TASTING THE WORLD WITH AUTHOR LEAH KOENIG

January 25, 2022

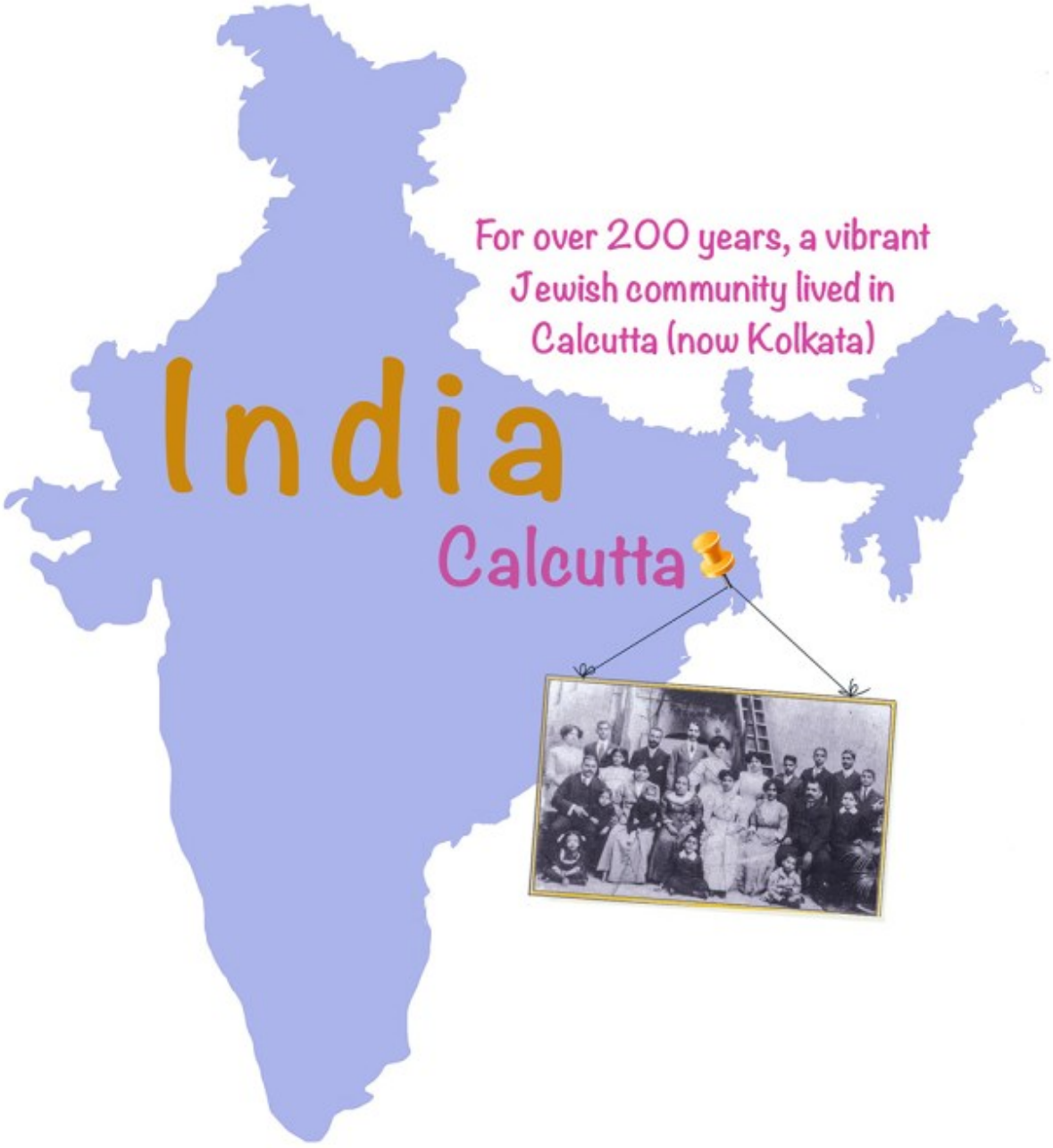


ILLUSTRATION BY ROD MORRISON

By Zoe Singer

Joining the Coop was one of the first things cookbook author Leah Koenig did when she got to Brooklyn in 2004. These days, you'll find her strolling the aisles picking up ingredients for her seventh cookbook about global Jewish food. "My philosophy about

Jewish food is that it’s a chance to see the world: Jews have lived and cooked almost everywhere. Especially right now, while we’re still in this pandemic, there’s this desire to travel for a lot of us, and for me cookbooks have been a way to tap into the world when I can’t visit in person.”

