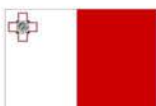




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SPECIAL EASTER EDITION



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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the fifth edition of "Il-Borma", the monthly newsletter dedicated to Maltese gastronomy.

Our March edition features the traditions of Easter and Lent in Malta, what could be called our most important season with regards to food and culture.

Because of Malta's strong roots in Catholic traditions, Easter is a cultural mix of ancient and religious rituals, gastronomic traditions, and a strong community atmosphere. Lent is preceded by the joyful Carnival festivities which are centralized around our capital, Valletta, and its popular display of huge, colourful floats. Lent is then comprised of different religious feasts and processions in many of our villages.

As usual, our newsletter is packed full of recipes, this time, all of them directly linked with Lent and Easter in some way. Our delicious sweet delicacies like Figolli, Kwarezimal and Karamelli are all worth tasting, along with traditional Easter savoury meals like Kusksu, Qassatat ta' l-Ghid and Soppa ta' l-Armla.

It would also be a good idea for you to have a look at our Facebook page since our members post new recipes every day and will be displaying their take on Easter traditions in the coming weeks. Also, feel free to take part in any of our ongoing discussions if you have any queries, comments or suggestions, accessible at www.ilovefood.com/discussions. We really hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter, and thank you for your continuous support!

We hope you thoroughly enjoy the Easter festivities with your friends and family!

Tony
ilovefood.com.mt

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Easter in Malta



Easter is probably the most significant period in Malta, owing to the nation's strong roots in Christianity. It is a time where most of the population comes together to celebrate very important religious feasts - the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Although Lent, Easter and all the different events that occur throughout are predominantly Christian, most people enjoy the celebrations whether they are religious or not. Needless to say, it is a colourful time in the Maltese calendar that promotes our collective spirit and culture. Any tourist would make a wise choice in visiting between the months of March and April.

The period of Lent, kicked off by Ash Wednesday, is preceded by Carnival, a time of wild and bizarre celebration, parties, and fooling around before the restrictions and sacrifices of Lent (for the more religious). During Lent, many Maltese make small sacrifices like not eating sweets and meat on certain days of the week - some even sacrifice for the full Lenten period up until Easter Sunday. As a child I was advised to give up sweets and television on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Various different events unfold throughout Lent, like Our Lady of Sorrows, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday itself, amongst other symbolic calendar dates. Each of these days holds specific implications and rituals like processions and church visits. Ultimately, the Easter period and all of the individual feasts are characterized by unique Maltese delicacies that can be enjoyed on the street, in cafés or at home. The most popular delicacies - Kwarezimal, Figolli, Kusku bil-Ful - amongst others, are all highlighted along with their own recipes in this newsletter.

It is safe to say that Easter is the most important time of the year in Malta. Being a summation of cultural, religious, ritualistic and culinary events, it is both enjoyable for members of the local community and fascinating for any foreign visitors to immerse themselves in. For a few moments, one can forget contemporary life, and engage in rites of passage that have existed for hundreds of years.

What is the weather like at Easter time in Malta?

Spring and autumn are the best times to visit the Maltese islands, unless one is looking for a blazing beach holiday. At this time, Malta is sunny and pleasantly warm with a cool breeze - the perfect weather for walking around and seeing the sights. The daytime temperature averages about 20° C in April.

The countryside is covered in green flowers, plants and trees are blooming, this is summer time at its best! If you love trekking or love doing long country walks then this is probably the best time to visit Malta and Gozo.



Traditional Maltese Figolli



Under normal circumstances, Easter brings to mind images of large coloured Easter eggs, bunny shaped Easter eggs, and other sweets. Malta presents its unique Easter delicacy: The Figolla. The Maltese language has been strongly influenced by Latin and Italian, so it is a possibility that 'Figolla' is the worn-down version of the word 'Figura' - a form, shape or image.

When someone mentions Figolli, for any Maltese, this will conjure images of pastry filled with almond paste, covered with icing of different colours with a chocolate Easter egg on top. Figolli are typically shaped around figures of butterflies, rabbits or hearts.

This tradition is loved by one and all, particularly Maltese children, who wait anxiously for their Figolla, waking up early on Easter Sunday to taste their much awaited sweet, and in the case of the more religious kids, to take their Figolla for blessing by parish priests on various church parvis. Some Figolli are even made without the almond paste inside the pastry, especially for younger children, or adults who are not fond of almonds but would still like to enjoy the delicacy in some sort (however this does take away the essence of the sweet).

Where and when can Figolli be eaten?

Tradition states that Figolli should not be eaten during Lent, as those days are catered for by the delicious Kwarezimal - so the first taste of Figolli should be on Easter Sunday.

However, Figolli of all shapes and sizes are on sale at all supermarkets in Malta throughout the Easter period. The beautiful displays mean that no one with a sweet tooth can go out without buying at least one Figolla!

Maundy Thursday & Good Friday are two days where all confectioners will be busy selling the famous Qaghqa tal-Appostli (apostle's ring) - and in any confectionery there will be an array of colourful and tempting Figolli on display. Figolli can also be found also in exclusive cafeterias, and undoubtedly in almost every household.

A piece of delicious Maltese Figolla, in any shape, is best eaten with a hot cup of tea or coffee. One can not enjoy Easter Sunday (or even before) without a decent taste of a Maltese Figolla!

