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## Middle Eastern Feast

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I love buffet-style eating because it's more fun to sample many dishes than to limit yourself to just one. Middle Eastern cuisine embraces this concept with its mezze or meze (pronounced meh **zay**), a complete spread of appetizers. With an emphasis on grains, vegetables, and legumes, Middle Eastern food is a natural choice for an ethnic vegan feast. Invite your friends and family over and pass the pita!

### **Hummus**

2 15-oz. cans garbanzo beans, drained  
2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed  
2 Tbs. tahini  
Juice of 1/2 lemon  
2 tsp. ground cumin  
1/4 cup olive oil  
Salt to taste

Place first five ingredients in a food processor and combine. Add olive oil while mixing until a smooth paste is achieved. Add salt to taste. Garnish with a sprinkling of paprika and serve as a dip for raw vegetables or with wedges of pita bread.

Variation: Add 1/2 cup chopped parsley.

### **Baba Ghanouj**

2 medium to large eggplants  
2 cloves garlic  
3 Tbs. tahini  
3 Tbs. lemon juice  
Salt to taste  
Olive oil  
Parsley for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 450°. Slice eggplants in half lengthwise. Pierce each half several times with a fork and place on a cookie sheet covered with aluminum foil. Bake eggplant halves until tender. Cool.

2. Peel eggplant and mash in a colander; drain juices.

3. Combine first five ingredients in a food processor and pulse until smooth (if you don't have a food processor, stir ingredients together in a large bowl, mashing eggplant as you work). Drizzle with olive oil, garnish with parsley sprigs or chopped parsley, and serve with pita bread.

### **Tahini Sauce**

1 cup tahini  
1/2 cup water  
Juice of 1-2 lemons (to taste)  
2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed  
1/2 tsp. cumin  
Salt to taste

Whisk all ingredients together in a bowl. Adjust seasonings to taste. Sprinkle with paprika for a colorful garnish. Drizzle over falafel and other pita fillings.

### **Tabbouli Salad**

Tabbouli, tabbuli, tabouleh—how many ways can you spell the name of this crunchy, nutritious salad? It's a refreshing yet filling dish that's especially good in the summer.

Tabbouli salad's main ingredient is bulgur (cracked) wheat. To prepare bulgur wheat for the salad, measure 1 cup bulgur into a bowl, and then pour 1 cup warm water over it and let stand for 30 minutes. Yields 2 cups.

2 cups presoaked bulgur  
2 large tomatoes, seeded and chopped  
1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped  
1 cup green onions, chopped  
2 cups fresh parsley, finely chopped  
1/3 cup fresh mint, finely chopped  
Salt to taste (try 1/4 tsp.)  
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice  
1/4 cup olive oil  
Fresh ground black pepper

1. Mix first seven ingredients together (bulgur through salt), and then add fresh lemon juice.
2. Refrigerate ingredients for about an hour. When ready to serve, add olive oil and black pepper. Mix well.

Notes: Fresh ingredients are absolutely necessary for good tabbouli. A large lemon usually nets 1/4 cup of juice. A large bunch of fresh parsley can yield 1, 2, or 3 cups chopped; use as much as you want. Cold-pressed, extra virgin olive oil is best for salads, and although mint leaves add a unique flavor, they can be omitted in a pinch (sometimes fresh mint can be hard to find). Cooking is an art, not a science, so have fun and experiment!

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