



MY SON and DAUGHTER-IN-LAW'S HENNA



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Photos: PASCALE PEREZ-RUBIN and NADAV ARIEL

I was so excited when my son's Ukrainian-American fiancée asked me to hold a henna ceremony for the two of them before their wedding. When I got married, my mother prepared a traditional henna ceremony for me at home. She sewed me a special outfit and prepared all the traditional Tunisian delicacies for our female friends and family members.

In modern-day Israel, Yemenite and Indian communities still hold traditional henna ceremonies, but most Israelis are happy to follow general Moroccan customs without worrying about their family's specific traditions. And so, when I set out to begin planning the party with all the traditional Tunisian customs, this did not prove to be an easy task.

I found numerous companies and individuals whose businesses organize hennas, including intricate head coverings for the bride, outfits for all the family and guests, and of course food. But I was not interested in a grandiose event with lots of glitter and noise. I wanted to find someone who could help me recreate an authentic Tunisian henna. I met with dozens of henna organizers, but it wasn't until I came upon Rachel Uzan from Moshav Beit Hagadi that I felt assured I would be able to give my son and his wife-to-be a proper Tunisian henna.

Uzan displayed for me a shiny beautiful hand-sewn outfit with strips of golden fiber running through it. The heavy head covering

was covered with gold coins and chains, and there were pointy gold shoes to match. I was head over heels excited to have finally found the perfect person to organize our henna, and when Uzan told me she could also prepare traditional Tunisian food for the event, I knew I'd hit the jackpot. We also hired Yehudit Enoshi from Netanya to provide more outfits and to direct the ceremony in real time during the party.

My next task was to find a caterer to prepare traditional Tunisian brik sandwiches, and we were very lucky to chance upon Rami Madar from Ashkelon. We prepared bowls of the wet henna mixture, which were carried in during the ceremony in fancy bowls, with four lit candles stuck inside them. Our guests were invited to don costumes, too, and the atmosphere at the henna was wonderfully happy.

The bride and groom sat on throne-like chairs, and guests would place coins on a scarf that was laid out over their laps, while offering them wishes of good luck and happiness in their upcoming betrothal.

Next was the actual henna ceremony, where everyone puts a bit of wet henna mixture in their palm.

The refreshments were superb – exactly as I imagined them to be. The Tunisian fricassee sandwiches were spicy with harissa, and there was plenty of arak and rosetta to drink. There were sfinj doughnuts covered with sugar and endless cookies that resembled jewelry prepared by Orli Barnaz from Bat Yam.

Below I've included recipes for deblah pastries in syrup, brik pastries stuffed with egg, and fricassee sandwiches.



DEBLAH PASTRIES IN SYRUP

Makes 30-35 medium pastries

Dough:

3 eggs
¼ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 cups flour, sifted

For work surface:

½-¾ cup corn flour

For frying:

1½ liters of oil for deep frying

For syrup:

3 cups water
2 cups sugar
Juice from half a lemon

Crack the eggs into a deep bowl and beat them with a hand blender. While mixing, add the baking soda and the vanilla. While continuing to mix, gradually add the

flour. Mix until smooth. Knead the dough on a work surface until it's soft. Separate into 3 or 4 equal pieces.

Sprinkle corn flour on your work surface and roll out one of the pieces of dough until it's very thin. Make sure it's floured on both sides with corn flour and continue rolling it out until it's ½ cm. thick. Cut into strips that are 2 cm. wide.

Heat the oil in a deep pot over medium flame. Take a strip of dough with a fork and dip the dough into the hot oil and then push it toward the side of the pot. Hold it there for a few seconds. Then use the spoon to twirl up the dough to form a spiral shape. When the pastry has turned golden, remove it from the oil.

Fry the rest of the strips in the same fashion. Keep the flame on medium-low so that the pastries remain light colored.

To prepare the syrup, add all the ingredients to a pot and cook over a medium flame for 30 minutes, until syrup becomes rubbery. Dunk the deblah pastries in the syrup for a second and then place them in a colander so the excess syrup can drip off.



BURIKA (BRIK PASTRY STUFFED WITH EGG)

Makes 4 servings

4 brik pastry sheets
4 eggs
Salt and pepper, to taste
Oil for frying

Flatten a sheet of brik pastry on a flat plate and crack an egg in the center. Season with salt and pepper and flip half of the pastry over the other half to form a half moon and press the edges to seal.

Heat oil in medium pan (the same amount you'd use to fry schnitzel). Carefully pick up the stuffed brik, making sure that none of the egg slips out, and fry in the pan. When the first side has turned golden, flip the brik and fry on the second side. Prepare all of the pastries in the same fashion. Serve hot.



FRICASSEE/TUNISIAN SANDWICH

Makes 14-16 rolls

Dough:

3½-4 cups flour, sifted
2 Tbsp. oil
2 heaping Tbsp. fresh yeast
Pinch of salt
1½ cups water at room temperature
Oil for frying

Filling:

2 large cooked potatoes, peeled and cubed
Harissa
3 hard-boiled eggs, quartered
200 gr. pickled vegetables, homemade or store-bought
50 gr. spicy pickled peppers, cut into strips
2-3 pickled lemons cut into strips or a tablespoon of pickled vegetables

2 pickled cucumbers, chopped or cut into strips
100 gr. pitted olives, halved
2-3 cans of tuna in oil, drained and fluffed

Place the flour in the bowl of a mixer. Add the oil and yeast. Sprinkle in the salt. Mix with a dough hook and gradually add the water and keep mixing until dough falls away from side of bowl. Cover the dough with a towel and let sit to rise in a warm place for an hour.

Knead the dough and push out all the air. Separate into 14-16 flattened balls. Let rise for another 30 minutes.

Heat oil in a large pot. When the oil is hot, place the rolls facedown and fry for 2 minutes. Flip them over and fry until golden brown. Remove and place on paper towels.

Slice the rolls in half and spread with harissa. Add the eggs, vegetables, olives and tuna, as you wish.

Translated by Hannah Hochmer.