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Figolli Recipe

Ingredients

For the pastry

- 350 grams caster sugar
- 800 grams plain flour, sifted
- 400 grams butter
- Grated rind of 1 lemon
- 4 egg yolks, beaten
- Malta honey and pistachio nuts or additional almonds

For the almond paste

- 600 g caster or icing sugar
- 2-3 egg whites
- Grated rind of 1 lemon
- A few drops orange flower water
- 600 grams almonds, ground
- To finish
- Glacé icing
- Royal icing
- Small Easter egg

Method

To make the pastry mix the flour with the sugar, then rub in butter until the mixture looks like fine crumbs.

Add the yolks and the grated lemon rind, then mix a little water to get a workable dough.

Leave the mixture to chill.

Add the lemon rind and orange flower water to the almonds and bind with the egg whites.

Roll out the pastry mix and cut out the shapes you want.

When doing this cut two shapes for each figolla as they will be sandwiched with the almond paste.

Lay the first shape on a floured and greased baking tray, spread with the almond paste made previously, leaving a small margin.

Put the second shape on the previous and press the edges together.

It would help if you were to wet the edges with a pastry brush to ensure binding.

Bake at a temperature of 200°C/400°F for five minutes and then at 180°C/350°F, for about 20 minutes until pale golden. Let to cool on the tray.

When cooled, coat with the glacé icing then decorate with some royal icing in an other colour, but do not overdo it and make it look gaudy.

While the icing is soft push a foil-wrapped egg into the pastry.

If you are making human shapes it is traditional to put the egg in the middle of the man's or woman's tummy. Then finish with some ground almonds.

Since ground almonds are quite expensive some substitutes, such as tiny sugar-coated eggs can be used, although these might not be as traditional.

If you can not obtain these pastries it is quite easy to make them yourself. You can also make your own templates, like sheep, out of cardboard. The traditional shapes of figolli are men, women, fish and baskets; the last probably being symbols of fertility. Recently new forms have been added to the traditional such as; cars, lambs and butterflies. The shapes of humans are easily identified by the old-fashioned paper faces that are stuck on the icing. Another traditional decoration is the Easter egg wrapped in bright colours.

Timeline of Easter Events

22nd February

Ash Wednesday

This falls in the middle of February, 46 days before Easter. This year, it was on the 22nd February 2012, but as the exact date for Easter Sunday changes each year, so does that of Ash Wednesday and all of the other Easter events. Being the start of Lent - a period of sacrifice, typically, no meat or sweets are eaten on this day, and ashes are placed on the head of the faithful during mass.



30th March

Our Lady of Sorrows

Called 'Id-Duluri' in Maltese, this always falls exactly one week before Good Friday, and is characterized by a procession with the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows in many Maltese villages on Friday evening. It is one of the most beloved feasts across the island.



1st April

Palm Sunday

This commemorates the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, held two days following Our Lady of Sorrows. In Malta, a tradition of blessing palm leaves and olive branches is still practiced.



5th April

Maundy Thursday

This falls the day before Good Friday, where hundreds of Maltese families gather in different villages to embark upon 'the seven visits', saying specific prayers in each church. On the streets outside, Karamelli are sold on stalls and are very popular.



6th April

Good Friday

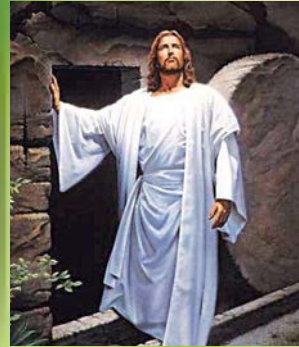
Like Ash Wednesday, typically, no Catholics eat meat or sweets on Good Friday - a more sombre day of worship. Instead, stalls are set up in village squares selling Karamelli, Kwarezimal and Qassatat ta' l-Incova, meaning anchovy pies, since fish is still permissible on this day. Good Friday is also characterized by the various processions featuring statues, characters and episodes of the passion story.



8th April

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday marks the end of Lent and is a joyful family day of food, parties and celebration. A traditional Easter Sunday lunch would formerly comprise lamb with potatoes and vegetables, but nowadays all varieties of meat are cooked on Easter Sunday. Catholics are also allowed to break the Lent fast and children are finally allowed to feast on Figolli and chocolate Easter eggs.



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Kusksu bil-ful

Broad bean and pasta soup

When Lent carried a much stricter regime than today, one of the main rules was that no meat could be eaten during the period of Lent. So it was obvious that an alternative had to be found, and such an alternative remained a staple dish in our Maltese culinary traditions.

To start with, the Kusksu bil-Ful should not be mixed up with the Tunisian Kuskus as they are two totally separate types of food.

Kusksu bil-ful is small square shaped pasta, cooked with tomato sauce, onions, and obviously fresh broad beans. Nowadays people might add potatoes or Maltese Cheeselet - but the traditional Kusksu bil-ful is the latter. This type of Maltese food is traditional during Lent and especially during Holy Week. The best tasting Kusksu is also cooked in the traditional way - very slowly on a very low flame. The smell is fantastic and one can be assured that a plate of Kusksu bil-ful - especially if cooked correctly - will definitely leave you wanting a second helping.

