

From Our Tables to Yours

We've gathered up some of the SVARA team's favorite recipes from our family holiday celebrations to share with you. Whether you're looking to create a full feast or just need one more dish or dessert to round out your meal, we hope you'll enjoy these as much as we do!

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Deborah's Damn Good Challah (hat tip to the Friends)

from Deborah

My brother is the best, most fearless cook in my family. My sister makes the best challah and my 87-year-old dad bakes the best no-knead bread. My mom is an excellent cook too, providing savory flavors from the old country—Vienna to be exact. And then there is me. I am an ok cook at best, but during shelter-in-place, I decided to crack the code to baking stellar challah. I made that recipe on Friday afternoons for twenty weeks before I got it to, not only look beautiful, but also consistently taste sublime. The recipe shared here turns out perfect challah(s) every time and has made me the toast of the town. Well, at least of my immediate household pod! I cracked the code!

I'd tried my sister's recipe 5 or 6 times and I never could make it taste as moist and bouncy as hers so at the start of the pandemic, I put out a request to my networks for great challah recipes and received one from the Friend family. The key that unlocked it for me came from my sister who generously told me: don't use olive oil, it's too heavy, and knead it a bit more than the recipe calls for. After incorporating those two suggestions, I added a bit of lemon to make it my own. And not only is this damn good challah on Friday nights, it makes for outstanding, award-winning challah french toast on Saturday mornings too.

makes two loaves

Ingredients

6 tsp yeast
½ cup sugar
1 ¾ cup warm water
3 eggs

½ cup vegetable oil
1 tbs salt
Zest of one orange or lemon
5 ½ cups of flour

Instructions

In a big bowl mix yeast, sugar, water and let it bubble for 10 minutes. Then add eggs, vegetable oil, salt, and zest and mix fully. Incorporate 5 ½ cups of flour (and maybe a little more if sticky).

Knead the dough for 5-10 minutes in the bowl and form it into a ball. Let rise for one hour. Knead again for 5-10 minutes and let rise 15-20 minutes more.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Divide the dough into 2 big balls and then divide each ball into four strands. Braid in four strands—come on you can do it—and brush the top with a beaten egg. Sprinkle on Everything But The Bagel Mix and jimmys.

Bake for half an hour and test to make sure a toothpick comes out dry. Remove loaves from the oven and put on a rack to cool.

Sweet & Sour Meatballs

from Benay

This is my sister Barbara's recipe. Super simple and really yummy! Served on little plates, makes a fancy appetizer (at least it always seemed fancy to me).

Ingredients

For the sauce:

2 cans tomato/mushroom sauce
¼ cup lemon juice
½ cup sugar
½ cup water

For the meatballs:

2 pounds ground beef
2 eggs
1 chopped onion
salt/pepper to taste
½ or so, breadcrumbs (or matzo meal if using for Passover)

Instructions

Combine sauce ingredients in a deep pot. Combine meatball ingredients in a bowl and roll into balls. Add meatballs to sauce and simmer for about one and a half hours.

Bubbe's Kugel

from Benay

This is the kugel I grew up on. It's my mom's famous kugel. It's everybody's favorite. We used to fight over the corners—"I call a corner!" "I call a corner!"—we all liked those the best. Now I like the middle sections. Go figure.

Ingredients

1 12-Oz bag of egg noodles (either fine or wide, whichever you prefer)
6 eggs
1 ½ sticks butter or pareve margarine (if you want it to be pareve)
1-2 tsp salt, to taste

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Boil the whole bag of noodles, but undercook slightly; this is important (cook for one minute less than the lower number on the cooking time range on the package; 3 min for thin noodles; 6 min for wide noodles).

Strain noodles and rinse under lukewarm water to cool noodles

Put noodles into large mixing bowl.

Cut up 1 stick of butter (or margarine) into smaller pieces and melt into noodles.

Add salt.

Let noodles cool somewhat.

In a separate bowl, beat your 6 eggs, then mix into buttered noodles in mixing bowl.

Put ½ stick of butter (or margarine) into a 9x9 or 9x12 Pyrex dish and put the dish into the oven to melt the butter (or margarine)

Take dish out of oven, and pour noodle mixture in.

Bake for approximately 30-40 minutes, or until top is golden brown. Serve hot.

