

# ROOT VEGETABLE COOKING

*from Zatar Restaurant & Catering*

Zatar Restaurant and Catering is the passion of husband-and-wife team Waiel and Kelly Majid. Since opening in 2002, the restaurant has gained a loyal following who come to enjoy the grilled lamb sandwich, slow cooked tagines, the signature lavash with house-made yogurt cheese, grilled squid with butter beans and watercress, and other tantalizing Mediterranean-inspired dishes. The unique wine list focuses on sustainability and suitability to Zatar's eclectic fare.

Waiel, raised in the oasis village of Baquba, Iraq, grew up eating food prepared with fresh ingredients plucked straight from the family garden, local fruit orchards, and date palm groves. As a child, it was Waiel's morning chore to fetch fresh bread from the village baker's oven. Entranced by the baker's skill, Waiel built his own clay oven in his back yard at the age of nine to bake his own bread. He has been cooking ever since. Kelly, a native Californian, was raised in the countryside, where she became an avid gardener, and later, a chef devoted to cooking with only the freshest and highest quality ingredients.

What's the secret to Zatar's super-fresh ingredients? Much of the produce is harvested daily from the Majids' own organic garden in East Oakland, so the grilled tromboncino squash on your plate may have been picked from the garden just an hour earlier. Pomegranates, plums, pears, apples, figs, persimmons, apricots, mulberries, peaches, and citrus occupy the top of the Majid's terraced garden, with vegetables flourishing in the lower terraces. Herbs and flowers are planted throughout, attracting an abundance of hummingbirds and bees for pollination.

The restaurant is open only Wednesday through Saturday so that Kelly and Waiel can tend to the garden during the rest of the week. In addition, Zatar also caters and hosts private parties in its intimate dining room, which is colorfully adorned with Moroccan ceramics, Syrian chandeliers, and Portuguese-tile tables.



## LEBNA BIL SHWANDR (DRAINED YOGURT WITH BEETS)



*Chef Waiel Majid grew up near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq, where he recalls that plants would self-sow in the riverbed in the summertime when the water level would drop and the sandy, fertile bank would widen. Suddenly eggplant, squash, and tomato plants would emerge like magic. Locals would camp on the riverbank to escape the summer heat, and for meals, would harvest vegetables straight from*

*their productive picnic site, roasting them over an open fire, and mixing them into spreads with homemade yogurt. These summer spreads were enjoyed with freshly baked bread. Lebna bil Shwandr (Drained Yogurt with Beets) is featured on Zatar's autumn menu.*

- 1 quart homemade yogurt or good quality European/Greek-style yogurt
- 4–6 medium-sized beets
- Rind and juice of 1 Meyer lemon
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Sea salt
- Black pepper
- ¼ cup Italian parsley and/or mint, chopped

Drain yogurt overnight in cheesecloth. Boil beets until tender, then peel and shred once they are cooled down. Fold shredded beets into drained yogurt along with lemon juice, lemon rind, garlic, olive oil, and a dash of salt and pepper. Chill for at least 1 hour. Garnish with fresh parsley and/or mint and serve with fresh, warm flat bread. Serves 4–6

## ROASTED MOROCCAN SPICED CARROTS, RUTABAGAS, AND PARSNIPS

- 3 carrots
- 3 parsnips
- 2 rutabagas
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons ground coriander
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
- Sea salt
- Black pepper
- ¼ cup fresh mint, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 350°. Wash and peel parsnips, rutabagas, and carrots. Cut into slices and toss in a large mixing bowl with remaining ingredients (except mint). Spread out on a baking dish and bake at 350° for around 30 minutes or until vegetables are softened and browned. Toss with fresh mint and serve.



## LENTIL SOUP WITH TURNIPS, LEEKS, AND LEMON

*Wael prepares different variations of this soup based on which herbs and greens are coming out of the garden. The following version with turnips is a wintertime favorite.*

- 2 large leeks
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cups brown lentils
- 1 bunch fresh chervil
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro
- 4–6 medium-sized turnips with tops
- Sea salt
- Black pepper
- 3 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 lemons

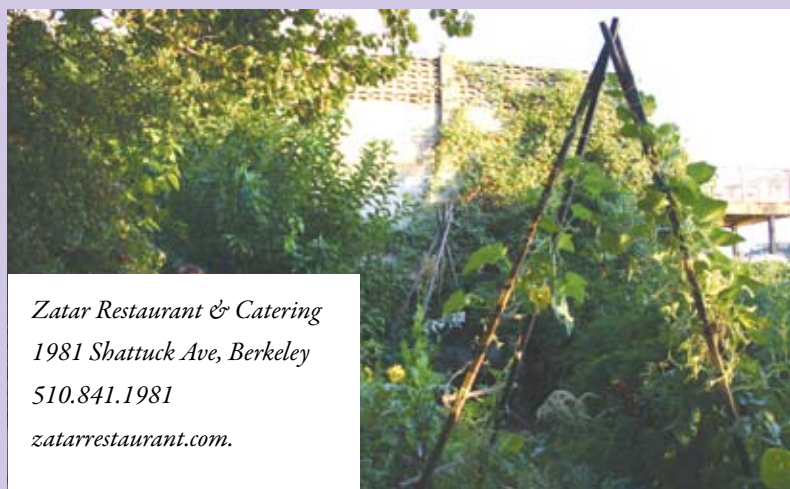
Wash leeks carefully, making sure to get all the grit out from between the leaves. Thinly slice and sauté in olive oil. Once leeks have softened, lower flame and allow to cook slowly on a very low flame for an hour, stirring occasionally.

Boil lentils for 10–15 minutes in a large pot with plenty of water. Drain when halfway cooked. (They should not be too soft yet.)

Wash chervil, cilantro, and turnips. Separate turnips from tops and cut roots into wedges. Roughly chop turnip greens.

Add sea salt, black pepper, garlic, and chopped chervil and cilantro to leeks and cook for another 10 minutes. Add about 8 cups water along with the cooked lentils and turnips. Bring to a boil, throw in chopped turnip greens, and then reduce flame and continue cooking over low heat for another 30–40 minutes, or until lentils and turnips are soft and broth has thickened.

Just before serving, squeeze in some fresh lemon juice and garnish with more chopped herbs.



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