

Sacred Cuisine

Preserving Traditions and Experimenting with Innovation

Chef Izzeldin Abdul Aziz Bukhari



I first experienced Sacred Cuisine at a taco-night event at Garage Restaurant in Ramallah last autumn. Each plate was served with made-from-scratch tofu tacos and rice and beans. Subtle but distinct flavors emerged with each bite. A few months later, Sacred Cuisine creator and chef Izzeldin Abdul Aziz Bukhari volunteered to prepare a spinach, beet, and feta salad and quinoa stuffed bell peppers for the Dalia Association's Make a Difference with Your Meal fundraising dinner.

Izzeldin explains that the Sacred Cuisine initiative provides an opportunity to combine his passion for food with the various elements of his ancestral roots. His descendants arrived in Jerusalem in 1616 from Bukhari, Uzbekistan, to establish a Sufi center, which still exists near the *Haram* in the Old City. Every Thursday after meditation, the Bukharis would cook a meal to share with the community. Sacred Cuisine embraces the good practices and principles that Izzeldin grew up with in his Sufi family in Jerusalem: prepare simple food that is acquired with minimal harm and pain in order to nourish his community. The menu thus consists of vegan and vegetarian meals made from local products using natural ingredients and minimal packaging. According to Izzeldin, his food aims to ensure a sustainable livelihood while reclaiming history and facts for the conscientious eater.

You can experience Sacred Cuisine through its pop-up kitchens at local markets across Palestine as well as on special nights organized by local restaurants. In addition to cooking meals in pop-up kitchens and local restaurants, Izzeldin is developing a line of vegan products for his vegan and health-conscious followers. You can purchase vegan pesto, avocado vegan cheesecake, and blueberry vegan cheesecake. Izzeldin explains that he uses local products as much as possible to create his products. The vegan cheesecakes, for example, are sweetened with *debess* (grape molasses) and flavored with rose water. Many vegan recipes include ingredients that are very hard to find here.

In addition, Sacred Cuisine is organizing a series of hiking and cooking adventures starting this spring. Participants will learn to forage for edible wild plants and cook them out in nature. The first event will focus on making *maqluba* in the wild. Sacred Cuisine is also collaborating with Al-Ma'amal Foundation in Jerusalem to develop a series of food tours to celebrate and preserve our ancestors' knowledge and recipes, countering the Israeli appropriation of our indigenous culinary culture. Over the next five years, Izzeldin hopes to grow his line of vegan products and build a community of conscientious eaters. He envisions Sacred Cuisine serving as a platform for other like-minded chefs and producers.

Izzeldin has generously shared his recipe for spinach, beet, and feta salad.

Beet and Spinach Salad

With Sumac, Grape Molasses (*Debess*) Vinaigrette

Yields 5 servings

Ingredients

1 bunch of spinach
1 medium beet
1 handful of toasted walnuts
1 handful of cubed feta cheese

For the Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons grape molasses (*debess* 'ennab)
½ teaspoon sumac
½ teaspoon fresh cracked black pepper
2 tablespoons lemon juice
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon ginger vinegar
Salt to taste



Directions

Wash, peel, and cut the beet, discarding the ends, then shred it.

Toast the walnuts in a pan on the stove over low heat, shaking the pan frequently to prevent burning.

Remove the stems from the spinach and discard any undesired leaves. Then wash, rinse, and chop the leaves into ¼-inch ribbons.

Cut the feta into cubes.

To serve

Toss the spinach with a small amount of vinaigrette. Separately, toss the shredded beet with vinaigrette, leaving some dressing on the side for later. Place the spinach in the serving bowl first, then mound the shredded beet in the center. Add the feta, then sprinkle the walnuts on top. Finish by adding more of the vinaigrette (as desired), and enjoy with friends or lovers. *Sahha!*