

## One-pot wonders

Maqluba (PAGE 127) is a one-pot meal of rice, vegetables, and meat turned on its head. Literally translating to “upside down,” it is made with fried cauliflower or eggplant, often with carrots and potatoes, all of which are usually fried, and includes meat such as chicken, lamb, goat, or beef. Sami’s mum used to prepare this dish for dinner and at the same time she’d fry more vegetables than needed. The next day she would warm them up, add garlic and lemon, and serve them for lunch with homemade flatbread, tahini, and pickles. It’s the nicest thing to have as a child—a sandwich of garlicky, lemony, warm fried vegetables.

Normally, women with children had their hands full with the general family requirements and the running of the house. The need to prepare a delicious and hearty meal that would feed an entire family inexpensively, with little fuss or washing up, is the general idea behind *maqluba*, as it is behind the Ashkenazi *tchulnt*, the Sephardi *dafina*, and the Iraqi-Jewish *tebit*. While they may each be arranged differently in the pot, require specific cooking times, and incorporate different combinations of meat, cereals, legumes, and vegetables, essentially all of them feed many mouths from a single pot.

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In Jewish communities, this is also a solution to the Shabbat’s challenges, where copious quantities of food have to be prepared by Friday afternoon and last the entire weekend. The famous, slow-cooked dishes of both Ashkenazim and Sephardim are fine examples of necessity creating culinary artistry. Their iconic standing in Jewish culture reflects the amount of love and thought put into them. The challenge is to make a dish that is appealing and diverse even though it has been cooked, or has started its cooking, many hours before. The solutions are so creative and varied that

Israeli food writer Sherry Ansky has even dedicated a whole book to *tchulnt*, or *hamin* as it is also called. Each community has managed to include its staple ingredients in the famous one-pot meal to uncanny degrees of harmony and deliciousness. Among others, chickpeas and all types of dried beans are included, wheat, rice or barley, kosher sausages, various fritters, all types of meat, eggs, noodles, potatoes, zucchini, and stuffed vegetables of every description.







# Maqluba

2 medium eggplants  
 (1½ lb / 650 g in total),  
 cut into ¼-inch / 0.5cm  
 slices  
 1½ cups / 320 g basmati  
 rice  
 6 to 8 boneless chicken  
 thighs, with the skin on,  
 about 1¾ lb / 800 g in  
 total  
 1 large onion, quartered  
 lengthwise  
 10 black peppercorns  
 2 bay leaves  
 4 cups / 900 ml water  
 sunflower oil, for frying  
 1 medium cauliflower  
 (1 lb / 500 g), divided  
 into large florets  
 melted butter, for greasing  
 the pan  
 3 to 4 medium ripe  
 tomatoes (12 oz / 350 g  
 in total), cut into  
 ¼-inch / 0.5cm thick  
 slices  
 4 large cloves garlic, halved  
 1 tsp ground turmeric  
 1 tsp ground cinnamon  
 1 tsp ground allspice  
 ¼ tsp freshly ground black  
 pepper  
 1 tsp baharat spice mix  
 (store-bought or see  
 recipe, page 299)  
 3½ tbsp / 30 g pine nuts,  
 fried in 1 tbsp / 15 g ghee  
 or unsalted butter until  
 golden  
 Yogurt with cucumber  
 (page 299), to serve  
 salt

*Even if this massive savory cake doesn't manage to keep its shape—and to assist with that, Sami swears, all members of the family must place the palms of their hands on the inverted pot and wait the specified three minutes—you are still in for a hearty celebration of flavors.*

Place the eggplant slices on paper towels, sprinkle on both sides with salt, and leave for 20 minutes to lose some of the water.

Wash the rice and soak in plenty of cold water and 1 teaspoon salt for at least 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat a large saucepan over medium-high heat and sear the chicken for 3 to 4 minutes on each side, until golden brown (the chicken skin should produce enough oil to cook it; if needed, add a little sunflower oil). Add the onion, peppercorns, bay leaves, and water. Bring to a boil, then cover and cook over low heat for 20 minutes. Remove the chicken from the pan and set it aside. Strain the stock and reserve for later, skimming the fat.

