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# Kitchen heritage

**D**URING Norma Dakhoul's childhood in the northern Lebanese village of Daraya, cooking for the family was a full-time job for most women.

Bread-making in particular was a big chore, recalls Norma, 42, who migrated to Australia when she was aged 11.

"My mum, grandmother, neighbours and aunts would all get involved," she says. "It would take all day and they'd even be kneading it in the

middle of the night."

Now the owner of Bondi-based cooking school Norma's Lebanese Foods has found ways to stay true to her culinary heritage while minimising time in the kitchen.

"With some of the meat pastries, for example, instead of making 20 or 30 little ones, I'll make it as one big pie," Norma says. "In my generation, when we have a dinner party it's not about spending a week preparing like our mothers or mothers-in-law would. It's

about doing what you can to feed everybody that's economical and tastes good."

The mezze style (selection of small savoury dishes) is what most people know about Middle Eastern cuisine, but it's just one aspect. There's a range of stews, broths, pizzas, rice dishes, breakfasts and salads, and recipes using every organ imaginable from lamb or goat.

Lebanese cuisine bears similarities to that of Egypt, Turkey and Greece and also has French and Italian influences.

"A little meat can go a long way when most of the meal is a starch – rice, potato or bread – and vegetables," she says.

Despite the ways Norma has tweaked traditional village cooking techniques, she says the results serve the same purpose: bringing people together. "When I visit my mum or mother-in-law, they get offended if I don't eat. The first question – after 'How are you and how is your health?' – is 'What do you want to eat?'"

- Laura Cencigh-Albulario

## FATTEH WITH HUMMUS

Norma shares her recipe for a breakfast dish that's popular all over the Levant and dates back to the time of The Crusades. It also works as a light summery dinner. As they say in Arabic, *sahtan* – enjoy in good health.



Drain chick peas, rinse and place in a large saucepan with six cups of water. Bring to the boil, reduce heat, skim off any scum, cover and simmer gently for 25-30 minutes until cooked but firm.

Strain, reserving some of the liquid, and add salt. In a separate bowl, mix garlic, salt and yogurt.

In a frypan, toast the pine nuts, add butter and cook until the butter is browned and fragrant. Assemble on a flat plate, starting with a layer of the bread.

Top with chick peas, yoghurt and lastly, drizzle the warm buttered pine nuts.

**1 cup dried chick peas, soaked overnight**

**500g Greek or European-style yoghurt**

**1/4 cup pine nuts**

**2 tbs unsalted butter**

**2 cloves garlic, mashed**

**1 tsp salt**

**Toasted, grilled or fried Lebanese bread, broken into chip-sized pieces**



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Teacher: Norma Dakhoul at her cooking school