Through more than 400 home-cooking recipes in her most recently published book, *The Jewish Cookbook*, Leah celebrates the diversity and breadth of the Jewish culinary tradition, with flavors from the Middle East to the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. To give us a taste, she shared a stunningly delicious recipe for chicken (or fish) fritters flecked with scallion, jalapeño, and fresh ginger.

THE JEWISH COOKBOOK



PHAIDON

LEAH KOENIG

The fritter recipe is from Kolkata (formerly “Calcutta”), where a vibrant community of Jews from Iraq and Syria settled and thrived for more than 200 years before eventually dwindling almost to extinction during mass migrations to Israel in the 20th century. “This one recipe shows how Jewish food is constantly evolving and is so much broader and deeper than what people think of, far beyond Eastern European foods like brisket and latkes,” Leah said. As culinary traditions evolved over time and across distance, the originally Iraqi fritter dish acquired more typically Indian flavors. Simple enough to make on a weeknight, they’re a favorite in her house served over coconut rice (that recipe, also in *The Jewish Cookbook*, hails from Mumbai).

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For her next book, Leah is focusing on the cooking of Rome’s 2,000-year-old Jewish community. Leah reminisced about visiting the area in her twenties, attributing her decision to become a cookbook author to her love for Roman Jewish cooking. “It exploded my curiosity, and I fell in love with this ancient community,” she recalled. “The history of the cuisine predates what we think of as Jewish cooking. My hope is that these recipes are interesting to people whether or not they have Jewish backgrounds.”

Through the flavors and stories in her books, Leah aims to “widen the world and build conversations.” Especially now when getting a taste of far away places and times is particularly welcome. And it’s nice to know that we can find most of the ingredients in these recipes right here at the Coop.



Chicken or fish scallion, ginger fritters—ready to serve as a snack or pre-dinner appetizer.

Chicken, Scallion and Ginger Fritters

Recipe reprinted, with permission, from The Jewish Cookbook (Phaidon, 2019) by Leah Koenig

Jews hailing from Calcutta serve these savory and gently spiced fritters, called *arook tahine*, as a snack or pre-dinner appetizer. This recipe uses chicken, but they are also commonly made with an equivalent weight of firm fish fillets. The fresh herbs and scallions give the fritters a gorgeous green color.



Serves 4–6

- 1 bunch scallions, white and green parts, roughly chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and roughly chopped
- 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1/2 cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro or flat-leaf parsley
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour (or gluten free all-purpose flour)
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- Vegetable oil (like sunflower), for frying



Scallions, jalapeño, ginger and cilantro ready for the food processor.



Transfer thick pancake-like batter to a bowl then refrigerate.

1. In a food processor, combine the scallions, jalapeño, ginger, and cilantro and pulse, scraping down the bowl as necessary, until very finely chopped.

2. Add the chicken, flour, eggs, and salt and pulse until a wet batter forms—it should be the consistency of thick pancake batter. Transfer to a bowl, cover, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

3. Line a large plate with paper towels and set aside. In a large frying pan, heat about 1/4 inch of oil over medium heat. Working in batches of 4–5, scoop out the batter by the 1/4 cup and add to the pan, gently flattening and nudging into rounds. Fry, flipping once, until golden brown on both sides and cooked through, about 8 minutes total. Add more oil in between batches, as necessary.

4. Transfer to the paper towel–lined plate to drain. Serve hot.



Fry batter until golden brown on both sides.



Transfer to the paper towel and serve hot.

