

episode 63 show notes and advice

Episode Description

This week Sarah chats to Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley about their cookbook *Falastin*, which follows *Jerusalem*, the cookbook they co-wrote with Yotam Ottolenghi. In *Falastin* they explore Palestinian cuisine, the food from Sami's childhood and Tara's journey into Middle Eastern home cooking. Incredible recipes are interweaved with stories about Palestine, its people and the complex political circumstances they have to live in. Sami and Tara tell Sarah what it was like to travel around Palestine researching this book and share some delicious recipes with us today.

In this episode, discover...

- How Sami and Tara came to work with Yotam Ottolenghi in his restaurants and on his cookbooks.
- Sami shares memories of his childhood and the food growing up in Palestine.
- Some of the incredible people profiled in *Falastin*, including Vivien Sansour, who runs the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library, and Islam Abu Aouda, who lives with her family in a refugee camp in Bethlehem, offering cooking classes to visitors.
- The paradox Tara and Sami wanted to show existing in Palestine where people live full lives and eat delicious food, while also portraying the harsh reality and constraints of living under occupation.
- Why olive oil is so important to Palestinian cooking, how to buy this oil here in the UK, and the people protecting 4000 year old olive trees under threat of destruction from the separation wall.
- Eight delicious recipes from *Falastin* including spiced salmon skewers with parsley oil Sami cooked when he came to teach at Perch Hill.

episode 63 advice sheet

Working with Ottolenghi

Sami started his culinary career in Palestine before moving to London as a young chef in 1997, where he met Yotam Ottolenghi. Together, Ottolenghi and Tamimi launched the celebrated [Ottolenghi](#) group of restaurants and cookbooks. The first cookbook they worked on together was *Ottolenghi*, followed by *Jerusalem* in homage to the food of their shared, divided home city (Ottolenghi is Israeli).

[Falastin](#) is Sami's first venture without Yotam, a book of recipes and stories. Co-written with Tara Wigley, who left a career in publishing to cook with the Ottolenghi family, collaborating with Yotam on both the writing and cooking of his recipes in the test kitchen.

Together, they wanted to zoom in on the food and people of Palestine, offering a collection of 110 recipes for the home cook. *Falastin* is also full of profiles of the people they met on their travels around Palestine to show the reality of living in fragmented occupied territories with conflict, checkpoints, complicated systems and rules.

Sami's story

Palestinians are obsessed with food and Sami's home was no different. Palestinian home cooks tend to be women and Sami spent much of his childhood being shooed away from the kitchen by aunties and sisters. As he says in the book, "the Palestinian table is only really happy when it's covered with food." He was a self-taught chef, moving to Tel Aviv and learning how to cook other cuisines first, while cooking Palestinian food at home.

The whole idea for *Falastin* came from working on *Jerusalem* with Ottolenghi which focuses on the Israeli side of their shared home city. Sami wanted to write a focused book on the Palestinian side.

Tara's journey

Tara joined Sami from beginning of the project. As she didn't know much about Palestinian food, she asked all the right questions. The good thing about a cookbook is it offers a more accessible introduction into the complex history, culture and politics of Palestine. Dealing with the grim reality of the occupation can be paralyzing.

Sarah asks Sami and Tara to touch on some of the people profiled in *Falastin*:

Stories from *Falastin*

One chapter is called 'a tale of two restaurateurs: the politics (or not) of food'. Over two nights, Sami and Tara ate in two different restaurants where the owners had very strong differing opinions. The first was a new restaurant in Haifa called Lux where the chef-owner Alla Musa was cooking incredible contemporary Palestinian food. He didn't want to talk about anything political, he just wants people to come to his restaurant to eat, drink and be merry. In contrast, the next night, for Daher Zeidani who owns the Alreda restaurant in Nazareth, food is intensely political and he talked in depth about how the political circumstances affect him trying to run his restaurant.

Another chapter focuses on Islam Abu Aouda, who lives with her family in a refugee camp in Bethlehem. She offers cooking classes to visitors as part of the [Noor Women's Empowerment Group](#), a grassroots collective that raises funds for the area's disabled kids, including her own eldest child. Aouda's dream, beyond a stable place to live, is to visit the sea for the first time. She lives within three hours of the Israeli coastal town of Haifa, where Palestinians can't easily go; "getting in the way is the paperwork needed, the visa often denied, the checkpoint lines so long and humiliating," the book explains. Gaza, the one chunk of Palestinian territory with Mediterranean coastline, is under blockade, and anyone who visits risks getting trapped up there for months by Israeli forces.

