

# Gastronomia

A PUBLICATION OF THE GREEK FOOD AND WINE INSTITUTE

## Excerpts from THE SLOW MEDITERRANEAN KITCHEN

by Paula Wolfert

The Greeks have a saying that they use frequently to convey the importance of patience: Slowly, slowly, sour grapes turn to honey.

I take great pleasure in preparing food from scratch. There's just something about slowly cooked food - meats turning tender and succulent, fruits and vegetables flavorful and satiny - that appeals to me. In this frantic cyber-age, the slow approach to food preparation helps me to ground myself. Not only does such food taste delicious, it is also relaxing and pleasurable to make. *The Slow Mediterranean Kitchen* is my attempt to recapture the feeling of the Mediterranean lifestyle - friendly but



### 2004

SLOW MEDITERRANEAN  
COOKING

.....PAGE 1

EVENTS;

MEMBERS CORNER

.....PAGE 3

AT THE TABLE

.....PAGE 4

NOTES FROM ALL OVER

.....PAGE 5

THE MAIN INGREDIENT:  
SPOON SWEETS

.....PAGE 6

voluptuous eating experiences - where home cooks can find a measure of contentment in preparing a fine dish, then serving it to family and friends.

Slow-cooking is ancient, the way food was prepared when humans first began to cook. It is relaxing and also more forgiving than fast cooking, since there's usually a decent margin of error. With slow-cooking, we needn't constantly check the clock.

Please think for a moment about the word slow. There is more to it in regard to cooking than may at first be apparent. For example,

the simple act of salting meat, then leaving it overnight to age a little and develop flavor is "slow." Combining ingredients the day before so that their flavors will blend is "slow." Brining and marinating are "slow." Pickling and curing are "slow." Allowing a roast or a whole fish to rest after being cooked so the juices can work themselves through the meat is slow cooking, too.

Last year my friend the Greek food writer Aglaia Kremezi and I traveled together to one of her favorite islands, Chios, in the northern Aegean, famous for its mastic gum, ouzo, olives, and delicious citrus-based

continued on page 2

spoon sweets. On Chios, I learned how fortunate northern Greeks are to have one of the most delicious beans to work with - the huge, nutty-tasting, white *gigante*, which, when baked slowly, produces a soft, unbroken skin over a meaty, firm, and delicately flavored heart. In northern Greece, *gigante* beans star prominently in soups, casseroles, and other family dishes.

Another ingredient that benefits greatly from slow-cooking is fennel, which develops flavor as it loses moisture. Cooks from Crete make a rustic, earthy dish with the popular combination of fennel and black-eyed peas. It's one of those wonderful culinary marriages in which each ingredient makes the other taste better. To simulate the flavor of wild fennel in a dish (which is what the Greeks use), add a pinch of bruised fennel seeds to cultivated market fennel.

Slow cooking is not limited to savory dishes. The Mediterranean is graced with wonderful fruits bulging with flavor in every season. And the women of the region often employ slow-cooking methods to turn these fruits into "spoon-sweets," syrupy preserves, pies, or dried fruit "leathers." The metamorphosis of orange and grapefruit rinds into candied sweets by the simple addition of sugar, water, and slow-cooking, has always struck me as...well...magical.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously proclaimed, "panta rei" - "everything flows." The most common interpretation goes something like: "You can't stick your foot into the same river twice." In regard to cooking, you can think of this phrase as meaning that no matter what you do, every time you cook a dish, it will come out a little differently. Usually the differences are inadvertent, due to such things as quality of ingredients and temperament of the cook. But for me, *panta rei* has a deeper meaning when applied to the kitchen - the slow transformation of taste over time.

With slow-cooking, we can feel the transformation of the food as it is happening. Wonderful aromas start floating through the house, exciting our appetites and creating a mood preparatory to our sitting down together to enjoy a meal.

## ~~~~~ Claypot Chickpea Soup ~~~~~

The splendor of this soup is its straight, intense flavor, achieved by using simple ingredients and traditional methods. Though the soup is rustic, the methods used are very precise.

"For a good Sifniot chickpea soup, you absolutely need a crunchy yellow onion that squirts when you cut it," my Greek-born friend Daphne Zepos counsels, after giving me a whole litany of other do's and don'ts, including the proviso that I use rainwater from a cistern and cook my chickpeas in a clay pot with a small opening at a Greek village communal oven.