Where can Kusksu bil-Ful be eaten?

Unlike other typical sweets, or bread, this cannot be bought as a ready made item from supermarkets. But no esteemed typical Maltese restaurant would refrain from putting Kusksu bil-Ful on its menu.

On Friday, during the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, traditionally, a plate of Kusksu bil-Ful is the main dish followed by a piece of Qaghqa tal-Appostli. The same follows on Good Friday.

Recipe

Ingredients

- Onion
- Salt and pepper
- Water
- Carrot
- 2 potatoes
- Broad Beans
- tomato pure
- peas
- Eggs
- Kusksu
- Fresh goat's chesse (you can use benna goat's cheese not fresh and make a different taste to change a little)
- Chicken stock cube

Method

Fry the onion with some salt and pepper.

Add in the water and leave to boil.

Add carrot, potatoes, broad beans, peas and chicken cubes.

When the vegetables are ready, add in raw eggs not beaten.

When cooked, remove the eggs.

Add kusksu and when ready add goat's cheese

Put in the eggs and serve.



Lent Fasting and Easter Delicacies

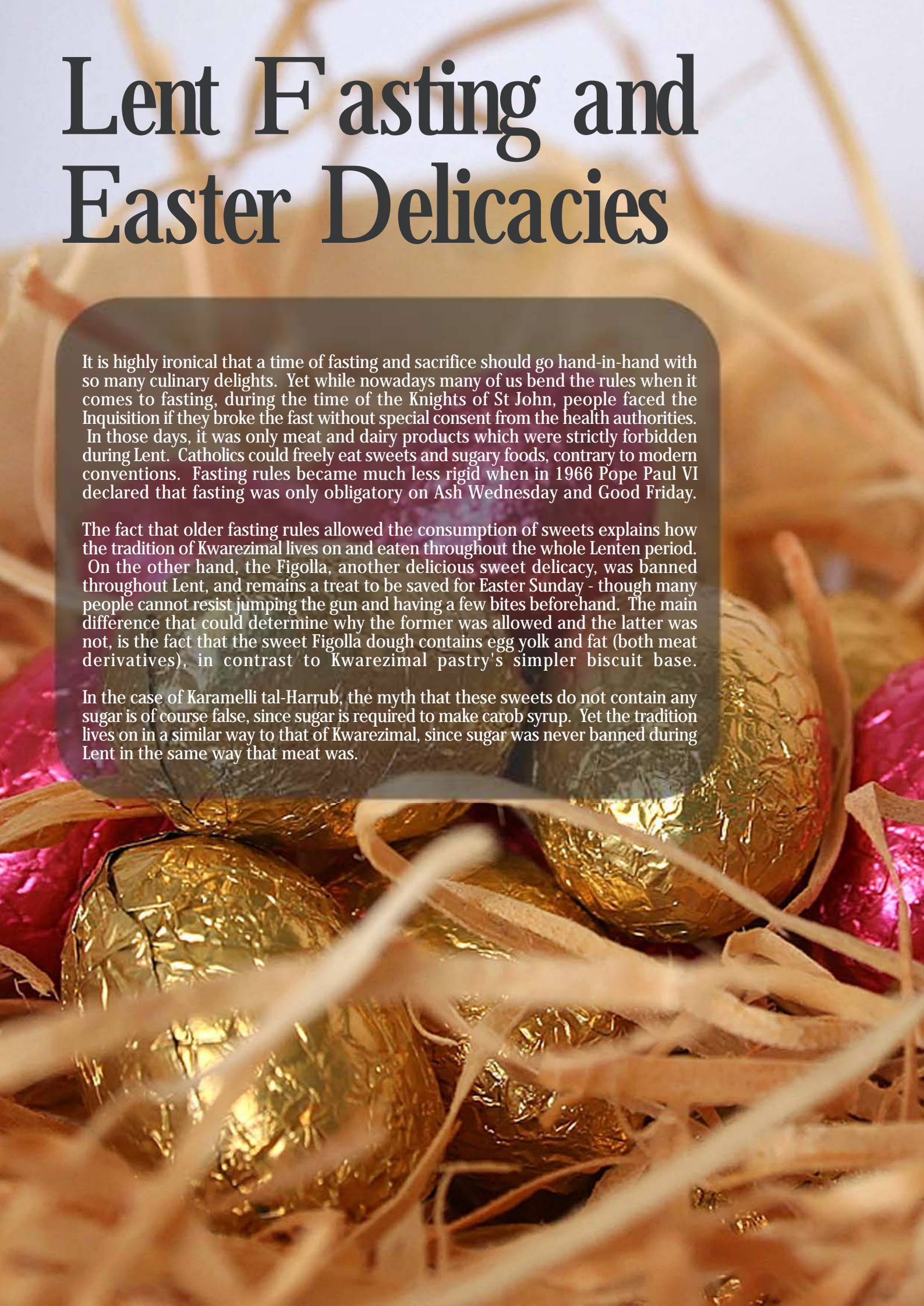
It is highly ironical that a time of fasting and sacrifice should go hand-in-hand with so many culinary delights. Yet while nowadays many of us bend the rules when it comes to fasting, during the time of the Knights of St John, people faced the Inquisition if they broke the fast without special consent from the health authorities.