Coop member Leah Koenig is the author of six cookbooks including 'The Jewish Cookbook' (Phaidon, 2019) and 'Modern Jewish Cooking' (Chronicle Books). She is currently at work on her next book, which explores Rome's historic Jewish cuisine. Her writing and recipes can be found in The New York Times, New York Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Food & Wine, Epicurious, Food52, and Tablet, among other publications. She also writes a weekly newsletter, The Jewish Table, which shares recipes and stories from the world of Jewish food. Leah also leads cooking demonstrations and workshops around the country and world.



PHOTO BY SOPHIE BARBASCH

Leah Koenig

Zoe Singer is a former food writer and recipe developer turned grant writer. She is a lifelong Brooklynite and longtime Coop member.

WHAT’S IN YOUR CART?

January 25, 2022



MANY MUSHROOMS AND TEA FOR GODDESSES

By Zoe Singer

If you've ever enjoyed working a check-out shift at PSFC you know the fascination of seeing what other shoppers choose, from produce you've never tasted to chocolate bars and yogurts you might not have known were worth the splurge. As your intrepid

reporter, I wandered the aisles of the Coop asking members ***“What’s in your cart?”***

On an autumnal weekday afternoon Coop members’ carts seemed especially abundant and idiosyncratic. I talked to folks buying everything from long knobby green bitter melons to spiky round pink rambutans, multiple mesh bags filled with exotic fresh mushrooms, and a garden’s worth of dried flower blossoms. Here’s some of what I learned by asking members about their shops.



Bitter melon, umeboshi paste, and oyster mushrooms.



Jonathan Bines, bitter melon and rambutan buyer.

Member Jon Bines had some eye-catching bitter melons and rambutan in his cart. Why? His high school-aged son asked him to get something unusual! (You can learn more about these unusual fresh gourds here.) I caught up with Jon's son Luca via email and learned that he likes to cut the bitter melons lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and pulp with a spoon, and cut them into half-moon slices, then stir-fry them with crumbled tofu, eggs, soy sauce, salt, and *katsuobushi* (bonito flakes). "It's just really good," he assured me, "and it's fun to eat something that's both so bitter and so mild." Also in Jon's cart, *umeboshi* plum paste, which is a puree of pickled, very salty Japanese plums. The pink paste, which was on the endcap near the fresh chicken case, is delicious on rice and has many health benefits. Jon and his family roll it into simple vegetarian sushi.



Satya Tisman.

I stopped member Satya Tisman near the bulk tea because her shopping list was so long, and her cart resembled a big sachet of potpourri.


PHOTO BY ZOE SINGER

Satya Tisman's shopping list.

What for? A goddess energy women's retreat tapping into pagan traditions and sisterhood, to be held outside on Halloween weekend. Satya was preparing for the event with her friend Stephanie, a private chef who had planned a Middle Eastern-inspired menu of vegetarian kabocha squash and chickpea tagine, basmati rice, *chermoula* (green sauce), harissa (hot pepper sauce) with preserved lemon, and minted yogurt. The many dried flowers, teas, and spices were destined for three libations: a warm mocktail based on tulsi (holy basil) tea with honey, lemon, and cardamom; a cooler of pomegranate juice and ginger kombucha muddled with rosemary and pink peppercorns (a riff on this cranberry version); and a beautiful concoction that Stephanie described as a "feminine herbal tea emphasizing the lushness of flowers," with rose petals, rose buds, rosehips, and chamomile.



Dried flowers, teas, and spices.

Meanwhile, members Chris Esposito and Leah Schwartz were all in on mushrooms. They grow mushrooms at home and were buying big oyster mushrooms destined for a delicious-sounding frittata as well as shiitake mushrooms to make into vegan bacon—and they kindly shared both recipes below.

These days, when we don’t break bread with others as much as we used to due to the

pandemic, the sharing of ingredient tips and recipes feels especially meaningful. During a season when we traditionally celebrate the harvest and give thanks, asking fellow shoppers about what’s in their carts reminds me how lucky we are to access beautiful food in a cooperative community.

CASHIER
COOP TOTES
BANANAS
PHOTO BY ZOE SINGER

Chris Esposito with his oyster mushrooms at checkout.