Daphne remembers how her mother would write the family name in charcoal on the pot. The village baker would push the pot deep into the cavernous oven so it would heat steadily and maintain its temperature throughout the night. The following day, it would be served for lunch.

Two Greek islands, Sifnos and Paros, vie for fame in producing this splendid soup. The only difference between the recipes is that the Sifniots add oregano. On Paros, a special pot with a very small opening called a *skountavlos* is used.

The chickpeas must be cooked with just enough water to cover, along with some very finely grated onions, bay leaves, a pinch of salt, and plenty of olive oil. The pot is sealed with a ribbon of flour, water, and oil to avoid any evaporation, then placed in a slow oven. The chickpeas cook to a silken tenderness that turns them almost buttery on the tongue. Amazingly their skins become tender and taut. The liquid will thicken slightly as the starch of the chickpeas is slowly released, creating a soup with an earthy flavor. Serve with just a squeeze of lemon to bring up the taste. You may also serve a chunk of tangy feta cheese on the side.

Serves 8

3 cups dried chickpeas  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
salt  
3 bay leaves (imported preferred)  
6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 medium onion, peeled and grated in a food processor  
flour, water and oil dough for sealing the pot  
freshly ground pepper  
lemon quarters

Soak the chickpeas in plenty of cold water with the baking soda and a pinch of salt for about 12 hours. Drain the chickpeas and rinse thoroughly. Place in a clay or sand pot (or any good bean pot), add the bay leaves, olive oil, a pinch of salt, the grated onion, and enough water to cover the peas by 1 inch, about 6 cups. Seal with a ribbon of flour, water and a drop of oil. Put the pot in a cold oven, set the heat to 450°F and bake for 30 minutes. Reduce the heat to 250°F and continue baking for 3 hours. Discard the bay leaves. (The soup can be prepared 1 day ahead up to this point. Let it cool, then refrigerate.)

To serve, gently reheat the soup to simmering. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve the soup in individual soup bowls and drizzle each with a few teaspoons additional olive oil and a squeeze of lemon.

Notes: I use a Chinese sand pot (available in most Asian markets or by internet). You'll find it cooks beans better than most pots and costs less than five dollars. To prepare the pot, soak it overnight in cold water before the first use, then repeat yearly. If you're lucky enough to own a HearthKit earthen lining for your oven, you'll be able to simulate the Greek village oven approach: place your bean pot in a cold oven; heat the oven to 450°F; reduce after 30 minutes to 250°F; one hour later, turn off the heat, and simply leave the beans overnight in the oven. You can remove them after 3 hours, but the texture is superb when cooked in a clay pot in a clay oven for a longer period of time.

It is very difficult to overcook chickpeas. If you think they're too soft, let them cool in their cooking liquid, then refrigerate for a few hours before reheating. They will be firmer and just as tasty. Once cooked, chickpeas can be stored, covered, for several days in the refrigerator. If your tap water is heavily chlorinated, use bottled or filtered water to cook the chickpeas. If your water is hard, add a small amount of baking soda to the soaking water to help tenderize the chickpeas.

You can also cook the chickpeas in a slow-cooker on low for 8 hours. Freeze any chickpeas you don't serve; they can be added to soups, stews or couscous.



# INSTITUTE EVENTS

## Sixth Annual Worlds of Flavor Conference & Festival: Mediterranean Flavors, American Menus - Tasting the Future –

In November, the Culinary Institute of America's Napa Valley campus hosted an event to introduce the best of ancient and modern Mediterranean ingredients and flavors to participants – and how to use them in their restaurant and food service kitchens.



Worlds of Flavor participants sample specialties of visiting chefs. Over 550 chefs, writers, culinary students and other senior-level food and wine professionals attended the three-day event. Greek Food and Wine Institute members Athens Foods, Krinos Foods and Nestor Imports were among the sponsors.

More than 40 guest faculty came from the countries represented and from across the U.S. They included such illustrious Greek and Mediterranean chefs, scholars and cookbook authors as Joyce Goldstein, Anissa Helou, Nancy Harmon Jenkins, Diane Kochilas, Aglaia Kremezi, Ana

Sortun and Paula Wolfert; such purveyors as Darrel Corti of Corti Brothers and Ari Weinzwieg of Zingerman's; visiting restaurant chefs Christoforos Peskias and Nena Ismirnoglou; and home cooks from Greece, Nikoleta Foskolou and Vali Manouilides.

