

Topik (Armenian wedding balls)

This recipe is thanks to Zeliha Irez, who delighted us with them when we stayed at her gorgeous guesthouse in the hills east of Istanbul. Turkish cuisine bears a few Armenian influences, one of the legacies of the Ottoman empire. These balls make a very elegant starter, and can be made and frozen in advance, which is a bonus. I haven't tried making them at home yet, so let me know how it goes if you try them...



2 pints dried chickpeas
4 tbsps tahini
2 kg onions
1 tbsps vegetable oil
2 tbsps pine nuts
2 tbsps dried currants
¼ pint tahini
sugar to taste
cumin to taste
cinnamon to taste
salt to taste
chopped parsley, lemon juice and cinnamon to garnish

1. Boil chickpeas in plenty salted water until tender. Drain, peel if needed/possible, then mash to a paste. Mix with 4 tbsps tahini. Taste and add more salt and/or tahini if desired. Chill.
2. Peel, halve and slice onions into thin half-circles. Sweat them in a sauté pan, covered, with the vegetable oil and a pinch of salt, very slowly, until tender and no longer watery.
3. Add pine nuts, currants, ¼ pint tahini, sugar, spices and more salt as desired. Turn off heat and let cool completely.
4. Once chickpea paste has completely chilled, start making wedding balls: Put some paste in the palm of your hand and pat flat. This will be the outside casing of the ball. Place a tablespoon of onion mix in the centre and fold the paste up and round it. Roll into a ball. Repeat. The balls should be the size of ping-pong balls. Wrap each one tightly in clingfilm and chill. (Or if you want, freeze.)
5. To serve, bring balls to room temperature, remove clingfilm and serve dusted with a little cinnamon, drizzled with lemon juice and garnished with parsley.