

Gastronomia

A PUBLICATION OF THE GREEK FOOD AND WINE INSTITUTE

GREECE'S FRUITFUL BOUNTY

by Susanna Hoffman



"Every fruit is good to eat."
Xenophon, 5th Century, b.c.e.

The fruit of Greece is indescribably divine, enhanced by mineral laden soils and ripened by the Aegean sun. Even in ancient times, the Greeks knew what a treasure they held in the melons, berries, drupes (fruit with a single large stone, e.g. peaches and

apricots), citrons, pods (carob), and venerated *rosaceae* pomes (fruit from the rose family) that flourished on their land, and still today they interweave that bounty into their healthful diet and glorious cuisine.

Many of the fruits Greeks relish are native to their country or had already migrated to Greece's sunny shores before the Greeks arrived. Wild strawberries, wild grapes, sorbs (ancient fruit from the rose family), and medlar (another ancient fruit, similar to loquats) are indigenous to Greece. The Greek name for their native carob fruit, *keras*, gives jewelers their "carat" weight. Melons came early from Egypt, mulberries from the Caucasus, apples from the Tigris-Euphrates. Peaches and apricots traveled along the Silk Route from China. We echo the Greek name for summer's initial apricots, *praikokion*, meaning "early ripening," in our word "precocious." The Minoans probably introduced quince. Cherries, pears, and figs came from the Greek homeland west of the Urals. Plums were found as Greeks explored the Pontos. Our name for

Arabian dates comes from the Greek *daktilos*, meaning "finger," and refers to the way the fruit hangs on the tree. The pomegranate, that rosy jewel of autumn, first grew in Cental Asia, but spread to the Eastern Mediterranean early on. To the ancient Greeks, it was the fruit of legend and fertility, the fateful nibble Persephone munched on her way back to daylight. To this day Greek grooms and brides smash a pomegranate on the doorstep of their first home. Alexander the Great found citron in India. Later Arabs brought lemons and oranges. Greeks today have added banana, pineapple, kiwi, kumquat, and prickly pear.

Orchards were planted and carefully tended by the Greeks as far back as Homer's day. He describes them as having pomegranate, pear, apple, fig, and grape. The great judge Solon prescribed that a newly married couple should eat a quince together so that their conversation would always be sweet. Fruit remains so abundant in Greece, vendors peddle it everywhere from outdoor stands and thread their way through streets and villages calling out the day's offerings.

2006

GREECE'S FRUITFUL
BOUNTY..... PAGE 1

EVENTS;
MEMBERS CORNER
..... PAGE 3

AT THE TABLE
..... PAGE 4

RESTAURANT NEWS
..... PAGE 5

THE MAIN INGREDIENT:
YOGURT
..... PAGE 6

continued on page 2

“If a man were to lock in his house a hoard of gold, a few figs, and two or three men, he would find out how much better figs are than gold.” Ananios, 6th century b.c.e.

The fruit of Greece is always tree and vine ripened to full maturity, never plucked early. As the ancients knew exactly which area the best of fruit came from, so do the Greeks today. The finest apples, they say, come from Mount Pelion, the apricots from Naoussa, the figs from Kalamata, the oranges from Missolonghi, and the plums from Skopelos. One year when I was in Greece, the government rejected the low export prices offered for its magnificent peach crop and kept the peaches at home. I cannot describe how ambrosial the peaches were that year, and how we reveled in them. Yellow, white, cling and freestone, they came from the Peloponnesos.

In ancient times, Greeks ended their meal with trays of fruit and nuts served all around. To this day, Greeks always end their repast, whether fillo pie or sizzling fish, with a piece of fresh fruit. To leave the table with a taste of nature's own dessert is to praise Mother Gaia for all she provides. Whatever fruit is in season gets washed, pared, and piled upon a plate. As diners pick with fingers and forks, the fruit disappears faster than Hermes' sandals carried him skyward. Even at restaurants, customers order fruit as their finale. Whole ripened pieces are served on white plates accompanied by paring knives. At late evening gatherings,

fresh fruit is yet again the refreshment. It is consumed faster than the chatter reverberates, although in Corfu that nocturnal treat might be a mix of black olives and orange slices.