Faculty held demo workshops, prepared meals and led participants through a culinary journey of the various geographic and cultural regions. Meals were enjoyed at sit-down events and the Marketplace -- a recreation of public street life -- which featured food stalls, informal demos, music and dance, comparative tastings and book signings.

Culinary creations included traditional specialties as well as dishes featuring unique use of Greek ingredients (see page 5 for recipes). Participants sampled over two dozen tantalizing Greek dishes, including pumpkin-leek-cheese fillo coils, Cretan octopus, shrimp with



Cretan octopus

trahana and citrus sauce, and *sfougato* (similar to an omelet) with greens and cheese, to name a few.

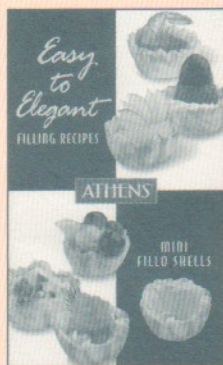


Ari Weinzwieg with Mediterranean oils and vinegars.

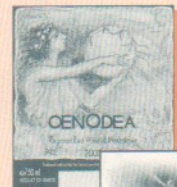
**Johnson & Wales** – The main campus in Providence, RI -- in collaboration with the Institute and Green Farms International -- will present a luncheon and tasting of Greek ingredients for faculty members on April 2nd. The tasting will include Ready-to-Go Fillo (an Athens Foods' product designed specifically for professional chefs), cheese, trahana and olive oil. A sit-down Greek wine tasting and presentation by Institute Vice President Kathy Spiliotopoulos will proceed the luncheon. Participating faculty will receive take-away product samples for instructional use, as well as recipes and cookbooks.

# MEMBERS CORNER

◆ **Athens Foods** has published a free, new cookbook with over 60 fillings recipes for its ready-to-fill mini fillo shells. The cookbook includes color photos with both simple and elegant recipes for cold and hot appetizers and desserts, plus more than two dozen other ideas for quick fillings. It is available from Athens (\$2.99 shipping & handling) at [www.athens.com](http://www.athens.com) or 800-837-5683. ◆ **Athens**, and its sister company, **Krinos Foods**, have both recently redesigned their websites. Rotating recipes, product details, cultural and historical information, news, promotions and publications



offerings are posted on the websites. ◆ **The Barba (Uncle) Stathis** line of frozen vegetables and soup and stew mixes is now available in the U.S. Among the offerings are an okra stew, an artichoke stew and a white bean soup. ◆ **Costa Lazaridi**, from **Nestor Imports**, has produced new wines with a lyrical name: Oenodea ("wine song"). Both are blends of traditional and native Greek varietals. The red (\$12) is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Limnio; the white (\$10), of Sauvignon Blanc and Assyrtiko.



# AT THE TABLE

A SAMPLING OF RECIPES FROM THE 2003 WORLDS OF FLAVOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND FESTIVAL AT THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA AT GREYSTONE

## CARAMALIZED GRAPE LEAF CHIPS

*Nena Ismirnoglou  
Chef, Gefsis  
Athens, Greece*

5 fresh or brined-preserved grape leaves  
1 cup water  
1/2 cup sugar  
Juice of 1/2 lemon

### Sauce:

1/2 vanilla bean  
1/2 cup Mavrodafne wine  
1 cup dry red wine (such as merlot)  
1 Tbsp thyme honey

### To finish:

7 oz vanilla or kaïmaki ice cream  
Mint leaf

For the grape leaves: Preheat oven to 350°F. For the brine-preserved grape leaves, rinse well under cold water and pat dry. Cut off the hard stems.

In a frying pan, combine the water with the sugar and stir until the sugar is melted. Add the lemon juice and grape leaves, and cook over low heat for 10 minutes.

Remove the grape leaves and dry them off on a paper towel.

Place the grape leaves on a silpat and bake for 10 minutes or until crispy.

For the sauce: Cut the vanilla bean diagonally and place in a small pot. Add both wines and heat until it boils down by half.

