



Honoring the Women of Palestine through Musalwa'a

By Becky Hadeed



In September, Mai Kakish was my guest on *The Storied Recipe Podcast*. She shared *musalwa'a*, a humble and hearty porridge made from red lentils and rice, in honor of her beloved *teta* (grandmother). The dish is practical – made from pantry ingredients and best served at room temperature.

To Mai, however, this rustic dish is beautified in light of her grandmother's life of love and sacrifice. As with many women of her generation, Um Hanna saw her sons (one of whom was Mai's father) and grandsons (Mai's brothers) arrested for acts of resistance. When the men were taken from their homes, Mai says that it was women like her *teta* who kept the family together and preserved Palestinian culture.

To Mai, this *musalwa'a* recipe represents the stability and love she experienced in her *teta's* garden and kitchen. Mai now lives in Chicago, where she raises vegetables from her grandmother's seeds. She honors her *teta's* legacy by sharing Palestinian dishes on her website titled *Almond & Fig* and by speaking out about Palestinian resistance. I was honored to share Mai and her *teta's* story on my podcast.

Ingredients

3 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, diced
3 cups red lentils rinsed
1½ cups short-grain rice
(rinsed a few times until the water runs clear)
9 cups water (more if needed)
salt and pepper to taste
2 tsp cumin
1 tsp turmeric
2 bay leaves

Crispy onions

½ cup extra virgin olive oil
2 large onions thinly sliced

Garnishes

3–4 tbs chopped parsley
1 yellow onion, thinly sliced
1 tsp sumac
1 tsp cumin, divided

Directions

-In a heavy soup pot or Dutch oven, add 3 tablespoons of olive oil and the chopped onion. Stir until the onions soften, about 5 minutes.

-Rinse the lentils, and add them to the onions, then add the water. Bring the mixture to a boil. Skim the foam off the top

*Tip: for every cup of red lentils, add 3 cups of water or stock.

-Add the rinsed rice, spices, and bay leaf, and stir to combine. Let the mixture cook until the rice and lentils are tender and cooked through, about 45 minutes. Make sure you stir frequently to prevent the lentils from sticking to the bottom of the pot.

-The mixture should be the consistency of porridge. If it's too thick, add ½ cup of water at a time. (I use an additional 1½ to 2 cups of water, depending on the type of rice.)

-In the meantime, in a medium pan, heat the olive oil and fry the onions until they are golden brown. Add a pinch of salt. Don't rush this process; it will take up to 30–45 minutes to caramelize the onions. Stir the onions often.

-Once the onions are caramelized, drain them on a paper towel but reserve the remaining olive oil.

-Once the lentils and rice are cooked through, add the olive oil left over from cooking the onions to the lentil and rice mixture, folding it in until all the oil is combined with the lentils. The olive oil will make this mixture super silky and pudding-like.

-Reserve the fried onions to garnish the top.

To serve, pour into a serving platter or little bowls.

To garnish, toss the raw sliced onions with a teaspoon of sumac and half a teaspoon of cumin, then garnish the top of the bowls with the crispy onions, the raw sumac-cumin onions, fresh minced parsley, and a sprinkling of cumin.

Musalwa'a can be eaten hot, at room temperature, or straight out of the fridge. Serve with chopped tomatoes and/or cucumbers and an assortment of pickles and olives.

Storing

This dish will last up to a week in the fridge.

Becky Hadeed is the host of The Storied Recipe Podcast.

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