Greeks also cook their copious fruit. Among their most sublime traditional dishes are a stew of quince and pork, as well as quince with pot roast or chicken. Whole quince are also stuffed with meats and grains. Meat casseroles and meatballs are paired with prunes. Plump sausage is zested with orange. Lemon is squeezed on fish, baked on chicken, and is one of the two eponymous ingredients (the other, egg) in Greece's most famous sauce, *avgolemono*. The ancients also stuffed fruit leaves, in particular fig, mulberry, and grape. The one that remains is among the most renowned of Greek dishes: grape leaf *dolmades*.

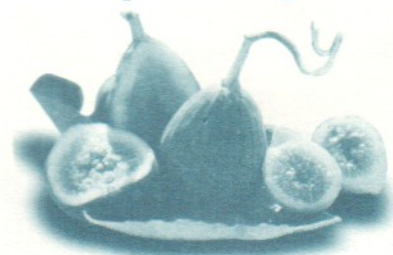
During Byzantine times, when sugar arrived, another Greek signature use of fruit appeared: the dulcet preserves called “spoon sweets.” Spoon sweets are made of cherry, apricot, citrus rind, grape, and others. They are the hallmark of Greek hospitality. Arriving guests are almost always greeted with an oozing spoonful of divine preserved fruit, accompanied by a tall glass of water or foaming cup of coffee. Should the guests be numerous, there are even cut crystal bowls surrounded by silver circlets of spoons from which to serve the sweet. The most famous spoon sweet is made of quince flavored with rose geranium.

Greeks also savor dried fruit. Dried raisins and currants sparkle in stuffings for tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers, are added to rabbit stew, and eaten as snacks. In the village we parch figs, whole and also opened up and

layered with sesame, in beehive ovens. We spread grapes to sun-dry into raisins on roof tops, then bake them in holiday breads. Fruit is pickled as well, especially quince and watermelon rind, while the ancients also pickled bright red Cornelian cherries as a substitute for olives. Greeks also sometimes use the fresh or dried peels of fruits as flavoring.

Increasingly, fruit is showing up in the exquisite innovations of contemporary cooks in today's stellar Greek restaurants. In my cookbook, I top white fish with kumquat, ply duck with ouzo and oranges, and simmer pears in chamomile and white wine syrup. Products featuring Greece's incredible fruits from spoon sweets and on, are available at gourmet markets, and any cook can explore the time-honored fruited dishes of Greece, from salad, to entree, to confection.

Certainly, everyone can discover the delight of ending a meal the healthful Greek way, with a piece of fresh and ripe-from-the-garden fruit.



Susanna Hoffman is the author of *The Olive and the Caper*.



In ancient Greece, pears were stored in cool rooms called *apothikoi*. Today they are bought in stores called *apothikoi*. From both we get the word “apothecary.”

INSTITUTE EVENTS



At the recent IACP conference, Susanna Hoffman fills Athens sweet-flavored fillo shells with new Greek-style yogurt from Krinos.

A workshop on fillo and fillings was organized by the Institute for faculty at the **Johnson & Wales University** campus in **Miami**. Among the fillings prepared and sampled were curried chicken and walnuts, jumbo lump crabmeat salad, duck confit, grilled vegetable medley, and chocolate and strawberry mousse. Attending faculty indicated plans to incorporate more fillo instruction into their classes.

Susanna Hoffman, author of *The Olive and the Caper*, presided over the Institute's **Culinary Showcase** exhibit at the recent **International Association of Culinary Professionals** conference in Seattle. Over 1,000 caterers, chefs, cookbook authors and other food professionals enjoyed samplings of yogurt; sweet and savory fillo shells; and fillo appetizers, including artichoke and cheese, three-cheese, and salmon and cheese. Hoffman complemented the offerings with recipe tips and shared personal experiences from her many stays in Greece. Take-away literature on Greek foods was available as well.

To launch its "Legacy of Homer" exhibit, New York's **Dahesh Museum of Art** teamed with the Institute to offer a program on the dining customs of ancient Greece. At a lecture led by

Francine Segan, author of *The Philosopher's Kitchen: Recipes from Ancient Greece and Rome*, attendees learned about the writings of Hippocrates, Plato, Socrates and Homer on food, wine and even dinner parties. A menu of Institute Members foods – including olives, cheeses and dolmades – were sampled during the event.