While the chicken is cooking, heat a saucepan or Dutch oven, preferably nonstick and roughly 9½ inches / 24 cm in diameter and 5 inches / 12 cm deep, over medium-high heat. Add enough sunflower oil to come about ¾ inch / 2 cm up the sides of the pan. When you start seeing little bubbles surfacing, carefully (it may spit!) place some of the cauliflower florets in the oil and fry until golden brown, up to 3 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the first batch to paper towels and sprinkle with salt. Repeat with the remaining cauliflower.

Pat the eggplant slices dry with paper towels and fry them similarly in batches.

Remove the oil from the pan and wipe the pan clean. If it isn't a nonstick pan, line the bottom with a circle of parchment paper cut to the exact size and brush the sides with some melted butter. Now you are ready to layer the maqluba.

Start by arranging the slices of tomato in one layer, overlapping, followed by the eggplant slices. Next, arrange the cauliflower pieces and chicken thighs. Drain the rice well and spread it over the final layer and scatter the garlic pieces on top. Measure out a scant 3 cups / 700 ml of the reserved chicken stock and mix in all the spices, plus 1 teaspoon salt. Pour this over the rice and then gently press it down with your hands, making sure all the rice is covered with stock. Add a little extra stock or water if needed.

*Recipe continued on next page*

*Recipe continued*

Put the pan over medium heat and bring to a simmer; the stock doesn't need to simmer vigorously but you do need to make sure that it boils properly before covering the pan with a lid, decreasing the heat to low, and cooking over low heat for 30 minutes. Don't be tempted to uncover the pan; you'll need to allow the rice to steam properly. Remove the pan from the heat, take off the lid, and quickly place a clean tea towel over the pan, then seal with the lid again. Leave to rest for 10 minutes.

Once ready, remove the lid, invert a large round serving plate or platter over the open pan, and carefully but quickly invert the pan and plate together, holding both sides firmly. Leave the pan on the plate for 2 to 3 minutes, then slowly and carefully lift it off. Garnish with the pine nuts and serve with the Yogurt with cucumber.





MAKES ENOUGH FOR 8  
SERVED AS A CONDIMENT

## Yogurt with cucumber

**2 mini cucumbers**  
(7 oz / 200 g in total)  
**2 cups / 500 g Greek yogurt**  
**1 clove garlic, crushed**  
**pinch of cayenne pepper**  
**1 tbsp dried mint**  
**2 tbsp chopped fresh mint**  
**2 tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice**  
**½ tsp salt**  
**¼ tsp white pepper**

*The combination of yogurt and cucumber uses the cooling effect of both ingredients to refresh hearty or meaty dishes. We are happy to spoon it over anything. The Palestinian version, khyar b'laban, is often served with rice dishes (SEE MEJADRA, PAGE 120) and with lamb or chicken (SEE LAMB SHAWARMA, PAGE 210, AND CHICKEN SOFRITO, PAGE 190). For Ashkenazic Jews, sour cream replaces yogurt in dairy meals, or just the seasoned cucumbers (with oil, sugar, green onion, dill, and vinegar) are served next to meat or fish.*

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Peel the cucumbers and cut them into very thin slices. Mix all the rest of the ingredients in a medium bowl, add the cucumbers, and check the seasoning. Leave in the fridge for 30 minutes. Serve cold.

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## Baharat

**1 tsp black peppercorns**  
**1 tsp coriander seeds**  
**1 small cinnamon stick, coarsely chopped**  
**½ tsp whole cloves**  
**½ tsp ground allspice**  
**2 tsp cumin seeds**  
**1 tsp cardamom pods**  
**½ whole nutmeg, grated**

*There's an infinite number of spice blends across the region; all vary according to spice availability, local tastes, and the different uses. Baharat, literally translated from Arabic as "spices," is used for flavoring meats, fish, stews, and various bean and grain dishes. Make your own and keep it in a sealed jar for up to eight weeks.*

*We recommend getting a spice grinder for this, and for plenty of other occasions. It is one of the kitchen gadgets we use the most, and it needn't be expensive. If you are using a mortar and pestle, you may want to get ground cardamom, as the pods will be hard to grind by hand.*

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Place all the spices in a spice grinder or mortar and grind until a fine powder is formed. Store in an airtight container, where it will keep for 8 weeks.