VEGAN SHIITAKE BACON

Serve these crispy, chewy, savory mushroom slices as you might serve bacon—as a side or topping.

Makes about 1 ½ cups

- 1 ½ tablespoons high heat vegetable oil, such as coconut
- 2 cups sliced shiitake mushroom caps
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup or to taste
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika or to taste
- ½ teaspoon salt or to taste
- ½ teaspoon liquid smoke (optional)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. In a 10–12 inch, oven-safe pan over medium-high heat, warm the oil. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, toss the shiitake with the remaining ingredients. Scrape the seasoned mushrooms into the pan and sauté until tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer the pan to the oven and roast, stirring every 5 minutes, until the mushrooms are crispy, 15–20 minutes.

MUSHROOM-LOVER’S FRITTATA



Mushroom frittata.

Resembling a baked omelette or crustless quiche, frittata is a savory egg dish you can enjoy at any temperature and any time of day. Chris and Leah like to use a variety of mushrooms.

Serves 2

- 1 ½ tablespoons unsalted butter

- 1 small shallot, diced
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 6 ounces fresh mushroom, such as shiitake or oyster, cleaned and sliced
- 2–4 farm eggs, beaten with salt and pepper to taste
- 1 ½ ounces grated cheese (Chris suggests sharp cheddar; Leah suggests goat gouda)

Preheat the broiler. In an 8–10 inch oven-safe pan over medium-high heat, melt the butter then add the shallot and a pinch of salt and sauté until softened, 2–3 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until they have begun to brown, 5–7 more minutes. Pour in the eggs, tilting the pan to distribute evenly. Turn off the stove and sprinkle on the grated cheese. Transfer the pan to the broiler and broil until the cheese has melted and the egg mixture has begun to puff and brown, approximately 4 minutes. Watch closely to avoid burning.

HOW CREATIVE CHEFS SUSTAINED COOP WORKERS

January 25, 2022



Above: Chefs Kate Zuckerman (R) and Kim Pistone (L) cooked amazing lunches for up to 90 Coop staffers right through the pandemic.

By Hayley Gorenberg

Chef and Coop member Kate Zuckerman surveyed banana boxes full of food that the Coop would, pre-pandemic, have donated to CHiPS soup kitchen. But it was April 2020; COVID had shuttered the kitchen, and with member labor suspended for the first time ever, the Coop was operating with temporary help and staff. And the staff was hungry.

Familiar with Zuckerman's professional culinary talents after years of her FTOP work creating festive meals celebrating staff milestones, Coop staff members hired her to help sort through the food and figure out how to whip up tasty lunches on a shoestring budget. The assignment lasted through the middle of July.

FLOUR, EGGS AND DENTED CANS

“It was like a puzzle,” Zuckerman said. She sorted through boxes that included dented cans, slashed bags of flour and post-dated eggs. There might be a case of something mistakenly delivered that a distributor didn’t pick up, or boxes of berries with a berry or two molding in each—not salable, but certainly salvageable.



JAMS AND CAKES

The inspiration flowed. “I made so many jams—blackberry, fig, raspberry. And endless cakes!” Not having a mixer, she poured olive oil from dented cans into a blender and frothed it with sugar, a process that began from necessity that she now uses intentionally—the whipping lightens the resulting dessert. Zuckerman rhapsodized about the fancy herb-infused brown butters on an endcap, and used them with bags of cocoa that were past their date to create a luscious dessert.

Word of sumptuous lunches got around. “When it started, it was, ‘Can you cook a meal for 30 people?’ And then it was 60. And then it was 90, every day.” The job

couldn’t be handled alone for long. With numbers growing and emerging COVID regulations for food handling, the lunch squad grew to include another chef, Kim Pistone, as well as a helper, to assist with prep for a few hours and wash dishes afterward.

