

Falafel with Cucumber-Mint Sauce

For the Falafel

½ pound dried chickpeas
3 garlic cloves
1 bay leaf
5 fresh thyme sprigs
1 onion
½ cup parsley
½ cup mint
½ cup cilantro
2 eggs
1 tablespoon ground cumin
2 teaspoons ground coriander
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon salt
black pepper to taste
large pinch cayenne
1 teaspoon baking powder
5 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon flour
½ cup dry bread crumbs
oil for frying

For the Cucumber-Mint Sauce

16 ounces plain yogurt
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
2 tablespoons sour cream
3 kirbys or 2 large cucumbers
½ cup mint
salt and pepper to taste
lemon juice to taste
pinch cayenne

To Cook the Chickpeas

Wash and place ½ pound of dried chickpeas in a pot with 2 quarts of cold water. Bring to a boil, and boil 5 minutes. Lower the heat to a simmer. Add a whole unpeeled garlic clove, a bay leaf, 4 tablespoons olive oil, and sprigs of fresh thyme. Cook for 1½ hours or more until tender. Drain off the liquid, discard the garlic, bay leaf, and thyme.

To Make the Falafel

Place ¾ cup of the cooked chickpeas in a food processor, along with the onion (cut in chunks), two peeled garlic cloves, parsley, mint and cilantro. Process until rather smooth.

In a large bowl, mash the remainder of the chickpeas with a potato masher. There will remain some small chunks, but be sure to mash any whole chickpeas. Combine the ingredients from the food processor into the mashed chickpeas.

In another bowl, beat together the eggs, cumin, coriander, lemon juice, salt, pepper, cayenne, and baking powder. Combine with the chickpea mixture.

Sprinkle on the flour and add the bread crumbs slowly to the mixture. Add only enough bread crumbs to make the mixture until it has a consistency to hold in patties. Add more or less bread crumbs and flour to achieve that consistency.

Form the mixture into 1½-inch patties and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Fry the falafel in a large skillet in about ½-inch of oil over medium-high heat, until browned on both sides.

To Make the Cucumber-Mint Sauce

Peel the cucumbers, cut in half, and seed with a spoon. Sprinkle both sides with salt, and place on paper towels, cut-side-down, to drain. Rinse the cucumbers in cold water, drain, and chop finely. Dry the chopped cucumber in paper towels.

Combine the yogurt, mayonnaise, sour cream, lemon juice, finely chopped mint, cayenne, and salt and pepper. Stir in the the chopped cucumber and chill.

To Serve

Place pitas, bottom-side down, directly on the grates of a gas stove over medium-low heat until they begin to puff up. Be careful not to let them burn. (If you don't have a gas stove, heat them in an oven.)

Gently cut the pitas in half and open the pockets. Stuff each pita half with the falafel, and top with the cucumber-mint sauce.

Left-over falafel can be reheated in a 350° oven for about 6 minutes.