

Not Your Grandmother's Kugel

(or how Sephardim use lots of vegetables and a few eggs to make flavorful *and* healthy casseroles)

with Susan Barocas

ANCHUSA

For my dear friend Jean Graubart, like me Sephardic via Spain and then the Ottoman Empire, *anchusa* is part of her family Passover traditions. It was made pareve for seder and dairy for breakfast or lunch. A typical Turkish Jewish breakfast would be to serve it with *huevos haminados* (the long-cooked hard-boiled eggs) and melon. Jean likes her anchusa very thin and crispy. I have adapted the recipe to make it a bit thicker and more substantial, but you still want to bake it to a crusty top. The onions are critical here, so don't skimp on them and feel free to add even more. The farfel or matzah can be omitted if preferred.

2 16-ounce bags frozen chopped spinach, defrosted
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 large onions, diced
4 large eggs, beaten
1 cup matzo farfel or 1 1/2 sheets matzah, crumbled into small pieces (optional)
1 teaspoon salt or to taste
1/2 teaspoon pepper or to taste
1/2 cup shredded kashkaval or sharp cheddar cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put the spinach in a strainer to drain. In the meantime, heat 2 tablespoons oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat and fry onions, stirring occasionally, until golden brown. As they are cooking, squeeze out all the moisture out of the spinach with your hands or the back of a large spoon. Put spinach in a mixing bowl. Add fried onions to spinach and mix well. Add the beaten eggs, farfel or matzo pieces, salt and pepper and stir with a spoon until everything is very well blended.

For a dairy meal, add cheese into the mixture now before baking. Another option is to melt grated cheese on top of the *anchusa* during last 10-15 minutes of baking.

Put remaining 2 tablespoons oil in a 9x12-inch glass baking dish and heat in the oven for 3 to 4 minutes. When the pan is very hot, take it out of the oven and quickly spoon the mixture into the baking dish, hearing it sizzle. This will help ensure a crusty bottom. Gently smooth the top. Bake, uncovered, until turning golden brown and crusty, about 45 minutes. Serve hot, room temperature or cold.

TO MAKE THE ANCHUSA ALONG WITH CHEF SUSAN, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING IN ADVANCE OF THE PROGRAM:

- Have all the ingredients and equipment mentioned in the recipe at the ready for your cooking including the onions diced, eggs well beaten and matzah crumbled, if using and left separate.
- Have your large frying pan and baking dish nearby.
- Go ahead and squeeze all the moisture out of the spinach and put it in a large mixing bowl. Save the spinach liquid from the draining and squeezing to add to soups and sauces. You can refrigerate or freeze the liquid until you are ready to use it.

QUAJADO DE PRASA Leek and Potato Casserole

Quajado – *kuajado* in Ladino, aka *sfontato* or *asfontato* – is traditionally made with vegetables, eggs and cheese, although the cheese can be left out to create a non-dairy dish. The dish makes a good vegetarian main course for brunch or a lighter dinner along with a salad. Because it holds up well to cutting and is enjoyable served at room temperature as well as hot, it's also a good side dish, buffet offering or, when cut into small squares, an appetizer. Satisfying any time, *quajado* is especially popular at Passover when eating leeks is part of the Sephardic tradition. It works best to use starchy potatoes that mash well.

4-5 large Russet or Yukon gold potatoes (about 3 pounds)
6 to 7 leeks (3-3 1/2 pounds)
1 large or 2 medium carrots, shredded (about 3/4 cup)
5 large eggs, well beaten
1 teaspoon salt (less if using feta or another salty cheese)
1/2 to 1 teaspoon ground black pepper or to taste
3/4 cup crumbled feta or shredded hard cheese such as parmesan or kashkaval (optional)
2 tablespoons + 1 teaspoon olive oil

Peel and cut potatoes into even pieces about 1" in size. Set aside in a bowl of cold water.

Cut off dark green tops of the leeks and save for making vegetable stock. (Wash and store in the freezer until ready to use.) Cut off the roots at the very end of each leek. Pull off a couple of the tough outer layers of the leek, wash and save for stock. Split each leek lengthwise and then cut across into half-inch pieces, resulting in 8-9 cups of leek pieces. Place in a strainer and wash well under cold water. Set the strainer into a large bowl and fill with cold water. Swish the leek pieces with your hand, then let stand a few minutes so the dirt settles the bottom of the bowl. Lift out the strainer and rinse again under cool running water. Toss and mix the leeks, checking for remaining dirt. If needed, rinse the bowl well and repeat the process.