Barbara's Sweet Kugel

from Benay

My sister Barb's famous kugel is truly amazing. Take my word for it. Once I adjusted to the idea that legitimate kugels could also be sweet (see Bubbe's kugel recipe above; not sweet), I fell in love with this kugel, too. It's very different from Bubbe's not-sweet kugel. Both are amazing. This is the kugel you bring to a shiva call, poo-poo-poo (in which case, buy one of those aluminum pans from the dollar store; that way no one has to return your pan afterward).

Ingredients

2 8-oz packages of cream cheese
½ pound of butter
3 cups milk
1 cup sugar
8 eggs, beaten well
2 teaspoons vanilla
16 oz noodles, cooked and drained
Cornflakes or cornflake crumbs
Cinnamon sugar

Instructions

In a pot on the stove melt cream cheese and butter. Once melted, add milk and sugar, stirring till smooth.

Remove from heat and add eggs and vanilla. Mix in noodles.

Pour into a buttered 9×13 inch baking pan (there may be a little extra for this size pan) and refrigerate overnight.

Before baking, top with cornflake crumbs and cinnamon sugar. Bake at 400 degrees for 15 minutes. Reduce heat to 375 degrees and bake for another 40 minutes. Check that kugel is firm. Serve hot.

Carrots with Tumeric by Ellen Magenheim

from Davi

My Mom first used this recipe when my family was hosting a bunch of college students over Thanksgiving (my parents used to host students from their classes who didn't have other places to go for Thanksgiving). My Mom was worried we didn't have enough food for everyone. She was thinking of things to add to the menu and had some carrots so she cooked them this way.

Ingredients

1 pounds of carrots
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/2 tsp ground cumin
1/4 tsp ground turmeric
1/8 tsp kosher salt
1/8 tsp coarse ground pepper

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees

Peel carrots and cut into 2 inch chunks. If the carrots are very thick, slice the thick part lengthwise before cutting into chunks.

Stir together olive oil, cumin, turmeric, salt, and pepper. Pour over the carrots and use your hands to mix everything together so that carrots are evenly coated in the oil mixture.

Roast on a baking sheet for 20-30 minutes until soft but still firm and starting to carmelize. Stir carrots about halfway through the roasting time.

Serve hot or at room temperature.

Tofu Pot Pie

from Ayana

Since we first started hosting holidays together many moons ago, we've been crafting full vegan/vegetarian feasts alongside several course meat meals. Because why choose one? And because everyone has competing dietary needs among our friends, families, and communities. Most of our feasts feature my tofu pot pie (adapted from my aunt's recipe with the most delicious gravy from Real Food Daily) and Josh's brisket (adapted from his Nana, Dagmar, who was a survivor of the Shanghai Ghetto turned most-fabulous Upper East-Side society lady). They're both great main dishes and they definitely don't complement each other :)

Ingredients

for pie crust

12 tbs butter, cut into pieces
3 cups flour
About 8 tbs cold water, milk, or buttermilk

for the filling

1 14 oz pack of extra firm tofu
3 cloves of garlic
1 head of broccoli
2-3 small zucchinis or yellow squashes
2 large portobello mushrooms
(you could swap/add frozen peas, carrots, peppers, etc - really any veggies work well!)
Olive oil for frying
Soy sauce and or white wine for flavor

for the gravy

½ cup nutritional yeast
½ cup flour
⅓ cup vegetable oil
½ cup chopped onion
2 cloves of garlic, minced
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme, or 1 teaspoon dried
2 teaspoons chopped fresh sage, or 1 teaspoon dried
4 cups water
¼ cup tamari
½ teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

Instructions

First prepare the crust. Use a pastry cutter, forks, or a food processor to cut together butter and flour until mixture is uniformly blended. Add just enough liquid to hold the dough together. Roll out the dough to form crust in a 9 or 10 inch pie pan. Set aside the second crust to be used on top of the pie.

To prepare the filling, cut the tofu and veggies into bite-sized pieces. Finely chop the garlic. Add olive oil to coat a frying pan and add tofu, stirring occasionally, until edges are browned. Transfer to a bowl.

Add more oil to pan if needed, then add garlic and cook until lightly brown. Add broccoli and mushrooms (or carrots), stirring regularly. After about 2 minutes, add zucchini and squash (or peas, peppers). Add white wine and/or soy sauce and let everything simmer until tender. Transfer to a bowl.