The Institute sponsored an auction to benefit the reinstatement of the summer **Delphic Games**. Led by the town of Delphi, the Isadora Duncan International Institute and the Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition, the historic revival of the Games featured live world-class performances, films and discussions, and artist workshops on dance, music, drama and poetry, inspired by the rich mythological legacy of the town.

As in years past, the Institute organized a **Greek Easter promotion** with fine Greek restaurants in New York. Each participating restaurant displayed a gourmet basket of products and cookbooks which were raffled to customers during a drawing on Greek Easter, April 23rd. This year's promotion was the largest ever, with 15 restaurants participating.



Chef Colin Roche, Department Chair of the College of Culinary Arts and Dr. Patricia Wilson, chef-instructor of the International Cuisine class of Johnson & Wales, Miami, present a platter of fillo offerings at the Institute event.

MEMBERS CORNER

◆ **Athens Foods** has added new offerings to its popular line of "bake and serve" fillo appetizers. Three-cheese, salmon and cheese, and artichoke and cheese are among the new choices. Athens also recently introduced four colorful, savory "fill and serve" mini shells: tomato, spinach, corn and black bean.

◆ **Krinos Foods, Inc.** is now making thick and rich traditional Greek-style yogurt, produced from cow's milk with all-natural ingredients. The plain variety ranges from fat-free and 2% to full fat and comes in retail and food service-sizes. Other flavors include strawberry, apricot and peach, raspberry, and cherry.

◆ The Institute regrets to inform readers of the passing of Dimitri "Mimis" **Kourtakis** (1908-2005) – renowned oenologist, statesman and innovative marketer – who was the heart and soul of modern Greek winemaking during its

formative years. The wines he developed continue to gain increased international recognition, as noted in a recent *Business Week*. Michael Psilakis, acclaimed chef of Onera in New York, said "... these wines are increasingly able to stand up to non-Greek food, too." And, according to the article, "Improvements in the wines go hand in hand with the increasing sophistication of Greek cuisine." The April issue of Martha Stewart's *Everyday Food* also featured an article on Greek wine.

◆ The **Kourtakis** and **Calliga** wineries are introducing three new vintage wines from the Peloponnese in late spring/summer: Kourtaki Moscofilero-Mantinia and Calliga Mantinia-Moscofilero, both dry whites with a delicate bouquet and a refined fruity taste; and Calliga Nemea-Agiorgitiko, a deep ruby red with a rich bouquet and smooth taste of berries and plums. ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

AT THE TABLE

QUINCE STUFFED WITH MEAT AND RICE

The Olive and the Caper
by Susanna Hoffman,
Workman Publishing, 2004

The ancient Greeks were not at all hesitant to seize the vessel-like advantage of the “golden apples” of mythology that they loved—quince—and fill them with other foods. The dish is luscious, meaty with the following meat stuffing, nutty with a rice stuffing, and will have guests clamoring for more.

- 1/2 cup cooked short-grain rice, preferably Arborio
- 1/2 lb ground beef or lamb
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp coarsely chopped lemon zest
- 1 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint leaves
- 1/8 tsp ground nutmeg, preferably freshly grated
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 Tbsp tomato paste
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 8 quinces

Place all the ingredients through lemon juice in a medium-size bowl and mix together. (You can use the filling mixture right away, or cool, cover and refrigerate it for up to 48 hours.)

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Place the whole quinces, skin on, in a large pot of water. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and parboil the quinces until just soft, about 10 minutes. When cool enough to handle, slice each quince around the top to make a lid. Scoop out the pulp, being careful not to split the sides or skin. Separate and discard the core and seed, but retain the pulp.

Place the pulp on the bottom of the baking pan. Stuff the quinces with the filling mixture, top with a lid and place on top of the pulp in the baking pan. Pour in 1 cup water mixed with a little sugar and a small piece (1 to 2 inches) cinnamon stick around the quinces. Place the baking dish in the oven and bake, uncovered, until the quince shells are soft and the rims and cap edges have begun to brown, 30 to 35 minutes.