Place a steamer basket into a very large pot with a few inches of water that does not come over the bottom of the steamer. Bring the water to a boil and put the potato pieces in the basket first, then the leeks on top. (By steaming, you eliminate a lot of the moisture the leeks get from boiling.) Cover the pot, turn the heat to medium low and let the potatoes and leeks cook about 20 minutes until both are soft.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Put the cooked leeks and potatoes into a large mixing bowl and mash together very well. Mix in the shredded carrots if using. Add the beaten eggs, salt, pepper and cheese and stir to combine well.

Swirl 2 tablespoons oil in a 9x12-inch glass baking dish, then place it in the hot oven for 3 to 4 minutes. Heating the pan with the oil helps create a crust on the bottom and sides of the casserole. Once the baking dish is hot, carefully remove it from the oven. Working quickly, pour in the leek-potato mixture and spread it out evenly, patting the top smooth. Lightly brush the top with the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Bake, uncovered, for about 45-50 minutes, or until the center is firm and the edges golden brown.

Let cool for about 10 minutes before cutting, if serving immediately. Serve warm or at room temperature. Cooked *quajado* can be refrigerated for up to 5 days or frozen for up to 6 weeks. To serve, defrost and heat in a 350-degree oven, covered for the first 10 minutes, then uncovered for another 10 minutes or until heated through.

Note: Other vegetables can be used in various combinations totaling 3 to 4 cups including raw shredded zucchini (salt, let stand for 15-20 min, then squeeze out as much liquid as possible), blanched chopped spinach (also with liquid squeezed out) or roasted, drained and mashed eggplants.

Tip: If you're really in a rush, 4 cups instant mashed potatoes can be substituted for preparing 3 pounds of fresh potatoes. Reduce the liquid to just enough to wet and mix in all the flakes so the mixture is dry.

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CAULIFLOWER KUKU

A *kuku* is a Persian egg-based, usually vegetarian dish similar to a frittata or omelet, but with a higher ratio of vegetables and lots of fresh herbs. Often cooked in an iron pan, this recipe uses a larger baking dish to feed a crowd or have delicious leftovers that also freeze well. The dish can be served as the center of a vegetarian brunch, lunch or dinner or a side dish to any meal or cut into small squares for an appetizer. The traditional way to eat kuku is with sliced radishes, additional fresh herbs and yogurt. The whole thing is often encased in fresh flatbread.

2 medium yellow or white onions, diced (about 3 cups)
2 medium heads cauliflower (4 to 4 1/2 pounds)
2 cups chopped mixed fresh herbs such as parsley, basil, dill or cilantro (2 to 3 ounces)
4 tablespoons olive oil
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste
1/2 teaspoon pepper or to taste
8 large eggs
1 cup crumbled feta (about 5 ounces) or shredded parmesan (about 3 ounces) (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Wash the cauliflower and pat dry. Cut the head in half from top to bottom, then cut the florets away from the core and coarsely chop the florets. Dice small any stems attached to the florets as well as the entire core.

Wash and dry the herbs. Break or cut off just the largest stems of parsley, cilantro or dill, then chop the leaves and more slender stems small, but not too fine. Pick the basil leaves off the stems and chiffonade, cutting it into long, thin ribbons.

In a large skillet over medium heat, add 2 tablespoons oil over medium heat and heat until shimmering. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion becomes soft and translucent, but not browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Add the garlic and cumin, stirring until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the chopped cauliflower and mix to combine. Cook, stirring occasionally, until cauliflower is softened to al dente, about 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the salt, pepper and chopped herbs and mix well.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs until just starting to foam. Add the cauliflower mixture and cheese, if using, and mix well.

Swirl 2 tablespoons oil in a 9x12-inch glass baking dish, then place it in the hot oven for 3 to 4 minutes. Heating the pan with the oil helps create a crust on the bottom and sides of the casserole. Once the baking dish is hot, carefully remove it from the oven. Working quickly, pour in the cauliflower mixture and spread it out evenly, patting the top smooth. Lightly brush the top with the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Bake, uncovered, for about 45-50 minutes, or until the center is firm and the edges golden brown.

Let cool for about 10 minutes before cutting, if serving immediately. Serve warm or at room temperature. Cooked kuku can be refrigerated for up to 5 days or frozen for up to 1 month. To serve, defrost if needed and heat in a 350-degree oven, covered for the first 10 minutes, then uncovered, for another 10 minutes or until heated through.

Tip: You can vary the kinds and quantity of herbs. Chopping the herbs by hand is the best option so they don't get too finely chopped in a food processor.

*Questions, comments, feedback? Contact me at shbarocas@gmail.com
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