

Creativity Through Cooking: Making Kibbeh Together

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Sponsored by SNMIC Al-Rajaa Community Center for Empowerment.



On Saturday evening, the warm buzz of conversation filled the room as women gathered around instructor Nahla Shamma to learn the art of making the classic Syrian dish, kibbeh.

“In Syria-especially Aleppo-we are known for our kibbeh. It is something passed down through many generations.” said Um Zelal (Nahla Shamma). She hopes that the other ladies will learn from her even if they are also from Syria:it is important that they know the food of their country.

The workshop brought together women from a variety of backgrounds—some from Yemen, others from Libya and Egypt. One lady from Indonesia has tried Syrian food during Ramadan but this was her first time learning to make it herself.

“ Yes, we are all in the same community but at the same time we have different dishes,” said another participant. There is a keen interest in wanting to learn this new food as they all gather eagerly around, trying to memorise the process.



Um Zelal showed the participants how to make two types of kibbeh: two tray kibbeh cooked in the oven and kibbeh formed into the shape of mini footballs which are then fried.

For many the experience stirs memories of their childhood. The teacher says that it brings back memories of her mother who would make all sorts of kibbeh. She and her sisters would help her in the kitchen, mixing meat, chopping onions and frying nuts. “ I learned it from her, and when we got married, we carried these traditions with us from my mother.” she said. Um Zelal passed on the tradition to her own daughter who said that this dish is hard to make and needs many hands. This is conveyed by the gathering of women bustling back and forth from the kitchen, the loud groan of the grinding machine and the chatter of voices as they shape the kibbeh. One of the students also shared the memory of her mother inviting her friends and neighbours for breakfast and then afterwards presenting them with a load of vine leaves, from which they would take hours and hours making grape leaves.





This event “creates stronger bonds between women” said one girl surrounded by the laughter of her friends. This event not only gives the women an opportunity to learn how to make new food but also to socialise and mix with different people. It brings them all together so they can learn from each other’s cultures. The room is filled with the smell of baked meat and the smiles of cheerful faces. At one point Um Zelal fed pieces of cooked kibbeh to her students with her own hands like they were her own little children. This was a sweet and humorous moment for the group.

Food and cooking for these women is an important aspect in their lives. It creates bonds between people and families. As one girl said” Cooking is more than a hobby. It is a language. It is a way to express yourself.” When a wife sees that her husband and family are happy with her cooking she is also happy and proud.



“ Food isn’t just something you eat. It carries beautiful family memories. It brings warmth-like when the kids come home and smell the food cooking. Food is not only a meal; it’s part of childhood memories and family moments, and it brings everyone together.” said Um Zelal.