Wild flowers and orange cauliflowers

Sarah has visited Jerusalem and was struck by the incredible energy and food. The wild flowers, extraordinary fritillaries and Anemone coronarias caught her attention as did the vans she saw full of orange cauliflowers. Cauliflowers were a star ingredient in their book *Jerusalem* and the same is true for *Falastin*. The cauliflower and cumin fritters proved so popular, they are shared also in *Falastin*. They are something Sami's mother used to make, packing them up for her kids to take to school.

Cauliflower and cumin fritters with mint yoghurt

Makes about 10 fritters, to serve 4-6

- 1 small cauliflower, cut into 4-5cm sized florets
- 120g plain flour
- 20g parsley, finely chopped
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 3/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp ground turmeric
- 1/2 tsp Aleppo chilli flakes (or a 1/4 regular chilli flakes)
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 250ml sunflower oil, to fry
- Salt and pepper

Sauce (optional)

- 250g Greek-style yoghurt
- 1/2 tsp dried mint
- 2 tbsps lemon juice

- 1 tbsp olive oil

Place all the ingredients for the sauce, if using, in a bowl with ½ teaspoon of salt. Mix to combine and keep in the fridge until ready to serve.

Bring a medium pan full of salted water to the boil and add the cauliflower. Simmer for 4 minutes, then (making sure to reserve 3-4 tablespoons of the cooking water) drain it into a colander. Using a fork or potato masher, slightly crush the cauliflower, then transfer it to a large bowl along with all the remaining ingredients for the fritters (apart from the sunflower oil), 1 ¼ tsp of salt and a good grind of black pepper. Add 3 tbsp of the cooking water and mix well, until the mix has the consistency of a slightly runny batter.

Heat the oil in a large sauté pan – about 22cm wide – and, once very hot, carefully spoon 2-3 tbsp of batter per fritter into the oil. You'll need to do this in batches – 4 or 5 fritters at a time – so as not to overcrowd the pan, and use a fish slice to keep them apart. Fry for about 5 minutes, flipping them over halfway through, until both sides are golden brown. Transfer to a plate lined with kitchen paper and set aside while you continue with the remaining batches. Serve warm or at room temperature, with the yoghurt sauce on the side.

Hasan's easy eggs with za'atar and lemon

This recipe, that opens *Falastin*, almost didn't make it into the book but ironically has become one of the most popular recipes, even going viral. Sarah loves the instruction to tear not cut the eggs as well as the all-important addition of olive oil.

Serves 4

- 6 eggs
- 1 ½ tsp lemon juice
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp za'atar
- 2 spring onion, finely sliced
- ½ tsp Aleppo (or any other) chilli flakes
- Salt and black pepper

Bring a medium saucepan of water to the boil and carefully lower in the eggs. Boil for 5-6 minutes, then refresh at once under plenty of cold running water.

Meanwhile, whisk together the lemon juice, olive oil and za'atar and set aside.

Peel and roughly quarter the eggs, by hand so they're not too neat, and arrange on a serving plate, yoks side up. Sprinkle with ¼ tsp of salt and a generous grind of black pepper and drizzle over the lemon juice and olive oil mix. Sprinkle with the spring onions and chilli and serve at once.

The significance of Palestinian olive oil

Olive oil is the Queen of this book. For Tara learning more the importance of the olive harvest and seasonality was incredible to witness as an outsider. She didn't grow up with a foodie identity so to come to Palestine and see whole year centred around this harvest and how important it was for so many people, from jobs it creates to seasonal recipes made with the oil like chicken musakhan. She met with and tells the story about the guardian of one of Palestine's oldest olive trees – estimated to be 4000 years old – under threat of destruction to make way for the continued building of the separation wall. Salah Abu-Ali's family has been farming the land since the 60s and he sits guard as the tree's protector.

Chicken musakhan

Serves 4

- 1 chicken divided into 4 pieces
- 120ml olive oil, plus 2-3 tbsp extra to finish
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 3 tbsp sumac
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground allspice
- 30g pine nuts
- 3 large red onions, thinly sliced
- 4 flatbreads (taboon breads ideally – p. 341 Falastin)
- 5g parsley leaves, roughly chopped
- Salt and black pepper

Preheat the oven to 200oc fan.