Add thyme honey and stir for 2 to 3 minutes in low heat until the liquid becomes slightly thick.

Assembly: In a big dish place one leaf and a scoop of ice cream. Repeat again until it looks like a Napoleon. At the end, pour the sauce over the dish. On top, place a mint leaf.

Yield: 1 portion

## SHRIMP IN A SKILLET WITH CREAMY TOMATO-OUZO SAUCE

*Meze by Diane Kochilas  
(William Morrow)*

1 lb large shrimp, heads removed and shelled, tails attached  
Juice of 1 lemon, freshly strained  
3 Tbsp butter  
1 yellow onion (medium), very finely chopped  
1 clove garlic, minced  
3 tomatoes (large), firm, ripe, peeled, seeded and chopped  
3 Tbsp ouzo  
1/3 cup heavy cream  
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Using a sharp paring knife, remove the threadlike intestine from the shrimp. Wash, drain, sprinkle with lemon juice and set aside in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Heat 2 Tbsp. of butter in a large skillet. When the butter stops bubbling, add the onion and cook over medium-low heat until very soft, about 10-12 minutes. Add the garlic and stir for a minute or so.

While the onions are cooking, pulverize the tomatoes in a food processor until smooth. Add them to the skillet. Cook the tomato-onion mixture over medium heat until thick, about 8 minutes. Add the ouzo and let simmer another 3 minutes. Drain the shrimp and add them to the skillet. Simmer for about 4 minutes, or until the shrimp firm up and turn pink. Add the cream, season with salt and pepper and stir well but gently to combine. Just before removing from heat, add the last dab of butter. Serve hot.

Yield: 6-8 meze servings

## FRIED DATES STUFFED WITH LAMB AND CHICKPEAS

*Ana Sortun  
Chef-Owner, Oleana  
Cambridge, MA*

12 Medjool dates  
1/2 cup chickpeas, soaked overnight  
1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
2 Tbsp butter  
3/4 lb ground lamb  
Pinch of saffron  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 clove garlic, chopped  
2 tsp tomato paste  
1 tsp ginger, fresh, grated  
1 Tbsp cilantro, freshly chopped  
Squeeze of fresh lemon  
1 cup flour  
3 eggs beaten with 1/4 cup water and a pinch of salt  
1 cup bread crumbs

Open each date up without cutting in two, to remove pit. Leave as intact as possible for stuffing.

In a small saucepan, cover soaked chickpeas with 2 cups of water and simmer until they are soft and tender. Season the water with salt to taste and let chickpeas absorb the seasoning for 5 minutes. Drain and place in food processor with steel blade. Puree until smooth and creamy adding olive oil and a Tbsp of the butter. Place in a mixing bowl and set aside.

In a small skillet, heat butter until it starts to brown. Add ground lamb, saffron and cinnamon. Cook for about 6 minutes, until lamb is browned. Stir in tomato paste, garlic and ginger and cook for another 3-5 minutes. Lamb should be glazy with spices and tomato. Stir lamb and fresh chopped cilantro into the hummus and season with salt and a little lemon juice. Cool and divide mixture into 12 little balls, the size of quarter. Fill each date with chickpea mixture.

Dredge dates in flour, then egg mixture, and roll in bread crumbs.

Deep fry.

Yield: 12 pieces

## NOTES FROM ALL OVER

**Restaurants** — New York: Cookbook author Diane Kochilas is serving as a menu consultant to chef/owner Christos Valtzoglou at **Pylos** (which means clay). The restaurant features rustic Greek home cooking from the mainland to the islands, and the wines are exclusively Greek. Appropriately, several clay pot dishes are offered, including a Greek cheese version of fondue. **Ethos** in midtown, enjoys the expertise of Kostas Avlonitis, one of Astoria's (New York's little Greece) most successful restaurateurs. Whole charcoal-grilled fish and traditional mezes are the specialties. **Snack Taverna**, a much larger offshoot of the tiny, popular **Snack** in Soho, has opened in Greenwich Village. The taverna offers a menu using Greek ingredients in unique interpretations. Among its highlights are dolmades topped with saffron and almonds, crispy lamb tongue with cranberry beans, meatless moussaka with prunes, and dried beef with fig vinaigrette. Meanwhile, a Greenwich Village mainstay, **Ithaka**, has moved to the Upper East Side, but kept its successful menu mix basically the same. While not the most likely place to find home-baked Greek pastries, the Dutch **ING Bank** in midtown has a caf' offering sesame biscotti, orange honey-walnut *melomakarona* (semolina and nut cookies) and other sweets.

