

VIRTUOUS PALESTINIAN FRESH MEDJOUL DATES

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I believe in these dates because my purchase thereof provided a livelihood to Palestinian farmers in the Jordan Valley. For me, eating these dates becomes a virtuous act of peaceful resistance to the situation in which these farmers find themselves - facing shrinking markets and water supply. Although I choose to believe such virtuosity can counter calories, as “daughters Suhair and Marwa” advise - keep a count of how many you eat.

Medjoul Dates

Originally grown in Morocco, Medjoul dates offer a sweeter and softer alternative to Deglet Noor dates, the variety of date most abundantly grown in California. Though they pack a hefty caloric punch, Medjoul dates also have minerals, vitamins and fiber that boost their nutritional value. Use Medjoul dates in recipes, or eat them on their own for a healthy snack. It is important to note that although dates are high in fiber and nutrients, they are still fairly high in calories and best consumed in moderation.

Calories

One Medjoul date contains 66 calories, 15.95 grams of sugar and 0 trans fats. Since dates are naturally rich in carbohydrates (17.99 milligrams in a single date), they are an excellent source of energy. When it comes to calories, dried dates are significantly higher in calories than fresh. Fresh dates make a better choice if you're watching your weight.

Nutrition Facts

Dates are rich sources of selenium, copper, potassium and magnesium; a 100-gram serving of Medjoul or Deglet Noor dates providing over 15% of the daily RDA/AI of these minerals. What's more, both varieties provide moderate amounts of manganese, iron, phosphorus, calcium, niacin (vitamin B3) and pyridoxine (vitamin B6).

Fresh vs. Dried

Fresh dates are available soft, semi-soft or dry. Dry fresh dates are not the same as dried dates. A dry date simply contains less moisture than a soft date. Fresh dates, if kept in an airtight container, stay fresh for up to 8 months if kept refrigerated, or for up to year in the freezer. Dried dates are deliberately dehydrated to remove moisture. Dried dates have a longer shelf-life than fresh. If refrigerated, dried dates, in an airtight container, stay fresh for up to one year; in the freezer they can last up to five years.

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Palestinian Recipe for a Healthy Ramadan & Happy Eid

During Ramadan, Muslim Palestinians break their daily fast - after sundown - by first eating 1, 3 or 5 dates (*an odd number of dates as Prophet Mohammed advised*) before ingesting heavier food. They have found this both cleanses the palate and makes it easier on the digestive system.

When Ramadan is over, on the first day of the Breaking of the Fast or the Eid al-Fitr celebration, Palestinian women serve scrumptious homemade cookies or cakes (*made with dates*) to lucky visitors and guests.

Here is one such treat:

- Pit the dates and mash or process into a smooth paste. If it is too dry, try adding a little butter.
- Put the mashed pulp into a bowl.
- Shape the date pulp into small balls; roll them in either sesame seeds or coconut (your choice).

Date balls can be served right away or kept in the fridge.
It is also possible to freeze them for a future event.

RAMADAN - akin to Lent - is a month of spiritual reflection, improvement and increased devotion and worship.

Muslims are expected to put more effort into following the teachings of Islam. The fast begins at dawn and ends at sunset. The act of fasting is said to redirect the heart away from worldly activities, its purpose being to cleanse the soul by freeing it from harmful impurities. Ramadan also teaches Muslims how to better practice self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice, and empathy for those who are less fortunate; thus encouraging actions of generosity and charity.

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Fresh Medjoul Dates make delightful snacks eaten alone or stuffed with other treats

1. Try these delights
 - Fill the dates with goat cheese, chopped sundried tomatoes and sliced basil.
 - Or stuff them with peanut butter and sprinkle with pomegranate seeds.
 - Or place a hard pretzel nugget inside the date and dip in dark melted chocolate
2. Only try the following recipe for those who **can eat pork**. Do not serve to any who follow a pork restricted diet - i.e. Halal, Kosher or Vegetarian.

• **Bacon Wrapped Dates**

- ½ c. crème fraîche or sour cream
- 1 tbsp fresh lime juice
- 1 tbsp. brown sugar
- 24 large dried pitted Medjoul dates
- 48 fried and salted Marcona almonds
- 12 bacon slices cut in half crosswise
- 24 wooden picks
- 2 tbsp. canola oil divided
- fresh mint leaves thinly sliced

Stir together crème fraîche, lime juice and brown sugar till smooth. Chill.

Stuff each date with 2 almonds. Wrap each date snugly with ½ bacon slice, overlapping the ends; secure with a wooden toothpick.

Heat 1 tbsp oil in large skillet over medium high. When hot, add half of the dates to skillet, turning occasionally, until bacon is cooked through and browned on all sides, 8-10 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel lined plate to drain. Repeat with remaining oil and dates.

Remove toothpicks; arrange on a platter. Sprinkle with sliced mint, and serve with crème fraîche dip.

*Pork and byproducts such as gelatin, shortening or lard are not Halal.