Next, prepare the gravy. Stir the nutritional yeast and flour in a heavy skillet over medium heat for 5 minutes, or until fragrant. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and saute for 10 minutes or until tender and beginning to brown. Add the garlic, thyme, and sage, and saute for 30 seconds, or until fragrant. Whisk in the flour mixture thoroughly, and then whisk in the water, tamari, salt, and pepper. Bring to a simmer, whisking frequently, and continue to simmer until the gravy is thick and creamy.

To assemble the pies, pour vegetables and tofu into a 9 or 10 inch pie pan already lined with pie crust. Cover with gravy until just below the edge. Cover pie with second pie crust, pressing the edges together to seal. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 30 minutes or until crust is golden brown and gravy is bubbling. Let set before serving.

Dagmar's Brisket

from Ayana

Ingredients

6–8 lbs Flanken (2 to 2 ½ inches thick)
Tiny Matzo Balls (use your favorite recipe)
Honey
Pitted Prunes
Red Wine (regular and sweet)
Brown Sugar
Bittersweet Baking Chocolate, shaved

Instructions

Season meat with salt and put in the bottom of a large pot (leave on the bone). Cover with water. Make matzo balls separately.

Place a layer of meat at the bottom of a pot and top red wine, 2 tbsp of honey, brown sugar, shaved chocolate and matzo balls. Make another layer in the same way. The liquid should entirely cover the meat.

Bake with the lid on for 2 hours until meat is almost falling off the bones.

Remove the lid and return to a 350 degree oven for half an hour.

Nana Evans' Brisket

from James

This is my Nana's brisket recipe. It is perhaps the most Ashkenazic recipe you can really find, but my Nana herself was not Jewish. As a kid, I always loved to hear her tell the story of how she learned to make this particular style of brisket. My Nana's family came over from Germany in the late 1890s, and settled on the Lower East Side, alongside many German Jews. When my great grandmother arrived in America she had not yet learned how to cook, so she turned to her new neighbors for guidance. And like that, an Ashkenazi-style brisket recipe became an Evans' family staple.

Ingredients

5 lbs brisket with some fat

(Fat is important because without it your meat will dry out. You just don't want too much fat)

½ C Ketchup

¼ C Brown Sugar

2 tsp Onion Powder

1 tbsp Garlic Powder

1 package Lipton's Onion Soup mix - 1 package

1 Onion, chopped

3 large Carrots, chopped in 1-inch pieces

1 C Manischewitz Blackberry Wine

(can sub beef stock if no sweet wine, increase the brown sugar to 1/2 cup)

6 Garlic cloves

1 C Water

1 ½ tbsp Salt

Pepper to taste

Oven safe roasting bag

(You do not have to use a bag; it just makes clean up easier.)

Instructions

Preheat Oven to 200 degrees.

Use a paper towel to pat the meat dry. Pierce holes in the brisket and fill with whole garlic cloves. Rub half of the brown sugar on each side of brisket and massage in. Combine garlic powder, onion powder, salt, pepper, and Lipton onion soup mix in a bowl and rub the mixture into both sides of the meat. Finally coat each side equally with ketchup.

Place brisket in oven bag fat side up a place chopped carrots and onions in an oven bag with brisket. Pour in the wine and the water into the bag (you want to partially submerge the brisket —it does not need to be completely covered by liquid).

Tie up the oven bag, place in a roasting pan, and poke a few holes with a fork to allow for proper ventilation. Roast brisket for 1 1/2 hours per pound at 200 degrees.

Allow to cool completely and then slice and place back in braising liquid in an oven-safe dish. Reheat brisket before serving by placing in a 200°F oven until warmed thoroughly.

Nadine's Magic Cookie Bars

from Ren

This is my grandma's "Magic Cookie Bar" recipe, that she almost always baked on special occasions. I used to think it was a top-secret recipe she made—turns out it's just a slightly edited recipe from a condensed milk can! Hahaha!

Makes about 30 1 1/2 inch by 2 1/2 bars

Ingredients

1/4 lb. butter melted
1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs
1 cup shredded coconut
1 12-ounce package semisweet chocolate chips (2 cups)
1 cup chopped pecans
1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk

Instructions

Mix melted butter and graham cracker crumbs together and spread/press evenly over bottom of 9" by 13" by 2" pan.