Yield: 8 servings

SWEET & SOUR SHALLOTS

Meze: Small Bites, Big Flavors
from *the Greek Table*
by Rosemary Barron,
Chronicle Books, 2002

Long, slow cooking is the secret of this rich, aromatic meze with its origins in ancient recipes for dishes of wild bulbs and leeks. Small onions, plump green onions (scallions), young leeks, or tiny carrots may be substituted for the shallots.

- 24 shallots (about 14 oz)
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 4 bay leaves
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar, or 2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar mixed with 2 Tbsp water
- 1/4 cup dried currants or small seedless dark raisins
- 2 Tbsp Hymettus or other strongly flavored honey
- 1/4 cup Mavrodaphne, Madeira, or port wine
- Coarse sea salt and coarsely ground pepper to taste

Neatly trim off the shallot root ends and remove a very thin slice from each stem end. In a medium saucepan of boiling water, cook the shallots for 5 minutes. Drain and set aside to cool.

Choose a heavy, shallow baking dish just large enough to hold the shallots in a single layer. Place in the oven and preheat the oven to 325°F. Remove the shallot skins with a paring knife. Pour the olive oil into the baking dish. Add the shallots, turn in the oil to coat, and tuck the bay leaves among them. Bake, uncovered, for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the vinegar, or vinegar and water, and currants or raisins in a small bowl. Stir the honey into the currant or raisin mixture and add this sauce and the wine to the shallots. Baste the shallots and continue baking for 40 minutes to 1 hour, or until the sauce is syrupy. Baste occasionally; if the dish appears dry, add a few tablespoons of water and lightly cover with aluminum foil.

Transfer the shallots to a serving platter or shallow bowl and pour the sauce and bay leaves over. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Serve at room temperature.

Yield: 8 meze or 4 side-dish servings

PEARS IN CHAMOMILE SYRUP WITH PISTACHIO TOPPING

The Olive and the Caper
by Susanna Hoffman,
Workman Publishing, 2004

Pears originated where Greeks did, on the west of the Urals above the Black Sea. The remains of wild pear are found in Mycenaean sites. Homer raved about pears. Greek orchard keepers learned early on to graft fruit-bearing branches to rootstock, and by Roman times, the Greeks had a number of varieties of pears. The original wild pears were better cooked than raw. It is that more archaic tradition that is followed here, though with fine, firm, modern cultivated pears.

- 1 1/2 cups water
- 2 Tbsp chamomile tea leaves
- 6 medium-size ripe but firm pears
- 4 cups dry white wine
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 cup (2 oz) shelled salted pistachio nuts
- fresh berries (optional)

Bring the water to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat. Add the chamomile tea leaves, cover, and set aside to steep for 5 minutes. Strain the liquid into a large pot and set it aside; discard the tea leaves. Peel the pears, leaving them whole with stems intact.

Add the wine, sugar, and lemon juice to the strained liquid and bring to a boil. Drop in the pears, reduce the heat slightly, and simmer briskly until they barely give when gently pressed, 8 to 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the pears to a bowl.

Continue simmering the liquid briskly until it is reduced by half, thickened, and amber colored, 220°F on a candy thermometer, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and let the syrup cool for 5 minutes. Pour the syrup over the pears, allow to cool to room temperature, then cover and chill thoroughly before serving.

Heat an ungreased skillet over medium-high heat. Add the pistachios and stir until toasted, 1 1/2 minutes. Allow to cool, and then finely chop with a chef's knife or in a food processor.

When you are ready to serve the pears, set them in individual bowls. Spoon the chamomile syrup over them, and sprinkle the pistachios over the top. For further festooning, a scattering of fresh berries adds splendid color and a contrasting fruit taste.

Yield: 6 servings

NOTES FROM ALL OVER

Restaurant News – Stavros Actipis of Avra and Costas Tsingas, who served as executive chef for the Olympics in Athens, bring their talents to the theater district with **Kellari Taverna** (cellar). The attractive space has a warm, rustic feel, with an open kitchen that turns out creative spreads; multi-cheese saganakis with sauces; raw and marinated selections; and other progressive Greek fare. The wine list has over 100 Greek wines. Midtown Manhattan welcomes **Artemis** (the goddess of hunting), a new Greek steakhouse.

