



A DAY in SHELLY YACIMOVICH'S KITCHEN



KNESSET OPPOSITION leader Shelly Yacimovich (right, with the writer) has created her own eclectic cooking style.

• PASCALE PEREZ-RUBIN
Photos: EITAN WAXMAN

I was recently invited by Knesset opposition leader Shelly Yacimovich to join her in her kitchen at her Tel Aviv home. Yacimovich told me that she's loved cooking since she was a kid and that she mostly learned how to cook from her friends' moms and while traveling (her own mother, a Holocaust survivor, was less interested in food – she was more concerned that none of it went to waste).

Over the years, Yacimovich has created her own eclectic style, which combines bits and pieces of Italian, Moroccan, Persian, Asian and her own family's Jewish Ashkenazi cuisine.

"I've been a bit distracted with the primaries recently, but generally I cook up a storm every weekend," she tells me. Her pantry is full of well-labeled jars of spices, and she has a well-maintained herb garden at home, which she takes advantage of to prepare her signature barbecued fish and vegetables (her daughter used to be vegetarian, and her son and daughter-in-law are pescatarians).

Although Yacimovich spends most of her hours engaged in politics, she loves to watch cooking shows on TV and learn new recipes. I could tell right away when I walked into her kitchen that she loved to cook and bake. Her shelves and pantry were well stocked, and she had soup stock labeled in her freezer, ready to use with fresh produce she buys at the nearby Carmel Market.

"Cooking plays an extremely important role in my life. Preparing meals for my family gives meaning to my life," she says.

One of Yacimovich's favorite dishes is hummus. She boils up a big pot of garbanzo beans and then freezes most of them for future use.

"Sometimes I dream of taking a break from my life and going to culinary school somewhere exotic," she says. "Not to become some famous chef – just to learn how to cook in a way that's new to me."



LEMON CHICKEN IN TOMATOES WITH GARBANZO BEANS AND SPINACH

This dish can be made for vegan guests by substituting three packages (300 gr. each) of tofu in place of the chicken. Cooking time for vegan version should then be reduced by 30 minutes.

Makes six to eight servings.

12 skinless chicken legs
800 gr. crushed tomatoes
400 gr. water
1 Tbsp. tomato paste from a tube (or one small container)
1 onion, chopped coarsely
1 fennel, chopped coarsely
4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped coarsely
2 Tbsp. olive oil
1 Tbsp. brown sugar, honey or maple syrup
2 crushed dried Persian black limes
1 Tbsp. pickled lemon
½ cup fresh lemon juice
3 kaffir lime leaves
1 fresh spicy green pepper, chopped
Salt and pepper, to taste

½ tsp. nutmeg
½ tsp. fennel seeds
Beef stock (or water with a little Worcestershire sauce)
1 cup cooked garbanzo beans
400 gr. rinsed spinach or Swiss chard leaves
Zest of ½ a lemon

In a flat-bottomed pot, add all of the ingredients, except for the spinach, garbanzo beans and lemon zest. Cook over medium flame and bring to a boil.

Lower the flame, cover the pot, and cook for one hour. Shake the pot every once in a while so that the sauce covers all of the chicken and vegetables. When the chicken has almost finished cooking, uncover the pot and let the liquid evaporate so that the sauce thickens.

Add the garbanzo beans and cook for another couple minutes. Sprinkle the spinach leaves on top and let them soften for a few minutes. Stir gently, adjust seasoning and then sprinkle lemon zest on top. Turn off the flame and let the pot soak up the flavors for a few minutes.

GREEN HUMMUS

Makes six to eight servings.