Place the chicken in a large mixing bowl with 2 tbsp of oil, 1 tsp of cumin, 1 ½ tsp of sumac, the cinnamon, allspice, 1 tsp of salt and grind of pepper. Mix well to combine, then spread out on a parchment-lined baking tray. Roast until the chicken is cooked through. This will take about 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside. Don't discard juices.

Put 2 tbsp of oil in a large sauté pan and place on a medium heat. Add the pine nuts and cook for about 2-3 minutes until the nuts are golden brown. Transfer to a bowl lined with kitchen paper. Add the remaining oil along with the onions and $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt to the pan. Return to a medium heat for about 15 minutes, stirring from time to time until the onions are soft but not caramelised. Add 2 tbsp sumac, the remaining 2 tsp of cumin and a grind of black pepper and mix through until the onions are coated. Set aside.

When ready to assemble the dish, set the oven to a grill setting and slice or tear the bread into quarters. Place them under the grill for 2-3 minutes to crisp up then arrange on a large platter. Top the bread with half the onions, followed by all the chicken and any juices left in the tray. Either place the chicken as it is or shred as you plate up. Spoon the remaining onions on top and sprinkle with the pine nuts, parsley, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of sumac and a final drizzle of olive oil. Serve at once with the yoghurt and a wedge of lemon.

How to buy Palestinian olive oil

You can buy delicious, intense Palestinian olive oil from [Zaytoun](#) – don't cook with it – just use a drizzle to enjoy the flavour.

Rice with yoghurt, roasted cauliflower and fried garlic

This recipe was new to Sarah, a very simple dish, bursting with flavour of the rice in yoghurt and cauliflower with garlic and coriander.

Serves four as a main or six as a side

- 1 large cauliflower, cut into roughly 6cm florets
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 400g Greek-style yoghurt
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cornflower
- 700ml whole milk
- 200g pudding or risotto rice, washed and drained
- About 5g picked parsley leaves to garnish
- Salt and white pepper

Adha

- 5 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 60ml olive oil
- 2 tsp coriander seeds, lightly crushed in a pestle and mortar

Preheat the oven to 200 oc fan.

Put the cauliflower into a large bowl with the oil and ½ teaspoon of salt. Mix well to combine, then spread out on a large parchment-lined baking tray. Roast for 25-27 minutes, until golden brown and tender.

While the cauliflower is cooking, place the yoghurt, egg yolk and cornflower in a free-standing blender and work on a medium speed for a minute, until the mixture is smooth and runny. You can do this by hand, but if you do, mix it really well to prevent the sauce from splitting when cooked. Set aside.

Roasted cauliflower and burnt aubergine with tomato sauce

- 4 large aubergines, pricked in a few places with a sharp knife
- 1 garlic clove crushed
- 1 ½ tsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp cider vinegar
- 1 large cauliflower (or 2 small cauliflowers) cut into roughly 3cm florets
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- ¾ tsp ground turmeric
- Salt and black pepper

Tomato salsa

- 3 large tomatoes, diced
- 10g parsley, roughly chopped
- 1 tbsp oregano leaves, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice

To serve

- 5g picked mint leaves
- 5g picked parsley leaves

There are 2 ways to char your aubergines: either directly on the flame of your stove top or in a hot oven. The oven takes longer – 55-60 mins rather than 15-20 on the stove. For full instructions see page 335 of *Falastin*.

Once the flesh has been scooped out of the burnt aubergines it should weigh about 500g. Place in a colander set over a bowl and leave for at least an hour (or overnight, in the fridge), to drain.

Once drained, put the aubergine flesh into a medium mixing bowl and, using your hands, pull it apart to create long, thin strands. Add the garlic, lemon, vinegar and 1 tsp of salt. Mix to combine and set aside (in the fridge if you are making this a day ahead).

Preheat the oven to 200oc fan.

Put the cauliflower into a large bowl along with the olive oil, coriander seeds, turmeric $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp of salt and a good grind of pepper. Mix well to combine then spread out on a parchment-lined baking tray. Roast for 30 mins, until the cauliflower is golden and tender. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool to room temperature.

While the cauliflower is roasting, place all the ingredients for the salsa in a bowl with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of salt. Mix to combine.

To assemble the dish, spread the aubergine on a serving plate which has a lip and arrange the cauliflower on top. Spoon over the salsa, sprinkle over the mint and parsley and serve.

Salmon skewers

Sami cooked this when he taught at Perch Hill. Salmon isn't very common in Palestine but he wanted to adapt a Palestinian spice mix for fish using a common UK ingredient.