In those days, it was only meat and dairy products which were strictly forbidden during Lent. Catholics could freely eat sweets and sugary foods, contrary to modern conventions. Fasting rules became much less rigid when in 1966 Pope Paul VI declared that fasting was only obligatory on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The fact that older fasting rules allowed the consumption of sweets explains how the tradition of Kwarezimal lives on and eaten throughout the whole Lenten period.

On the other hand, the Figolla, another delicious sweet delicacy, was banned throughout Lent, and remains a treat to be saved for Easter Sunday - though many people cannot resist jumping the gun and having a few bites beforehand. The main difference that could determine why the former was allowed and the latter was not, is the fact that the sweet Figolla dough contains egg yolk and fat (both meat derivatives), in contrast to Kwarezimal pastry's simpler biscuit base.

In the case of Karamelli tal-Harrub, the myth that these sweets do not contain any sugar is of course false, since sugar is required to make carob syrup. Yet the tradition lives on in a similar way to that of Kwarezimal, since sugar was never banned during Lent in the same way that meat was.





Qaghqa tal-appostli Apostle's ring bread

The Qaghqa tal-Appostli (Apostle's ring bread) is a ring-shaped bread, baked exclusively from Friday evening, the day Malta is celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows which is carried out in the various towns and villages, then on Maundy Thursday evening and again on Good Friday, in the morning and evening. The Qaghqa tal-Appostli is synonymous with the bread that was shared during the Last Supper, and remains a traditional delight during Lent.

After the end of the procession of our lady of sorrows one can find vans loaded with the lovely Qaghqa tal-Appostli near churches, and all the faithful who attend the procession will not leave before making sure they buy at least one Qaghqa to take with them home to be shared with the family.

The Qaghqa tal-Appostli is adorned with sesame seeds and most importantly with almonds - most often children and adults alike make sure that in their share of the Qaghqa there is an almond.

How is the Qaghqa tal-Appostli eaten?

First of all if the Qaghqa is warm, it tastes even better, as the butter melts on it. Normally it is eaten with cheese and fresh broad beans. An obvious must is a hot cup of tea or coffee.

Where can one find the Qaghqa tal-Appostli?

As part of our tradition, men who take part during the Maundy Thursday function get awarded after the function is over with a big Qaghqa given to them by the parish priest - for free.

For those not keen on taking part in such traditional religious functions, they still have the availability of a Qaghqa - albeit not for free - from various locations, such as from supermarkets, confectioneries, village grocers, bakeries, and for those who are out and about during these celebrations, in the various towns and villages in Malta & Gozo, it will be almost impossible to find a street without a vendor selling the beautiful smelling snack.

Easter in Malta is definitely unique in more ways than one and our culinary traditions ensure that no one will let Lent or Holy Week pass without trying out the various traditional food items that circulate the islands.

Ingredients

- 500gr plain flour
- 100gr margarine
- 4 teaspoons yeast
- 100gr sugar
- The grated rind of orange
- The grated rind of lemon
- 2 tablespoons caraway
- Quarter teaspoon cloves
- Quarter teaspoon of cinnamon
- Citrus 50gr · kunfettura
- Spoon · blossom water
- Spoon · anisett
- 275ml lukewarm water
- 4 tablespoons sesame
- nut 50gr


Recipe

Method

1. Sift the flour and margarine. Add the yeast, sugar, the orange peel and lemon, the sweetness, the cloves, the cinnamon and kunfettura. Mix everything well together.
2. Add blossom water, the anisette and warm water and make dough.
3. Divide the dough in two. Use each part to make a Qaghqa.
4. Wrap in sesame. Heat the oven and cook for about 30 -35 minutes.



Qaqocc mimli - Filled Artichokes



As usual, our gastronomic tour is here to entice you with the most delicious Maltese cuisine. Though Lent is a time of sacrifice, we need to make sure that the sacrifice isn't too hard on us - How is this to be done? Obviously, by tasting our delicious traditional Lent dishes! Spring is in the air, so we will be having a mouthwatering taste of QAQOCC MIMLI (FILLED ARTICHOKES).

These artichokes are well filled up with a mixture of dried bread, mint, parsley, leeks, olives, tuna and Maltese capers, are a must eat during Lent, but can be found throughout the whole year in a Maltese kitchen. The green colour may be dull but it is certainly deceiving - after tasting, you will be sure to eat this delicacy again and again.

Traditionally, your plate will not only boast Qaqocc Mimli, but will also be filled with Maltese Gbejniet (Cheeselets), Tadam Imqaddad (Sundried tomatoes), Basal tal-Pikles (Maltese pickled onions in Maltese vinegar), Bigilla (Maltese bean paste), and some Maltese tomato paste with a dribble of Maltese olive oil. Your plate will be a delicious blend of Maltese flavours not to be forgotten.

It goes without saying that you cannot taste this plate without having a fresh Maltese loaf at hand; or without topping up your palate with a good bottle of Maltese wine - home-made wine, if possible! Some black coffee is the perfect end to this glorious meal, a little Bajtra liqueur together with a piece of our much vaunted Lent sweet Kwarezimal: A meal worthy of a king, even during his Lenten sacrifice!