Pistone, a self-taught chef, had ended her own catering business with a well-timed event before joining the Coop lunch squad. “I did a beautiful wedding March 13. It was like a great send-off: ‘OK, I’m done now!’ Every single thing on my resume ended in March 2020.” She rang up the Coop office and said, “Do you guys need any help, or what?” Her home situation also motivated her to reach out. With her husband and child at home, she said, “I thought somebody’s got to *not* be here. Too many people under one roof 24 hours a day!”

“I threw myself into being at the Coop,” Pistone said. “Physically it was really exhausting. But I think it kept me sane. I didn’t feel stuff other people felt—depressed—because I was working.”



MANY DRESSINGS

“Every day I would do a different vinaigrette. Sriracha lime toasted sesame! Raspberry red wine! I would mix it up so it would complement whatever we were serving,” Pistone said. “I tried to make as much comfort food as I could. It was a lot of sanity for a lot of people, the stability of having a place to go and having lunch and a community of people you could talk to.” For safety, the Coop had socially distant meals and also built plexiglass carrels. “A lot of people are by themselves,” Pistone remarked. “I think it was a touchpoint for a lot of people to just have a meal with somebody once a day.”

“It was really fun for me,” said Zuckerman. “It was a race to make the best meal I could in an efficient way with whatever ingredients they were getting rid of, spending as little as I could.” No-knead focaccia with long fermentation, “allowing gluten to form and stretch and hold” was a new skill for her. Zuckerman and Pistone used new flours, learned to make egg substitute, baked gluten-free tahini cookies, and made their own cashew milk. They created vegan butter and “tons of things with chickpea flour and polenta,” Zuckerman said. A box of peppers yielded roasted pepper soup. “I made so many vegan soups—because I had to.” The chefs made stock from fennel tops, deteriorated onions and carrots—all boiled for six hours.

LOTS OF COUSCOUS

The food available was a daily surprise, including, at one point, two 50-pound bags of Israeli couscous! “I didn’t spend too much time at home thinking or stressing about it,” said Zuckerman. “I would just come in and see what was there and make something. It was always tasty and delicious. It was nice to be governed by what was there and what equipment we had, and just show up and know you were going to cook for eight or ten hours.”

INSPIRATION FROM MEXICO AND INDIA

They made custards with past-dated cream; Mexican lasagna with tortillas; curry and

other Indian-inspired recipes, including a variation of saag paneer that substituted braised escarole and chard. There were lots of pasta, pesto, dips and sauces; along with fruit, fennel and lots of mushroom barley soup.



CURRIES AND COBBLERS

“Kate and Kim were the most amazing chefs ever,” said 23-year Coop veteran Alexandra Hodgson MacDonnell, who came to work as a temp, and is now a Membership Coordinator on staff. “I saw them cooking with food that was maybe not salable but perfectly good for cooking, and turning it into curries, an absolute delight. When I came

to lunch I would see something I hadn't used. In particular, they loved watermelon radish. I found everything to be so inspiring; it was amazing. Some days they would go the whole nine yards and make dessert. We'd come up and there would be a blueberry cobbler."

UP ON THE ROOF

MacDonnell observed that many temporary Coop workers came to work because they lived alone and felt isolated, especially the case for artists and restaurateurs "completely out of work." In contrast, MacDonnell shares her home with her husband and four sons, all of whom were working online. Working twenty-seven hours per week doing check-out at the Coop was "a little bit of an outlet." (Though she hastens to add, "Don't get me wrong! It was a lovely, great time to regroup with my teens and young adults!") At the same time, she enjoyed taking an occasional rooftop break with a Coop member she thinks she'd never have met otherwise—over an excellent lunch.



THE LUNCH BILL

The Coop staff went up to 205 employees at one point during the pandemic hiring period, and there wasn't enough space to even store the staff lunches, let alone have each person use the kitchen. Hiring a chef was the solution. According to Coordinators, it cost $4,000 a week to feed the staff and that expense lasted for 65 weeks—and included ordering from restaurants occasionally. Coordinators also say it was important to have a plan like this for safety reasons: The staff members could easily grab a boxed lunch, then go off and eat on their own, since during the pandemic, staff members were encouraged not to eat together.

Check out the recipes: http://www.sweetcyclebrooklyn.com/recipes-1