Serves 6 as a starter or 4 as a main

- 800g salmon fillet, skinless and boneless, cut into 4cm chunks
- 6 skewers
- 1 tbsp fish spice mix
- 2 tbsp sumac
- 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp olive oil
- 2 onions halved lengthways and quartered into 4 large chunks
- 12 cherry tomatoes
- Sunflower oil
- Salt and pepper
- 1 lemon, quartered to serve

Parsley oil

- 40g parsley
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 90ml olive oil

- 1 lemon

Fish spice mix

- 2 tsp ground cardamon
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp paprika
- 2 tsp ground turmeric

Put the salmon into a large bowl along with the fish spice mix, sumac, 2 tbsp olive oil, $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp of salt and a generous grind of pepper. Mix well to combine, then set aside in the fridge for at least an hour.

Put the remaining 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp of olive oil into a large sauté pan and place on a medium high heat. Add the onions and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring a few times, until they are softened but not coloured. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Make the parsley oil by blitzing the ingredients, apart from the lemon, in a food processor. To prepare the lemon, use a sharp knife to trim off the top and tail. Cut down along its round curves, removing skin and pith. Release the segments by slicing between the membranes then roughly chop and add to the parsley oil. Set aside.

Preheat the oven at 230oc fan.

To assemble the skewers, start with a tomato and then alternate the salmon chunks and onion pieces. Finish each skewer with a second tomato.

Place a well-greased griddle pan on a high heat.

Once the griddle pan is smoking hot, add the skewers, in two batches, add grill for 3-4 minutes, turning so all sides are charred on the outside. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking tray and continue with the remaining skewers. Transfer to the oven and bake for 6-7 minutes.

Transfer the skewers to a large serving platter and drizzle over the parsley oil. Serve at once with a wedge of lemon.

Shatta (red or green)

Shatta is on every Palestinian table, cutting through the rich foods or peppering others up. Green shatta is tangy and red shatta is sweeter.

Makes 1 medium jar (sterilised first)

- 250g red or green chillies, thinly sliced with seeds
- 1 tbsp salt
- 3 tbsp cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- Olive oil, to cover and seal

Place the chillies and salt in a medium sterilised jar and mix well. Seal the jar and store in the fridge for 3 days. On the third day, drain the chillies, transfer them to a food processor and blitz: you can either blitz well to form a fine paste or roughly blitz so that some texture remains. Add the vinegar and the lemon juice, mix to combine, then return the mixture to the same jar. Pour enough olive oil on top to seal, and keep in the fridge.

Baby gem lettuce with burnt aubergine yoghurt, smacked cucumbers and shatta

This is one of Tara's favourite recipes using red shatta.

Serves 4 generously

- 5-6 baby gem lettuces, bases trimmed
- 1 ½ tbsp shatta (red or green)
- ½ tsp Urfa chilli flakes (or a small pinch of nigella seeds or black sesame seeds)
- Salt and black pepper

Aubergine yoghurt

- 2 large aubergines
- 35g Greek-style yoghurt
- ½ garlic clove roughly chopped
- 1 ½ tbsp lemon juice
- 1 ½ tbsp tahini

Smacked cucumber

- 1 regular English cucumber, peeled, sliced in half lengthways and watery seeds removed
- 25g parsley, roughly chopped
- 25g mint leaves, roughly chopped
- ½ garlic clove, roughly chopped
- Olive oil

There are 2 ways to chargrill the aubergine: on an open flame on the stove top, or in a chargrill pan on a hob followed by 10 minutes in a hot oven. Once cooked, scoop out the flesh and place

in the bowl of a food processor along with the yoghurt, garlic, lemon juice, tahini and ½ tsp of salt. Blitz for about a minute, until completely smooth, then set aside until needed.

Prepare the cucumber by placing each half on a chopping board, cut side facing down. Using the flat side of a large knife, lightly 'smack' them until bruised but still holding their shape. Cut the cucumber into roughly 1cm dice and set aside.

Clean the food processor, then add the parsley, mint, garlic, olive oil and ¼ tsp of salt. Blitz for about 2 minutes, scraping down the sides a couple of times if you need to, to form a smooth paste, then add to the cucumber.

The Palestinian seed library

Sarah asks Sami and Tara to tell us more about the Palestinian seed library run by Vivien Sansour, which seeks to preserve ancient seed varieties and traditional farming practices—both under severe pressure from the occupation. Vivien also does education projects with kids – using the seed as a metaphor for growth – so they see the amazing results of what can happen to a seed with water, light and nurture, and hopefully apply this to themselves.