Another exciting addition to New York's Greek dining scene is **Parea** (a group of friends), with a first-of-its-kind *meli* (honey) room, patterned after dessert and coffee bars found in Greece. The room has colorful displays of spoon sweets, preserved fruits and honeys. For savories, there is a menu of organic mezes, souvlakis and other entrees cooked barside on the restaurant's *sxara* (grill).

In a beautiful and spacious setting, diners at **Ammos** (sand) can feast on excellent grilled fish-by-the-pound – as well as a full menu of unique mezes and country-style cuisine spanning the varied geographical regions of Greece. Dishes feature both typical and more uncommon ingredients. The team of veteran restaurateurs – formerly of Avra, Molyvos, Trata and Milos – also owns Ammos in Astoria, Queens.

Barbounia (red mullet) - features an open kitchen with an innovative menu inspired by the cuisines of the Dalmatian coast – primarily Greece, as well as Turkey, Croatia and Italy. Among the Greek offerings are rabbit with feta, and in fillo, Portobello moussaka, octopus with kalamata olives and fava beans, saganaki with fig marmalade, and meze spreads. The bar offers excellent, unique concoctions, plus a sampling of the menu's lighter fare.

Amidst a grand setting of historical figurines, reliefs and other artwork, the Onassis Cultural Center in Manhattan has opened the **Atrium Café**, with an excellent, well-rounded menu of mezes; salads; desserts, from fillo creations to Greek yogurt and spoon sweets; and Greek coffee.

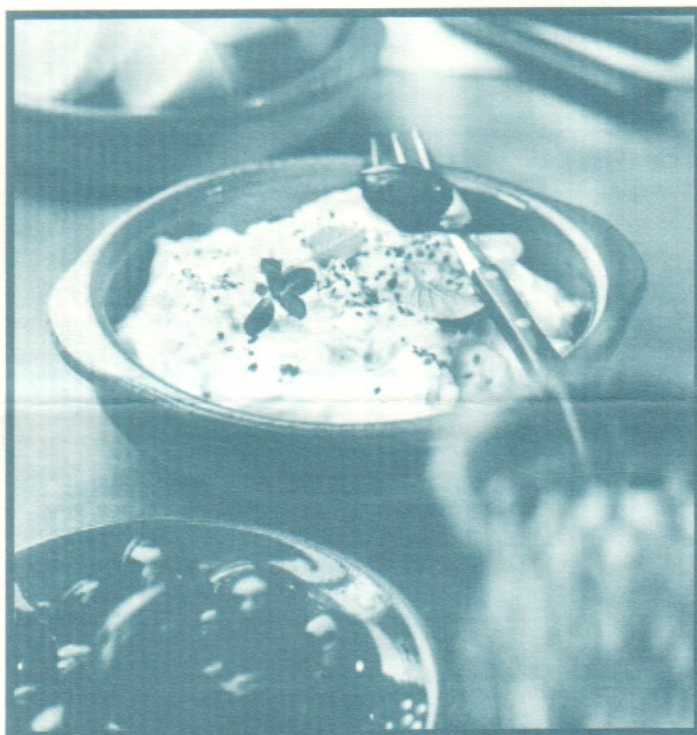
The Brooklyn restaurant boom has embraced Greek cuisine, with the notable additions of **Elios** (sun) in Park Slope, and **Agnanti Meze** in Bay Ridge. Elios serves a menu of more rustic Greek dishes, while Agnanti Meze brings the same quality of shrimp kataifi, tender charred octopus and other dishes that its popular sister branch in Astoria has been offering for three years. The new **BZ Grill** in Astoria offers excellent grilled cheeses and meats, spreads, innovative gyros, and house specialties, including a *biftek gemista* (Greek burger) filled with melted goat cheese.

The team from Manhattan mainstay **Trata** has just opened **Trata East** in the Hamptons on Long Island. It follows the successful charcoal-grilled seafood formula, sandwiched between wonderful spreads and mezes to begin and sumptuous desserts to end.

