

Mshaat Zahrah (Cauliflower Fritters)

Slightly adapted from a recipe published in a book (in Arabic) by Mary Salah Khabbaz, in 1970, in Ramallah.

Palestinian cuisine abounds with vegetable dishes that can be served at any meal, be it a farmer's breakfast or as a side dish for lunch or dinner. A traditional breakfast can include fried cauliflower served together with hummus, zeit wa za'tar, labaneh, pickled olives, homemade pita bread, and hot sweet tea. Such a meal may also include tomatoes (fresh or fried with garlic), cucumbers (fresh or pickled), and/or fried eggplant - and it tastes especially delicious when enjoyed after an early morning visit to the farm to tend to growing vegetables. Mshaat can be made with most kinds of vegetables, especially those that are in season. Some prefer to use cabbage ribs, others broccoli, not to mention zucchini (it's a good way to use the insides of the zucchini that have been scooped out in preparation for stuffing). The cauliflower in this recipe can be replaced with your choice of vegetable. If using the zucchini innards, there is no need to pre-boil.

Ingredients

- 1 small head of *baladi* cauliflower (or half a large one)
- 6 eggs
- fresh parsley, chopped (around 1 lightly packed cup)
- fresh mint, chopped (a handful)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 5 spring onions, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- A pinch of black pepper
- A pinch of cumin
- 1 cup of flour
(The amount may vary according to the size of the eggs. You need to add enough flour to get a thick batter.)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder (optional)
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Lemon wedges for serving



1. Cut the cauliflower into flowerets and place them in a pot filled with water; bring to a boil and cook until a fork can be easily inserted into them (overcooking will result in soggy fritters). Drain and set aside. This step can be done a day or two in advance. The pre-cooked cauliflower should be stored in the fridge.

2. Beat the eggs until they are pale and slightly fluffy. This can be done manually or using a food processor.

3. Add the mint, parsley, and onions. Mix until well combined.

4. Add the spices, salt, and flour, and mix well. If you are using baking powder, add it now. Baking powder is optional because both well-beaten eggs and baking powder will produce a lighter fried dough, but baking powder also gives the fritters a smoother outer shell.

5. Break your flowerets into small pieces and stir them into the batter. That's the shortcut. If you prefer doing it the very traditional way, cut your flowerets into thick slices, and dip those slices in the batter (dipped-in fritters). The small parts of the flowerets that are left over are later chopped coarsely and stirred into the remaining batter (mixed-in fritters).

6. Heat the oil in a deep frying pan. When the oil is ready* drop dollops of heaped tablespoons of mixed-in fritters into the hot oil. Keep the fritters separated because they will spread slightly. Using a spoon, take some of the oil and pour it on top of the fritters – this will prevent them from spreading too much. If you're making dipped-in fritters as well, fry them in separate batches from the mixed-in fritters, as the amount of batter-coating differs significantly, and thus the cooking time.

7. When the fritters are golden in color, remove them with a slotted spoon, and place them on paper towels to drain the excess oil. Repeat until all the batter is fried.

8. Serve hot or warm, with a squeeze of lemon. Enjoy!

9. Store leftovers in an airtight container in the fridge to be enjoyed later, cold or at room temperature.

*As with all fried food, you don't want the oil to be too hot because that will cook the outside of the fritter too quickly and the center will be undercooked. Keep the oil on medium high heat, and once you flip the fritters, lower the heat a little to give them a chance to cook all the way through.