Where can this dish be found? Obviously all typical Maltese restaurants will proudly present this type of fayre, but if you happen to be on your own, and feel up to cooking, all the ingredients can be found anywhere in supermarkets, in grocers and green grocers. Do not forget that you can also buy scrumptious Maltese delicacies such as sun dried tomatoes, Maltese pickled onions, Maltese capers, Maltese olive oil, Maltese Tomato Paste and Bigilla to be tasted while away from the Mediterranean environment. But eating this while enjoying our sunny Mediterranean climate makes it taste even better!



Ingredients

- Maltese loaf crumbled (better if a bit stale)
- 4 anchovy fillets, chopped
- tuna chunks in oil
- 6 cloves of garlic, minced
- lots of fresh parsley finely chopped
- capers and olives
- Sea salt & freshly ground pepper
- Olive oil

Method

Mix all these ingredients well.

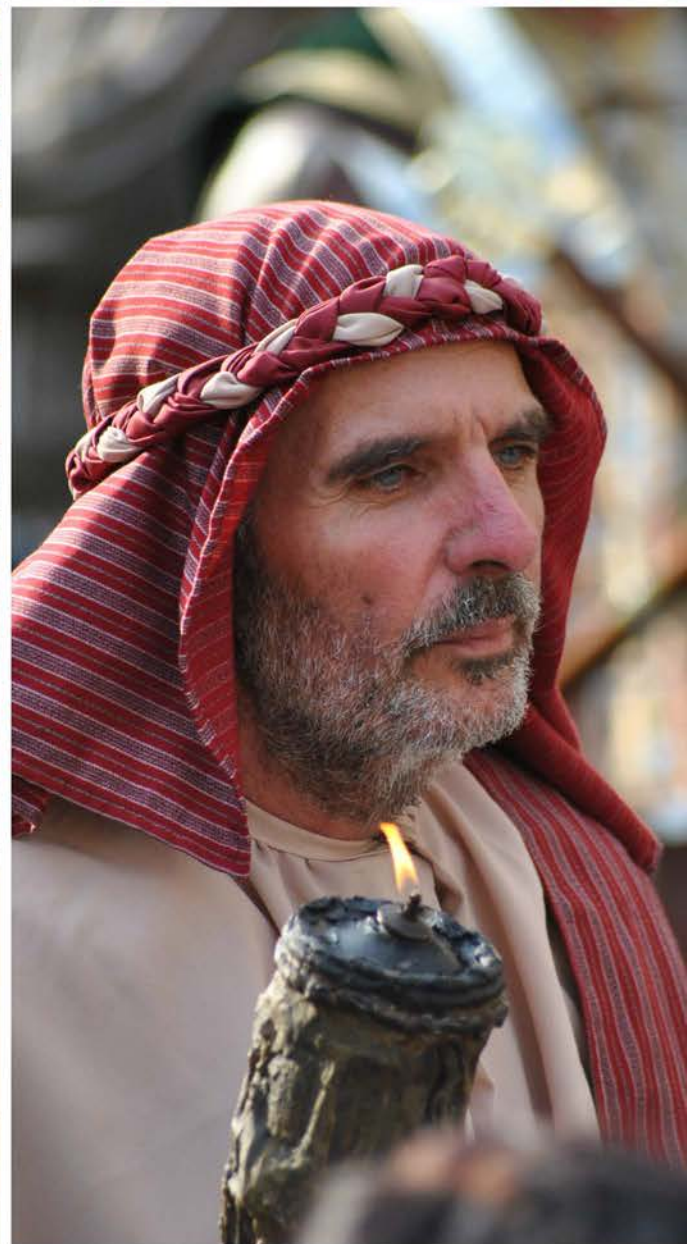
Stuff the filling between the artichoke leaves, make sure you fill them really well, push the leaves with your fingers so you make space where stuff the filling.

Make sure that the mixture is not dry and add olive oil if necessary out in a pot with cold water at the bottom and bring to the boil, cover the pot for about 30 minutes.

The artichokes will be ready once its easy to pull out one of the leaves.

Once ready drizzle some more olive oil on the artichokes and serve immediately.

Make sure you have lots of fresh Maltese bread.



Easter Processions in Qormi





Throughout Lent and Holy Week many different processions take place along the streets of various Maltese towns and villages, as with any religious feast on the island. One week before Good Friday, a procession called “id-Duluri” is held in practically every town and village in Malta and Gozo. This very same procession sees thousands of people from all walks of life walking in prayer behind the statue of our Lady of Sorrows (id-Duluri). Some of the faithful very often women walk barefooted behind the statue as a sign of sacrifice or thanksgiving for the fulfillment of vows made to Our Lady.

The Good Friday procession is probably the most established and well-known. It features statues depicting Christ's passion being carried through the streets along with people dressed up as central characters like Pontius Pilate. It also features fragments of many other biblical stories. This procession is organised in many different towns like Birgu, Bormla, Ghaxaq, Luqa, Mosta, Naxxar, Paola, Qormi, Rabat, Senglea, Valletta, Zebbug and Zejtun. In few towns there is also an Easter Sunday procession where the statue of the Risen Christ is displayed.





Kwarezimal

Kwarezimal is, yet again, another must-eat Maltese delicacy. This is a sweet pastry which is commonly presented as dessert during Lent and Holy Week. In appearance, it might seem dull or uninteresting - but the taste will prove the opposite.

