

# A tasty mix of tradition and nutrition

With such a wide variety of ingredients used in Jordanian cooking, we look at ways to maintain a healthy, balanced diet while still enjoying the rich flavours of the Kingdom

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**Insight, tradition and** nutrition have all played a crucial role in shaping Jordanian cuisine. As well as a variety of tasty foods that are calorific or high in fat – think falafel, mansaf, pastries and nukha'at (fried lamb's brain) – there are also many healthy options in the Jordanian diet: yoghurt (cooked or raw), complex carbohydrates – mostly from beans, lentils, chickpeas and grains like bulgur, maftoul or frikeh – and vegetables.

**MANSAF IN MODERATION** Mansaf, a legendary dish of Jordan, is a much-loved and hugely satisfying meal but is often criticised for its high fat content, especially when soaked with traditional ghee. Yet it is a complete meal that encompasses nearly all food groups – carbohydrates from the rice and jameed (cooked yoghurt), protein from the meat and nuts, and healthy fats when cooked with oil and garnished with almonds or pine nuts. It should also come with vegetables on the side (like parsley, onion and peppers). If you are trying to be healthy, think moderation, not mansaf elimination! »



Jordan's cuisine is also famous for vegetables that are added to meat dishes, such as ma'loubeh (rice with vegetables), or mujaddarah (rice with lentils). Dishes that are basted with tomato sauce, stuffed with rice and spices (stuffed grape leaves), grilled or marinated with spiced garlic are also common.

**BEANS MEANS HEALTH** Beans are a staple part of many Jordanian dishes and as good a source of protein as many types of meat. In addition, beans such as chickpeas, kidney beans, pinto beans and lima beans contain calcium, phosphorus, folate, iron and copper and phytoestrogens – compounds touted for their cancer-fighting ability. Full of complex carbohydrates, and rich in fibre, beans are also great for making you feel full and keeping your weight in check.

**FEEL THE FLAVOUR** Jordan's traditional food has a unique culinary flair, taking flavours from a variety of spices while retaining the original nourishing qualities. Poultry and red meat are often poached in flavoursome broth rather than just cooked in oil. Flavours are intensified with high-heat cooking, such as pan-searing or grilling, to seal in tasty juices. Healthy nuts like almonds, walnuts and pines are often added to recipes or as a garnish,



Top: an assortment of beans, peas, pulses and rice  
Above: stuffed vine leaves and a yoghurt dip  
Below left: Jordan's beloved national dish, Mansaf

thereby packing big flavour and nutrition. Jordanian cuisine inspires the use of big, bold ingredients in small amounts, such as pomegranate seeds with mutabbal (smoked eggplant paste), pepper or cilantro with okra.

**THE VEGETARIAN OPTION** For vegetarians, a typical Jordanian offering would include puréed drained beans with a splash of balsamic vinegar, lemon, and tahini (sesame paste) for an easy spread or dip, like pita bread with hummus. Adding some shredded carrots, diced cucumbers and/or grated cheese to up the vegetable and protein quota is easy to do.

All these selections offer a good source of high nutrients, including complex carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals. 



## strong code of hospitality »

Jordanian mealtimes are always a social event. The warm and welcoming Arabic hospitality that the country is famous for is inextricably linked with food, and mealtimes create an emotional trigger that inspires communication. First off, Jordanians offer their guests traditional Arabic coffee and once food is served, they wish you a 'suhtain' which means 'bless your meal in good health!' Jordanians' meals often feature authentic local cooking, offering an abundant selection and great variety to make sure there is something for everyone to enjoy. Delicious dishes are made with the simplest ingredients: from grains to cheeses, yoghurt to meat and nuts, fresh and dried fruits and vegetables, subtle local seasonings, relishes, olives and hot pickles.

## making mujaddarah »

*Mujaddarah is a renowned cheap, yet nutrient-rich, vegetarian Jordanian dish.*



### Ingredients (feeds 5-6) »

- 1 cup lentils, rinsed;
- 2 cups water;
- ½ cup olive oil;
- 2 chopped medium onions;
- 3 crushed garlic cloves;
- 2 tbsp finely chopped fresh coriander leaves;
- 1 cup rice or bulgur;
- ½ teaspoon salt;
- ½ tsp pepper;
- ½ tsp cumin;
- ¼ tsp cayenne;
- 2 cups water

### Instructions »

Put lentils in a saucepan, add 2 cups of water, and bring to boil and cover. Cook over medium heat for 25 minutes. In the meantime, heat olive oil in a frying pan and sauté onions, garlic and coriander leaves over medium heat for 10-12 minutes. Add rice and stir-fry for an additional 3-4 minutes. Add salt, pepper, cumin and cayenne. Add the frying pan contents into the lentil mixture. Add 2 more cups of water and bring to a boil, and cook over medium heat for 20 minutes or until rice is cooked. The dish is often served hot with raw relishes or salad with pickles.