To learn more about what is Halal (allowed) and what is Haram (not allowed), see -

<https://www.icv.org.au/about/about-islam-overview/what-is-halal-a-guide-for-non-muslims>

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Famous Date Filled Oatmeal Cookie Sandwiches

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup golden brown sugar
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 2 cups slow cooking old fashioned rolled oats
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

INGREDIENTS FOR FILLING

- 1/2 pound of pitted dates (*dried, not fresh medjoul*), chopped
- 2/3 cup cold water
- 1/2 cup granulated white sugar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

METHOD

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING THE DOUGH

1. Sift last three dry ingredients together into large mixing bowl; add all remaining ingredients
2. Work with hands until ingredients combine into a cohesive mass; form into two discs
3. Wrap and refrigerate for at least three hours or overnight; remove from fridge and roll when at room temperature

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ROLLING THE DOUGH

1. Preheat oven to 350F
2. Roll on a slightly floured surface with a sleeve over the rolling pin; cut shapes and refrigerate for 10-15 minutes
3. When cold; bake until golden: if small 7-8 minutes; if large, 15 minutes
4. Place on wire rack to cool immediately

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING

1. Combine all ingredients, except lemon juice in heavy pan on medium heat until thick and cohesive; add juice and stir to completely combine

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

1. Place a small amount of filling (a teaspoon for small cookies, a tablespoon for large cookies) on bottom of one cookie; top with bottom of other cookie to sandwich filling
2. Store in air tight container.

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No-Bake Date Energy Bar

(8-12 bars)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cup dates seeds removed (I used Mejdoul dates)
- 1 cup walnut
- 1/2 cup almond
- 1/2 cup grated coconut
- pinch of salt
- 1/2 cup mixed seeds like sunflower and pumpkin

METHOD

First of all, clean the dates and remove seeds.

In a food processor add walnut, almond, and coconut.

Pulse for 10 seconds. Repeat this until dry fruits are broken into pieces.

To this add seeds and dates.

Pulse for 20 seconds. Repeat this for 2-3 times till dates are crushed and mixed with dry fruit mixture.

Line a parchment paper in a baking pan or in a plate.

Pour this mixture in the pan and set it with the help of a spatula. Spread some seeds on top. Set them and keep in the fridge until they firm.

Cut them into the desired shape. No-bake date energy bar ready to serve with milk at breakfast time or snack time.

VIRTUOUS PALESTINIAN FRESH MEDJOUL DATES

Date Wheat Germ Muffins

INGREDIENTS

- ½ to 1 cup dried dates (depends on your choice)
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup boiling water (pour over & let cool)

- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 1 tsp. vanilla

- 2 ½ cups flour
- ½ tsp. salt
- 4 tsp. baking powder
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup wheat germ

- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup milk

METHOD

Turn oven to 375. Prepare muffin tins.
Prepare dates in a medium bowl.
Add oil & vanilla when cool.

Meanwhile stir dry ingredients in large bowl.
In another bowl beat eggs & milk until light & fluffy.

Add all ingredients together, fold just until combined. Spoon into prepared muffin tins.

Bake approximately 15 minutes, until firm & golden.
Recipe makes 2 dozen.

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Vegan Gluten-Free Date Squares

To Make the Date Layer

- 2 cups packed (400 g), pitted dates,
- *pinch of sea salt (optional but I loved the flavour)*

To Make the Crust and Topping

- 3 cups (300 g) Bob's Red Mill Rolled Oats (Gluten-Free if needed)
 - 1 1/2 cups Bob's Red Mill Rolled Oats (150 g) blended into oat flour
 - 3/4 cups (110 g) Bob's Red Mill Coconut Sugar
 - 3/4 cups melted (150 g) coconut oil (you can also use olive oil)
 - 1 tsp baking powder
 - 1/2 tsp sea salt
1. Soak the pitted dates in hot water for 15 minutes. The water should be as hot as possible but no need to boil it.
 2. Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees.
 3. While those are soaking, prepare the crust and topping layers.
 4. Make the oat flour by blending 1 1/2 cups of oats. Let them blend for a while until they resemble very fine flour.
 5. Add all the crust ingredients to a bowl, including the oat flour, and mix.
 6. Press about 2 1/2 cups of the mixture into the bottom of a small, square baking pan that's either been sprayed with non-stick cooking spray or lightly greased with coconut or olive oil.
 7. Drain the dates and then use your hands to mash them into a paste. (This is a bit messy so if you prefer, you can blend them. I didn't want to create a dirty blender cup so I just used my hands.)
 8. Evenly spread the date paste over the crust layer in the pan.
 9. Press the rest of the crumble on top of the date layer.
 10. Bake for 40 minutes then let cool completely in the pan. You can put them in the fridge to speed up the process. This is an important step for best results! I know it's hard to wait but if you slice them too early they'll be a bit crumbly...still entirely delicious but just a little crumbly. Once they cool they'll be completely firm and hold together in squares.