olives, Lemons & Za'atar is not only one of the most beautiful cookbooks that I have recently seen (with its atmospheric on location photographs in Israel and succulent food photography) but is also

filled some of the best, authentic Middle Eastern recipes. I am a big fan of Rawia Bishara and her Brooklyn restaurant Tanoreen. And it is a pure cooking pleasure to be able to bring her recipes into my kitchen. I recently served several recipes at a dinner including several of the dips, salads, and the incredible tagine and everything was a hit! This cookbook is a keeper!

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