Many older Greek restaurants that have withstood the test of time have recently expanded, remodeled and enlivened their menus with new chefs. These include the popular **Christos Hasapo-Taverna** in Astoria and **Fleria**, down in

San Juan, Puerto Rico. Christo's new menu was developed by talented chef Mina Newman; it mixes authentic Greek mezes with American steak. Popular with tourists and locals alike, the expanded Fleria won a best "Chef Hat" award from Tables magazine.

Greek cuisine shares the spotlight in several pan-Mediterranean restaurants that have recently opened as well. These New York restaurants include **Dona**, from Michael Psilakis, chef and owner of the popular Greek restaurant Onera and Donatella Arpaia; **Providence**, whose menu focuses on "coastal European" cuisine; and **Dani**, which mixes in North African influences. **Figs & Olive Kitchen and Tasting Bar** offers a casual menu of dishes prepared with – no surprise -- olive oil, as well as oil tastings at the bar, and products to purchase for home.



**Gastronomia invites readers to share information about any new and notable Greek restaurants that have opened in their area. (email: lisacutick@insightbb.com)*

Misc. – About.com has launched a new Greek food site (<http://greekfood.about.com>). The site features articles, recipes, menu plans and sources for key ingredients and products. One of the key goals of the website is to encourage readers to incorporate healthful Greek ingredients and dishes into their everyday cooking.

Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries (CCS) is a finalist for the prestigious Tourism for Tomorrow Awards for best practices in responsible travel worldwide. The awards ceremony is held in Washington, D.C. as part of the Global Travel and Tourism Summit. CCS has also announced its spring/summer schedule: May 22-27, June 19-28, and July 10-16. Tours visit farms, wineries, olive groves, and historic sites, and include such activities as cooking, eating, gardening, and light hiking. www.cookingcrete.com



THE MAIN INGREDIENT: YOGURT



Long savored throughout the Mediterranean, yogurt has of late gained tremendous popularity in the United States – as evidenced by its recent inclusion in everything from cereal to toothpaste and even pet food! More easily digested than milk, yogurt is high in calcium, potassium, protein, B vitamins, vitamin D, and, through the process of digestion, vitamin A. It also contains active “friendly” bacteria known to keep the intestinal system healthy.

Greek yogurt is thick, rich and creamy, and generally made from either cow’s or sheep’s milk, or a combination of both. It can be found in varying degrees of fat content, from a luscious 10% to fat-free, which, because of its thick texture, still tastes and feels like an indulgent treat. Even American whole-fat yogurt does not do justice to Greek yogurt in cooking or in thickness when eaten on its own.

The origin of yogurt is thought to have been accidental, discovered by nomadic Balkan tribes thousands of years ago, and then made purposefully as a means of preserving milk. Greek cooks have continued the tradition of the ancients, using yogurt in dishes both savory and sweet to lend them a rich taste and creamy texture.

Yogurt is the foundation of many meze spreads, most popular of which is *tzatziki*, when mixed with cucumber, garlic, and dill or mint. It is also frequently used in stuffed vegetables and fruit, from quince to zucchini blossoms, and as an accompaniment to spicy dishes. For desserts, yogurt is baked into pies and cakes, and enjoyed on its own with fresh fruit or drizzled with Greek honey (itself outstanding in taste and quality) and topped with nuts, most commonly walnuts and pistachios. In some recipes, yogurt

is separated from the whey (the watery part of milk) to produce an even thicker “cheese”.

Store-bought Greek and Greek-style yogurt – both plain and flavored—are now readily available in the U.S. However, if you choose to make an approximation of Greek yogurt at home, take ordinary yogurt and drain it through a sieve, lined with a minimum of two layers of cheesecloth (or a paper coffee filter). Mix in some salt and refrigerate for 24 hours with a bowl below to catch the dripping water. The resulting yogurt will be about half the quantity of the original amount used.



PR SRT STD
US POSTAGE PAID
DEER PARK NY
PERMIT NO. 11

GREEK FOOD AND WINE
Institute
47-00 Northern Boulevard
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 729-5277
lisacutick@insightb.com