This oval shaped sweet is based on a pastry with a mix of flour, eggs, rose water, nutmeg, honey (if possible Maltese honey), and nuts - which are shredded on top of the pastry. The whole sweet is then covered in honey and placed in the oven.

The smell coming from any Maltese kitchen while Kwarezimal is being baked allures anyone, particularly those with a sweet tooth, to try the sweet out with a cup of hot tea or coffee.

Where can one find Kwarezimal?

Kwarezimal can be found basically everywhere during Lent from the supermarkets, to the village groceries, to bakeries, to the village tea bars or the most exclusive cafeterias.

The trick of eating Kwarezimal is that it needs to be heated up, not until it's hot, but till warm. An espresso is the perfect accompaniment to a warm serving of Kwarezimal, and could potentially be enjoyed at any time of the year.

Palm Sunday marks the start of holy week in Malta and a time for a visit to a bakery or to a café - exclusively for an oval shaped piece of delicious brown Kwarezimal. Your first piece of Kwarezimal will almost certainly not be your last!

Ingredients

- 250g almonds
- 250g sugar
- 240g plain flour
- 2 egg whites
- Some blossom water
- Some water
- grated rind of orange
- Some cloves

Method

1. Toast or roast the almonds for a while and make sure that they do not get burnt because the taste will become sour. Once it turns golden..

2. Leave it to cool down and then crush them well.

3. In a bowl sieve the flour. Add the almonds, grated rind of orange, sugar, blossom water and the egg whites.

4. Mix all the ingredients until the mixture becomes like dough. If needed be add more water so that it solidifies. You have to be careful when you add the water so that it doesn't become too soft and neither too solid.

5. Knead well.

6. Water your hands and take pieces of this mixture and roll them in balls. Flatten each piece and elongate and fatten it so that its form is like a sausage.

7. Cover a dish with a baking sheet and put the Kwarezimal on top.

8. Before putting them in the oven, set them aside for a few minutes. Then with a knife put lines on top of each piece to form a pattern.

9. Heat at a medium temperature for 20 to 25 minutes.

10. Check that they don't over bake. Some people tend to take out the Kwarezimal when it is too solid. This is wrong as it should be taken out when it is still soft in order so that later on it can be eaten.

Karamelli tal-Harrub



Traditional snacks characteristic of Easter are the sweet Karamelli tal-Harrub, sold on street stalls at every Maltese village during Easter time.

These are a favourite amongst children and adults alike, particularly during the Seven Visits to different churches on Maundy Thursday. Many street hawkers enjoy a booming trade at this time, since so many families gather in the different villages for the various events that happen throughout the Lenten and Easter period.

These Karamelli, translated into English as Carob sweets, are small, sweet and solid squares of carob syrup with a very distinct texture and taste, which cannot be truly described unless they are tried. They are tempting, delicious and inexpensive, which makes them all the more popular during this time.

Carob Syrup

Ingredients

- 1kg carobs
- 1kg sugar
- 1/2 tsp cloves ground

Method

- 1) Wipe pods clean, then wash in 3 to 4 changes of water.
- 2) Roast for about 10 minutes in one layer.
- 3) Let cool, then break each pod in 3 or 4 pieces.
- 4) Soak overnight in about 2 liters water.
- 5) Bring to boil in same water, hence simmer for 30 minutes.
- 6) Drain the liquid pressing pods to extract maximum juice (discard pods).
- 7) Add sugar and cloves, then boil for 30 minutes.
- 8) Cool completely (you can add whiskey to taste).

Karamelli tal-Harrub

Boil some carob syrup in a pot over fairly high heat and stir continuously until the mixture is dissolved and caramelised and reaches a hard-crack stage.


Pour onto a piece of glass or marble.

Let cool and cut into small squares.

When cold, the caramel hard toffee squares are wrapped in grease-proof paper to avoid becoming sticky.

Carnival in Malta and Gozo





Carnival comes right before Lent begins, and literally means 'Meat is allowed'. It is the time before Catholics fall into a period of fasting and sacrificing - a time which allows them to let loose and engage in as many bizarre celebrations as they want. This feast manifests itself all over both Malta and Gozo. Malta's carnival dates back to the 16th century when the Maltese and the Knights of St John would hold a week-long event leading up to Ash Wednesday.

The largest carnival celebrations in Malta take place in Valletta and Floriana, where extravagantly coloured and decorated floats are carted along the streets for large crowds of people, young and old, many of whom are dressed up in costumes themselves. It is a fantastic display of the originality, skill and hard work of the float builders and crews. These displays go on for about three days, after which the festival is closed off in the main street of Floriana with a fireworks display.

Gozo also spots its own floats and Carnival festivities in its centre, Victoria, but the most popular attraction is the well-known (and rather notorious) Nadur carnival that takes place every year in the town of Nadur in Gozo. It is not organised by a committee, and for this reason it is entirely spontaneous and quite wild at times. The night invites an array of hooded and masked creatures, grotesque costumes, the sound of horns, bells, banging and whistling, even the trailing of live animals. It is a unique experience that sparks the curiosity of hundreds of Maltese and tourists alike.

