



The Quick and the Med: Greek Food and Wine



FOR IMMORTAL BEINGS, the Greek gods sure loved earthly, gourmet pleasures. **Dionysus**, lord of the grapes, constantly swilled wine. **Persephone**, goddess of the harvest, munched a pomegranate that got her banished to the underworld.

The Greeks' nearly mythological passion for food and drink also means serving **Hellenic** specialties makes for one heck of a summer party. "Really, in Greece, entertaining is spontaneous — you say, 'Come over tonight,' and put out appetizers or some lamb," says **Reston** social worker **Maria Roberts**, 46, a **Greek American** who dishes up souvlaki, pastitio (meat/macaroni casserole) and other fare at her bashes.

Greece, like many **Mediterranean** countries, also tends to be big on small plates. A mezze (array of appetizers) at an **Athens** taverna might include spinach pies (spankopitas), tiny meatballs and maybe even some grilled squid, all of which could also star at your next buffet.



"In the U.S., you put out French onion dip and salsa at a party," says Mike Isabella, chef at Penn Quarter's Greek-Turkish hot spot [Zaytinya](#) (701 9th St. NW; 202-638-0800). "In Greece, it's stuffed grape leaves and olives. It's the same snacking mentality, but it's been going on for centuries there."

Isabella is one of several U.S. chefs

trafficking in what you might call **New Wave Greek**: dishes and drinks that spin Hellenic standards (zucchini, phyllo, lamb, kasseri cheese) in innovative ways. At Zaytinya, ideas worth imitating range from crab cakes in garlic yogurt sauce to baklava, the age-old honey/phyllo pastry, zipped up with peanut butter (see recipe). In **New York**, the Greek-meets-West fare at [Anthos](#) (raw hamachi with chickpeas, feta risotto) scored the restaurant a **Michelin** star.

To whip up your own Greek bash, **Embassy of Greece** press attache **Athanasios Sloros** recommends snagging recipes at [Gourmet.gr](#). In "[Regional Greek Cooking](#)" (\$25, Hippocrene), **Catherine** and **Dean Karayanis** detail easy dishes such as taramasalata (caviar dip) and mussels with feta. Catherine Karayanis also likes "throwing halloumi cheese, which is like mozzarella, on the grill." Buy it, as well as frozen spinach pies, cabbage rolls and other quickie aps, at [Aphrodite Imports](#) (5886 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church; 703-931-5055).

What to pour with islandy snacks? Greek wines, like crisp whites from **Santorini** or reds from **Crete**, sold at **Aphrodite** or **Total Wine**. You could also try ouzo, the anise-flavored liquor gulped by **Zorba the Greek**. "It's summery and refreshing," says **Athens**-born restaurateur **Kostas Daskalakis**, who serves it on ice at his **Burke** pub, [Hopsfrog Grille](#) (5745 Burke Centre Parkway; 703-239-9324).

Isabella infuses ouzo with watermelon in summer and apple in the fall. In her book, Karayanis suggests ouzo cocktails like the Iliad (amaretto, ouzo,



strawberry puree). But sip slowly: Ouzo is strong enough to knock Hercules out of his sandals. Still, if the libation encourages guests to linger and chat, then you've truly captured the Greek vibe. "Drink ouzo when have plenty of time to kill," says Daskalakis. "Kick back and relax, and the world goes by."

» PEANUT BUTTER BAKLAVA RECIPE

Mike Isabella's spin on the traditional dessert can be drizzled with melted chocolate for extra oomph.

DIRECTIONS

For the filling, blend all ingredients in a food processor until a "butter" forms. Keep at room temperature. For syrup, bring the sugar, corn syrup, cinnamon and cloves to a boil. Strain and add lemon juice and rosewater. Cool.

To assemble, lay one sheet of phyllo down on a cool surface (keep remaining phyllo covered in a cool place). Spoon peanut mixture in a narrow line along the long side of the sheet to within 1/2 inch of the edges. Fold in edges. Fold bottom over nuts and roll up. Seal with more clarified butter. Repeat until you have used up filling.

Place rolls on ungreased baking sheets; bake at 325 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes, until phyllo turns golden. Take baklava out of the oven and drizzle cool syrup over hot baklava. When cool, sliced into cigar-like lengths.

Leave on baking sheet overnight to absorb the syrup.

The next day, cut into desired portions or wrap in plastic. The baklava will keep for three to four weeks in the refrigerator.

INGREDIENTS

» Phyllo sheets (2 packages), thawed and kept under a damp towel

» Clarified (melted) butter, 2 sticks

» **FOR FILLING**

» 10 cups peanuts, toasted

» 3 cups bread crumbs

» 1 1/3 cups sugar

» 2 tbsp. ground cinnamon

» 1 tbsp. ground coriander

» **FOR SYRUP**

» 4 lbs. sugar

» 1/2 cup lemon juice

» 2 cinnamon sticks

» 8 whole cloves

» 4 oz. rosewater

Photos by Lawrence Luk