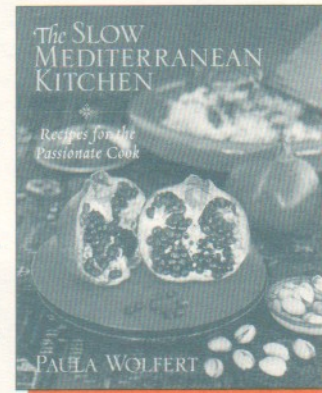
In San Francisco, the high-end **Estia** offers dishes beyond the standard fare, including barley rusks (baked bread) topped with tomatoes and oregano, and lavender ice cream. Lavender surfaces at another San Francisco spot, **La Table O&CO**, which offers a menu of small plates, including a unique dessert of Greek yogurt topped with plums and lavender madeleines. (A new La Table O&CO has just opened in New York as well.) **Mezes, A Taste of Greece** (its name is a mouthful!), also in San Francisco, offers nothing but.

Mezes again are the main attraction at a slew of other new restaurants, including New York's **Zerza Bar, Cripplebush Road**, and **Nar**. **Alma Blu**, also in New York, carries the small plate menu beyond appetizers through entrees, side dishes and desserts. In Washington, D.C., the highly acclaimed **Zaytinya**, offers a meze menu that includes fillo pies, vegetable fritters, scallops with yogurt, and fried mussels.

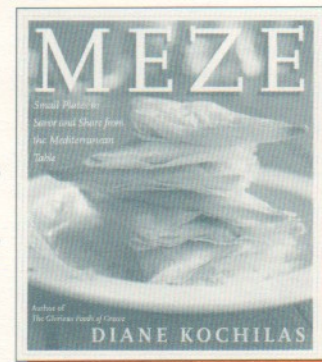
The Harvard School of Public Health in Boston has put its money where its mouth is. For years, the school and Dr. Walter Willett, chairman of its department of nutrition — along with the public health/medical communities — have touted the benefits of the Mediterranean diet. This model diet is based on the traditional diet of Crete. Now, **Sebastian's**, the school's caf', offers a menu (with its own name! - Salute) reflecting the key components of this diet. Choices include dishes with healthy oils, whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and fewer meats, sweets and refined foods. The caf' at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore may follow suit. **Yia Yia's Euro Bistros** chain has expanded from Kansas City, Missouri to Memphis, St. Louis, Denver and Wichita. Menu offerings include Greek-spiced lamb, grilled shrimp with fennel, and goat cheese pudding topped with a kalamata spread.

**Book Watch** — Paula Wolfert's seventh book on the Mediterranean, *The Slow Mediterranean Kitchen: Recipes for the Passionate Cook* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) braises, simmers, marinates and slow roasts her way through 150 recipes from seven countries. The focus is on the joy of preparing, serving and sharing bountiful, home-cooked meals — which has always been a major part of the cultural fabric of the Mediterranean. Greek recipes include pork and orange-flavored beans; spicy mussels with herbs and feta cheese; squid or cuttlefish with fennel, spinach and sorrel; and pot-roasted pork loin with fall fruits. Beautiful color photos are peppered throughout the book.

Wolfert includes wonderful anecdotes—historical, cultural and culinary—while providing easy-to-follow instructions and tips. We learn that in ancient Greece, butter was for external use only (e.g. rubbing on a burn). Due to spoilage in the heat, dairy was only consumed in the form of cheese — even yogurt didn't keep long and was rarely on the menu.



In her spare time as an Athens food critic, chef/owner of an island restaurant, head of a cooking school and Pylos menu consultant, Diane Kochilas has managed to pen a fourth cookbook. Enhanced by tantalizing photos, *Meze: Small Plates to Savor and Share from the Mediterranean Table* (William Morrow) offers diverse samplings including a spicy carrot puree with mint-flavored yogurt; fish-stuffed artichokes with a citrus-saffron sauce; bread salad with watermelon, feta and red onion (Kochilas notes that the pairing of feta and watermelon is one that Greeks savor); little meatballs stuffed with olives; and fillo rolls with spicy sausage, peppers and cheese. Like an authentic Greek meze table, the recipes are inviting and uncomplicated — full of flavor, texture and color.