Qassatat ta' l-Ghid



Qassatat ta' l-Ghid, are small traditional Easter pastries. Tradition states that they are only made in the village of Xaghra, but they can probably be found in many Maltese kitchens at Easter time though they are most popular in this location. They are small cheese pastries filled with grated goat cheeselets (gbejniet nexfin) mixed with beaten eggs and ground black pepper. The top is sometimes left open so that when they are baked in the oven, the filling overflows, apparently to symbolize the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the tomb. Whether this interpretation is correct or not, these miniature delicacies are a delicious snack to try at Easter time - but with this recipe, they can be enjoyed all year round, provided that you find the right ingredients.

The production of Gbejniet is at its peak during the months of April and May, when sheep produce more milk for their lambs. Traditionally goat cheese was produced from sheep's milk. Cows were reared especially for meat and work, while sheep were reared to supply fresh milk. Therefore in this time of the year we find a lot of dishes that can be substituted to meat for Lent, with goat cheese as the main ingredient. Amongst these dishes we find Kusksu, Widow's Soup - is-Soppa tal-Armla, Ravioli and this Easter Qassata - Qassatat tal-Ghid.

These Qassatat are not only easy to make but a delicious snack appropriate for the Lenten season on the days when some people may be refraining from eating meat. They can be enjoyed individually at home, but because of their typically miniature size, make perfect party food. So go ahead, impress all of your friends, Maltese and foreign, with a delicious serving of Qassatat ta' l-Ghid!

Ingredients

For pastry:

- Half kilo flour
- Packet of margarine or a little less
- Half teaspoon salt
- Teaspoon yeast
- Some warm water

For filling:

- 8 goat cheese moist, grated
- 4 fresh goat cheese (best if they are bought 2 days before so they are a little dry)
- 3/4 eggs
- Pepper
- Currants for those who like - optional

Method

Sieve flour together with salt. Cut the margarine in cubes and knead with flour, till the mixture looks like breadcrumbs.

Melt the yeast in a glass with a little warm water, make a hole in the middle of the flour, pour the melted yeast and knead.

Keep adding warm water little by little till need be, cover and leave for two hours.

Crush the fresh cheese and mix it with all the ingredients. It is important that mixture does not become liquid, so it's better to pour eggs one by one, and use depending on the density of the mixture.

Cut pastry in sizeable portions, open with a lembuba (pleat/rolling pin), pour a spoonful of mixture on it and close the pastry.

Brush the egg yolk on the pastry and bake in very warm oven until golden.



Sfineg

In olden days, the Maltese ate a special kind of bread during Lent. This bread was known as "Sfineg", which were flat and circular loaves of bread. The "Sfineg" were made from flour and meal flour mixed together. Then the bread was coated with honey and fried in oil. Sometimes, Maltese women filled the "Sfineg" with spinach, salted anchovies and olives and rolled them into a kind of Swiss roll. The "Sfineg" were taken with a cup of tea or coffee while a member of the family read a passage from the Bible about Christ's Passion.

Sfineg are also known as anchovy zeppoli, and first started being prepared in Rabat more than half a century ago. It is a food item which was always very popular especially during Lent, when abstinence of meat was strictly observed. Nowadays, anchovy sfineg are available for sale from a number of small food outlets in Malta.

Recipe

- 1 packet yeast
- 1 cup of water
- 1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
- Anchovy fillets (at your taste)
- Oil for frying
- Confectioner's sugar

Dissolve yeast in 1/2 C warm water with a pinch of sugar

Set aside for 10 minutes to proof

Stir remaining 1/2 C water in bowl, and beat in the flour forming a soft dough.

Mix the very small pieces of anchovies.

Knead the dough for about 10 minutes by hand or 5 minutes in a mixer with a dough hook.

Put the dough in greased bowl and turn to coat. Cover and let rise until doubled, about one to one and a half hours.

Heat about 2-3 inches of oil to 375 degrees

Break off golf ball-sized pieces of dough and fry until light golden brown

Drain on brown paper or paper towels, and dredge with confectioner's sugar

Eat warm & enjoy!





photo by Malta Dairy Products

Soppa tal-Armla (Widow's Soup)

There really is nothing like a hot pot of soup on those occasional chilly days in Lent when meat is eaten sparingly. The traditional Soppa tal-Armla, or Widow's Soup, is a simple, delicious soup made with fresh vegetables and frozen or dried soaked broad beans. The dish can be topped off with a soft gbejna cheeselet popped in the hot soup just before serving, leaving you with a beautiful molten soft cheese in the centre of your bowl.

This versatile and extremely healthy soup saw many Maltese families through difficult times, including World War I, when Malta was facing the constant threat of siege, leaving hundreds of people stuck in shelters for long periods of time. This dish has become a Lenten tradition owing to the Catholic restrictions of meat during the months of February through to April.

The good thing about this soup is that it's very easy to prepare and all of the ingredients are found at any grocer or local supermarket for a very inexpensive price. In fact, the name 'Widow's Soup' is traditionally called so because the ingredients are affordable even to the 'poor' widow. And although it is made up of relatively simple contents, the result is a delicious, traditional min course in itself. It is most definitely worth a try!