Hummus:

4 cups cooked garbanzo beans
½ onion, peeled
2 cloves of garlic
1 bunch of cilantro
1 Tbsp. cumin
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 tsp. ground coriander
½ tsp. nutmeg
½ tsp. spicy green pepper
2 tsp. honey, maple syrup or silan
1 tsp. amba
Salt, to taste
1 cup of water in which garbanzo beans were cooked
1 cup raw tehina

Additions:

Whole cooked garbanzo beans
Whole cooked fava beans (that were

cooked with garbanzo beans)
Olive oil
Roasted pine nuts
Whole cooked wheat pieces
Paprika
S'hug (Yemenite hot sauce) diluted with water
Hard-boiled eggs
Parsley

Add all of the ingredients except for the tehina to a blender with a metal blade. Add the water in which the garbanzo beans were cooked. Blend until smooth.

While blending, add the desired amount of tehina. If it's too thick, add more of the water in which the garbanzo beans were cooked. If it's too watery, add more garbanzo beans or tehina. Taste and adjust seasoning. Spread hummus on a plate and add toppings.

TOMATO, PEPPER AND GARLIC SALAD

Makes four to six servings.

3 large blanched tomatoes, peeled
1 or 2 spicy green peppers
1 white or red onion
3 to 4 cloves garlic
Leaves from 3-4 sprigs basil
3 sprigs parsley, chopped coarsely
Salt and coarsely ground pepper, to taste
2 to 33 tsp. olive oil
3 Tbsp. lemon juice

Cut the tomatoes into large cubes and place them in a large bowl. Cut the peppers lengthwise and remove the pith and some of the seeds, then cut the pepper into thin strips and add them to the tomatoes. Chop the onion and garlic and add them to the bowl, too.

Add the basil, parsley, salt, pepper, oil and lemon juice. Mix well and adjust seasoning before serving.



FOCACCIA WITH HERBS

Makes one large round focaccia.

2 cups pizza flour (or regular white flour)
1 tsp. white sugar
1 level Tbsp. dry yeast
1 Tbsp. olive oil
Water, according to need

Toppings:

1 onion, sliced thinly and separated into rings
4 Tbsp. oil
Leaves from 2-3 sprigs thyme
½ red pepper, sliced into thin rings
Needles from 2-3 sprigs rosemary
2-3 sage leaves
Kosher salt

Add all the ingredients to the bowl of a mixer fitted with a dough hook. Mix on slow speed. Add water slowly until dough becomes rubbery and falls away from side of bowl.

Cover bowl with a towel and let rise in a warm place for 1 hour. Then take the dough out and knead it. Place dough on a large, round, greased tray. Flatten the dough and then brush with olive oil. Let it rise again for 30 minutes.

Place the toppings in a small pot and heat over a medium flame for a few minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°-200°. Add the toppings to the dough and sprinkle with kosher salt. Bake for 30 minutes or until turns golden brown.

VEGAN COOKIES

Makes 30 to 35 cookies.

220 gr. bittersweet chocolate
1¼ cups white flour, sifted
½ cup cocoa powder (unsweetened)
1½ tsp. baking powder
¼ baking soda
Pinch of salt
120 gr. coconut oil (which is solid at room temperature)
1½ packed cups light brown sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 Tbsp. ground flax seeds mixed with 5-6 Tbsp. water (let mixture set for five minutes before adding to batter) or applesauce
½ cup coconut or almond milk
200 gr. bittersweet chocolate or vegan chocolate, broken up into pieces

Topping:

100 gr. powdered sugar

Melt the chocolate in a bain-marie and then let it cool slightly. In a separate bowl, mix flour with cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

Whip the sugar with the coconut oil, using an electric mixer. Add the vanilla and flax (or applesauce). Mix slowly while pouring in melted chocolate. Gradually add flour mixture and then add coconut or almond milk. Add the chocolate pieces and mix well. Wrap dough in plastic wrap and put in the freezer for 90 minutes.

Make balls of dough with 3.5-cm. diameter and then roll them in the powdered sugar. Place cookies, with space between them, on a baking tray. Bake in an oven that was preheated to 175° for 12 minutes. Check them after nine minutes, though, because some ovens bake quicker than others.

Store cookies in airtight containers.

Translated by Hannah Hochner.

