

# Falafel

When I was living in the United States, I realized how it is hard to get a good falafel sandwich. It became frustrating, as I adore falafel and was lucky enough to be born in the Old City of Jerusalem where I got used to eating some of the best falafel! This frustration pushed me to try to make falafel and hummus by myself, but I had no clue that it would be the start of a culinary journey.

Falafel helped me to discover that my true passion is cooking. Once, when I was preparing falafel, I realized that only a genius could have invented falafel. Who would have imagined that soaking some beans, mashing them by hand, and adding some onions, garlic, and parsley would give Middle Eastern cuisine one of its most delicious famous foods? No one really knows who invented falafel, but most stories describe how the Copts in Egypt began to make falafel as a substitute for meat during Lent.

The great thing about falafel is that it tastes different from place to place, and even from region to region. The recipe is simple, but some people use fava beans, and others use garbanzo beans, and some mix both. In Egypt it is made from fava beans, but in Palestine garbanzo are used, and in other places, such as Gaza — which is a Palestinian city but influenced by Egyptian culture — both beans are used.

When I was child, I spent many summers in Gaza — before it was blockaded! My mother's family are refugees from Ramla who left for Gaza in 1948. My cousins and I had the duty to buy hummus and falafel every morning and to fill drinkable water gallons. Even as a child, I noticed that falafel in Jerusalem tasted different from that in Gaza. Seventeen years later, I went with a friend to one of his favorite places in Ramallah, and when I took my first bite of his falafel, I realized that it was prepared by a person from Gaza. So I went to the shop owner and asked him, and sure enough, he was from Gaza.

Gazans add fresh dill or dill seeds to the mixture, which gives the falafel a strong flavor and makes it stand out. Falafel comes in various shapes as well. In Jerusalem, for example, they are usually round, but in Ramallah they are mostly finger-shaped!

A variation is stuffed falafel. Originally, large falafel were stuffed with sumac and onion, but nowadays one can find cheese-stuffed falafel. During Ramadan, stuffed falafel can be found on just about every iftar table to break the fast.

Ramadan Kareem!

By Izzeldin Bukhari

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Photo courtesy of Chef Shady Hasbun.



## Ingredients

- 2 cups garbanzo beans, soaked in water for at least 12 hours
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ½ bunch parsley, chopped
- ½ bunch cilantro, chopped
- 10 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp. dill seeds
- 1 tbsp. chili flakes
- 1 tbsp. sea salt
- 1 tbsp. coriander
- ½ tbsp. cumin

- Mix ingredients in a food processor and set aside for at least one hour (for better results).
- Before frying, add 1 tsp. baking soda and mix well.
- Use a falafel mold (or tablespoon) to shape each falafel.

- Heat ½ liter of cooking oil.
- Make sure the oil is hot before you fry the falafel!
- Fry the falafel for about 5–7 minutes, until they are golden brown.

Saahha!