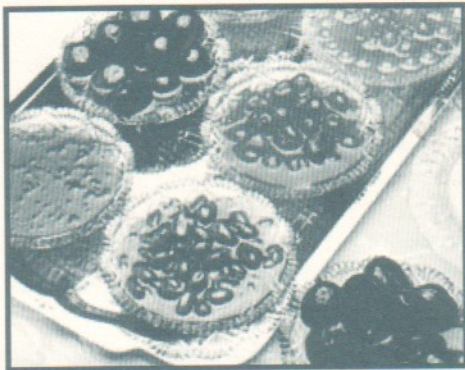
Mediterranean food expert Clifford Wright has written *Mediterranean Vegetables* (The Harvard Common Press), an A-Z tome with history, anecdotes and 200 recipes, both traditional and rare. Information on growing, cooking and storing vegetables is included as well. Among the many interesting tidbits readers will learn is that lettuce was considered by Greeks to be an antiaphrodisiac and that broccoli supposedly has its roots in Greece.

**Misc.** — Nikki Rose, chef, writer and culinary arts professional, is hosting cultural-culinary tours in Crete this summer. Participants will stay in a small village to experience rural life while learning about Cretan cooking. For details, check [www.cookingincrete.com](http://www.cookingincrete.com).



# THE MAIN INGREDIENT

## Spoon Sweets



but the list is extensive, from vanilla to watermelon rind and even such vegetables as cherry tomatoes and baby eggplants.

Spoon sweets are making their way onto an increasing number of restaurant menus here in the U.S. New restaurants dedicated to serving Greek home cooking are using their flavors and textures to accent their dishes, sweet and savory alike. In a unique twist, Snack Taverna tops its herbed grilled sausage with pear spoon sweets. Pylos sticks closer to the traditional use, mixing sour cherry spoon sweets — along with thyme honey and walnuts — into thick Greek yogurt.

Spoon sweets are available in ethnic and gourmet food stores, or can be ordered at [www.3emarket.com](http://www.3emarket.com) and other websites. Major brands include Sarantis and Kafkas. The following recipes for homemade spoon sweets are from *The Complete Book of Greek Cooking* (HarperPerennial) by Katherine Boulukos with the Recipe Club of Saint Paul's Greek Orthodox Cathedral.

### Sour Cherry Spoon Sweet

- 1 lb fresh black or red sour cherries
- 1 cup water
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 1/2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice

Wash and pit cherries, reserving pits in a small bowl. Add water to the pits and set aside. Put 1 cup sugar

in a medium-sized saucepan. Place a layer of cherries on top, and then 1/2 cup sugar, another layer of cherries, and remaining sugar. Strain water from cherry pits, and add to the cherries. Let mixture stand for 1 hour, then bring to a boil and simmer for 30 minutes, or until syrup thickens to consistency of honey. Stir gently at intervals while cooking and skim off any scum that rises to top. Add lemon juice at end of cooking time to prevent syrup from crystallizing. Spoon into sterilized jars, cool and refrigerate.

### Quince Spoon Sweet

- 1 lb quince
- 2 cups sugar
- 3/4 cup water
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 whole cloves
- 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice

Peel and core quince. Reserve seeds and place them in a cheesecloth bag. Tie securely and set aside. Grate quince flesh on a coarse grater or food processor. Place quince in saucepan with sugar, water, cinnamon sticks, and cloves. Add cheesecloth bag. Simmer for about 1 hour, or until syrup thickens to consistency of honey. Stir at intervals and skim off skum that rises to top. Add lemon juice at the end of cooking time to prevent syrup from crystallizing. Continue to simmer until glassy and jellylike. Discard cheesecloth bag of seeds, cinnamon, and cloves. Spoon into sterilized jars, cool, and refrigerate.

Yields: 4 8-ounce jars per recipe.



Bulk Rate  
US Postage Paid  
Bayshore, NY  
Permit #54

GREEK FOOD AND WINE  
*Institute*  
47-00 Northern Boulevard  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
(718) 729-5277  
[lisacutick@insightbb.com](mailto:lisacutick@insightbb.com)