- 1 onion, diced
- 3 to 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 kohlrabi, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup broad beans
- 2 celery sticks, sliced
- 1 cup peas
- ½ or a small cauliflower cut into bite size pieces
- ½ cup chopped parsley, plus extra for garnish
- Freash Gbejniet (Maltese cheese), allow one per person
- Stock - enough to cover vegetables (chicken or vegetable)
- 1 ½ tbsp tomato paste
- Salt & pepper to taste

Sauté garlic, onion and parsley in the butter and olive oil until soft.

Add potato, carrot, kohlrabi, broad beans, celery, peas and cauliflower.

Pour in stock and tomato paste. Stir well and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for about 15 to 20 minutes, until the vegetables are just cooked.

Add gbejniet and press down lightly to submerge. Cover and cook for a couple of minutes to heat through.

Garnish with parsley and stir through.

Serve with one piece of gbejniet in each bowl.

Hot cross buns

Hot cross buns are a popular Easter delicacy the world over - particularly in England. However, the Maltese have taken them on as a traditional snack during Lent. They are a characteristic of every Lent procession.

Hot cross buns are warm sweet bread buns, usually eaten warm and sold on street stands, with a small cross cut on the top of the pastry. They are eaten during Lent, particularly on Good Friday, with the obvious cross reference to Jesus on the cross.

Although they are typically bought and best served warm during street processions and gatherings, they can also be found in supermarkets and grocers, to be heated up at home and eaten with butter or jam. They are a must-have at Easter along with the other sweet delicacies like Kwarezimal, and of course, on Easter Sunday, the traditional Figolli.





Method

Sift together flour, spices, salt and yeast to evenly distribute.

In a small saucepan gently heat the milk over a low temperature and melt the butter into it.

Beat the egg in a separate bowl .

Add the milk and butter mixture to the flour and mix thoroughly. Add the egg and mix well to form a dough.

Work in the dried fruit and peel.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until it feels smooth and is no longer sticky (approx 10mins).

Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap and place in a warm spot to prove.

Leave for an hour or until doubled in size.

Punch the dough down and then separate it into 12 equal portions.

Place the buns close together on a lightly greased baking tray.

Cover and allow to rise until doubled in size and very light (approx another hour).

For the crosses: Mix the flour and water thoroughly to form a thick paste. Spoon into a zip-lock bag, cut a little hole out of the corner of the bag and use it to pipe the mixture in crosses on top of the buns.

Bake the topped buns at 220°C for 15-20mins.

For the glaze: Mix together all ingredients, dissolving the sugar in the boiling water. Brush over the buns lightly while still hot.

Ingredients

- 2 teaspoons dried instant yeast
- 500grams plain flour
- 90 grams sugar
- 300mls milk
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground all spice
- ¼ teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg
- 60grams butter
- 1 large egg
- 140grams sultanas (or a mix of currants, sultanas and raisins)
- 30 grams mixed peel (optional)
- Crosses
 - 2 Tablespoons self raising flour
 - 2 Tablespoons cold water
- Glaze
 - 4 Tablespoons of sugar
 - ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
 - 150mls boiling water

Spinach and Tuna Pie (Torta tal-I spinaci u t-Tonn)

Once again, because of the Catholic tradition of fasting during Lent, the Maltese had to come up with some tasty alternatives to meat. This did not prove to be a difficult task owing to our roots in Mediterranean cuisine, and numerous traditions were thus formed in Maltese kitchens - Soppa tal-Armla, Sfineg, Qassatat ta' l-Ghid, Qaqocc Mimli, and of course, Spinach and Tuna Pie.

Growing up, I remember this pie being a yearly tradition during Easter time. Initially I would complain about too many vegetable dishes, but once I took a bite into the delicious pastry, I changed my mind and often asked for a second helping. Served hot or cool, this pie is a perfect alternative to any kind of meat pie during the Lenten season. Even for those who choose not to fast, it is still a delicious dish that can truly be enjoyed all year round.

Generally spinach and tuna pie is not served ready-made at most cafes, but a few traditional Maltese restaurants will include this on their menu, and the ingredients are found at any supermarket or grocer so it can easily be replicated at home.



Ingredients

- 500 g puff pastry
- 1 large and 1 small tin of tuna fish (200 g)
- 1 tin of ratatouille (200 g) (kaponata - if freshly made, even better)
- 2 kilos of fresh spinach, washed,
- cooked and well drained or one packet of frozen spinach.
- 6 anchovy fillets
- 12 olives chopped and stoned
- Large Can / a handful of cooked peas
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 3 tablespoons capers
- 4 tablespoons each of olive oil
- fresh mint leaves
- 2 tablespoons tomato puree
- a little sea salt and freshly
- ground pepper.

Method

There is nothing better than a good golden brown baked pie. A culinary delight for everyone with a weakness for pastry.

Heat some olive oil and toss in the chopped onion and crushed garlic and bake till it's gold. Throw in all the other ingredients one by one, bake them until every vegetable is well baked in the fats. There should be no liquids left in the pan. Cool the mixture before proceeding.

Get the pastry ready by rolling it out and lining it in the bottom of an oven dish. Add the cooled off mixture and press it down into the pastry case. Cover it with the pastry lid, seal the edges and prick all over with a fork. Bake the pie at 200° (400°F), or gas mark 6 for about 45 minutes until it's golden brown. Make sure it settles and eat it preferably at room temperature.



Spinach and Tuna Pie
(Torta tal-I spinaci u t-Tonn)