Sprinkle coconut evenly over crumbs, followed by chocolate chips, then pecans. Do not mix ingredients together before spreading; make a layer out of each ingredient.

Pour condensed milk evenly over everything. Do not stir.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes (the time may vary so watch for doneness. Top layer will get lightly golden.) Cool before cutting.

Whipped Cream Pound Cake by Beth Evans

from James

This pound cake was served at every special occasion at my house for as long as I can remember. Growing up we always had to be extremely quiet when my mother made this dessert or else—she told us—the cake would...*FALL*. Well, it turns out all these years believing it needed to be absolutely silent to make this dessert were wrong! My mother made it all up because she wanted an hour and a half of peace and quiet during which her 3 sons would have to whisper and play outside. Enjoy!

Ingredients

2 sticks butter
3 cups sugar
3 cups cake flour (must be boxed cake flour)
1 small (8 oz) carton whipping cream
6 large eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp almond extract

Instructions

Cream sugar and butter together then add all the other ingredients and mix well. Place mixture in a prepared (oiled and lightly floured) bundt or loaf pan. Place in a cold oven and set the temperature to 325°F. Bake for 1.5 hours. Serve with coffee!

Honey Cake

from Amir

My family tradition was always to break the Yom Kippur fast with chocolate honey cake and herbal tea (I recommend mint!) but this recipe is not the honey cake I grew up with. Rather, it's a recipe I found during my first high holidays living in Chicago. I made it for the chagim but did not have a big enough pan so I filled my undersized pan all the way to the top. The cake rose very quickly, overflowed, and much of it ended up on the floor of the oven, from which we carefully sliced it, and ate it anyway. This cake is moist and delicious—and it has become my new tradition.

The recipe is from Claudia Roden's *The Book of Jewish Food*. I seem to have misplaced my copy of the book and could only find the recipe online from the Guardian newspaper and therefore all the measurements are metric. It's worth making the unit conversions.

Makes 1 round cake or 2 loaves

Ingredients

| | | | |
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| 2 large eggs | 2 | salt | |
| 200g sugar | 200g | 1 tsp ground cinnamon | |
| 125 ml light vegetable oil | | ¼ tsp ground cloves | |
| 250g dark liquid honey | | zest of one orange, grated | |
| 2 tbsp dark rum or brandy | | 300g plain flour, plus extra to dust the | |
| (I've used Bourbon or nothing at | | dried fruit and nuts | |
| all. Both work fine.) | | 40g sultanas | |
| 125 ml warm strong black coffee | | (I think I've used golden raisins.) | |
| 2 tsp baking powder | | 50g chopped walnuts or slivered almonds | |
| ½ tsp baking soda | | | |

Instructions

Beat the eggs with the sugar until pale and creamy. Then beat in the oil, honey, rum and coffee.

Mix the baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, cloves and orange zest with the flour. Add gradually to the egg and honey mixture, beating vigorously to a smooth batter.

Dust the sultanas and the walnuts or almonds with flour to prevent them from dropping to the bottom of the cake and stir them into the batter.

Line a 24cm cake tin with greaseproof paper or with foil, brushed with oil and dusted with flour, and pour in the batter. Or divide between two 24cm x 13cm loaf tins.

Bake the large cake in a preheated oven 180C/gas mark 4 for 1¼ hours, or longer, until firm and brown on top, and the smaller ones for 1 hour.

Nana Schwalb's Rice Pudding

from Laynie

My Nana Schwalb (my great-grandmother), of blessed memory, hailed from Romania and came to the United States as a young girl with chocolate in her pocket. She loved all things sweet, including rice pudding, which I always ate (with a side of chocolate) at her house. Her rice pudding is one of my favorite desserts. True confession: I've never made this rice pudding, I've only eaten it!

½ cup of rice
1 large can evaporated milk
1 qt milk
1 cup sugar
2 beaten eggs
1 tsp vanilla
Some undetermined amount of raisins

Bring all ingredients except raisins to a boil, then simmer for 30-45 minutes, fold in raisins when finished. Sprinkle with cinnamon. (Will be loose, gets nice and creamy as it cools. "MMMMM GOOD.")