

Chef's Corner: Cypriot Tzatziki (Bonus Feature!)

March 2019

This “Bonus Feature” was prepared and served as an accompaniment to the Cypriot Venison Meatballs at the VBAC 60th Annual Awards Banquet and is Angler-tested and Club-approved!

Tzatziki is a refreshing dip essential to cuisines of Southeast Europe and the Middle East. It reflects the legacy of the Ottoman Empire which once controlled the island country of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea and home to my Greek ancestors and many current relatives.

It is an excellent side dish for classic Greek kebabs – and of course, Keftedes – which is the featured recipe of the month.

Tzatziki is a popular appetizer, or “Meze” that combines simple ingredients and appeals to the most discriminating palate!

Cypriot Tzatziki Dip

Ingredients:

- 1 large cucumber, unpeeled
- 1 1/2 cups plain full-fat Greek yogurt (use 2 cups for a less intense flavor if desired)
- 2-3 large garlic cloves, finely minced (I like to crush mine to a paste in a mortar and pestle)
- 2 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice (more or less to taste)
- 1 Teaspoon salt (you can always add a pinch more to taste!)
- 1 Teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
- 2 Tablespoons fresh mint, finely chopped (can substitute fresh dill if desired – I like the mint!)

Instructions:

Crush the garlic to release the oils and finely mince or grind to a paste (I like to use the salt to soak up the oils).

Grate the cucumber and drain through a fine mesh sieve overnight in the fridge.

Combine the yogurt, garlic, olive oil, lemon, and spices in a large bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Transfer the grated cucumber and fresh dill to the melded yogurt mixture and stir to combine.

Serve chilled with pita bread for dipping.



Tzatziki with a Mint Garnish and Pita Bread.



Melding the yogurt, garlic, oil, lemon, and spices.



Grating the Cucumber.



Draining Grated Cucumber.

Tzatziki Tips:

- Make sure your grated cucumber is well-drained. If you have time, you can drain it in cheesecloth or a fine mesh sieve overnight.
- If you're in a rush, you can use your hands to squeeze the liquid out of the cucumber by pressing it in the strainer.
- Full-fat Greek yogurt is best, but low-fat can be used if you are willing to sacrifice texture – be sure to drain all water/liquid in either case!
- Use the salt to absorb any residual garlic oil from the cutting board or mortar and pestle – that's the good stuff!
- The longer the garlic “rests” in the yogurt, the less sharp bite it will have and the better it will taste as the garlic melds with the yogurt, oil, and spices.
- For best results, combine all of the ingredients except for the cucumber and mint (or dill), then let it rest overnight in the fridge while your cucumber is draining.
- Add the mint or dill at the last minute so it doesn't overwhelm the rest of the flavors.
- Vinegar may be substituted for lemon, but Islanders love lemon!
- This recipe is extremely flexible and does not require strict adherence – best to start small and add as you go to tweak to your particular taste – especially with the garlic, mint, or dill!
- Toasting the pita bread and/or using pita chips makes dipping easier!
- Can also be served as a dressing for classic chicken, lamb, or pork Shish Kebabs in folded pitas with a nice Greek Salata!

Dips-Away!

Contributed by: John Germanos (aka “The Instinctive Chef”)