

University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service

Travel the World without Leaving Your Kitchen

International Cooking Series

The Foods of Greece

Most of us can passionately describe a delicious recipe or meal that someone in our family has passed down for generations and the ensuing joy of sharing the dish around the table. Exploring, learning, and embracing cultural food traditions, both our own and others', can broaden our perspectives about history and cultures from around the world. Whether you experience these cultural differences in eating while traveling, while visiting a restaurant in your community, or by preparing them at home, it can help you celebrate the cultural diversity found in all our communities. So, let's travel the world without leaving your kitchen, and see what the Greek Islands have in store for us.

History of Food

Greece is in southeastern Europe, including a mainland and an archipelago of islands spread across the Aegean and Ionian Seas. The geography of Greece greatly influenced the culture of the people. Surrounded by water and made up of mostly mountains, the people made their livings on the sea and by building massive structures of antiquity. Athens is a perfect example of the rich medieval culture and traditions with Byzantine history at its roots. As the capital city, it is home to many architectural wonders - think the Parthenon and Panathenaic Stadium. Greece also gave us Western philosophy (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), literature (Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey), mathematics (Pythagoras), history (Herodotus), drama (Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes), the Olympic Games, and democracy.



Greek flavors draw from the surrounding lands. And every time yet another empire conquered Greece, they introduced new ingredients and dishes. The influences of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and present-day Turkey, a Mediterranean climate, and even Greek mythology, have allowed healthier food traditions to be the norm. You may have heard of the islands of Mykonos, Santorini, Rhodes, Kefalonia, Corfu, or Crete, to name a few; all heralded for their emerald waters and idyllic beaches. So, it's not hard to visualize freshly caught fish sprinkled with olive oil and just-picked herbs; served with grilled vegetables and a full-bodied red wine. From a simple meze (appetizer) of feta cheese and olives to a hearty casserole, such as moussaka, your local Greek restaurant will direct you to their favorite traditional Greek dishes.

Traditional Greek Cooking

Ingredients

Let's look at the ingredients you will likely find in your kitchen that will allow you to experience a taste of Greece, without traveling too far. The following ingredients are found in many Greek kitchens.

Olive Oil

Greece is the third largest olive oil producer in the world, but first in consumption, using more than 5 gallons per person per year. While olive oil is the basic cooking and baking oil, it is also often drizzled over dishes. Olive oil is a rich source of the monounsaturated fat called oleic acid and antioxidants. Both are believed to have many beneficial health effects.

Olives

Along with olive oil, olives themselves are a staple on any Greek table. The kalamata olive is a national favorite. It is purple-hued, with a smooth, meaty texture, named after the city of Kalamata. Besides a unique flavor, Kalamata olives are full of antioxidants. Research has found the presence of hydroxytyrosol and gallic acid, which may reduce the risk of some chronic diseases, such as heart disease. Like all olives, they must be cured in a specific way before they can be eaten. The saltcured process makes them high in sodium, so limit your portions of olives, as well as other processed foods. Try kalamata olives included on a cheese platter, on pizza, in homemade spaghetti sauce, and in Greek salads.

Honey

Greek honey is some of the finest in the world. There are more beehives per acre in Greece than any other country in Europe. The rich variety of Greek flora give rise to several delicious flavors of honey, including thyme, pine, blossom, heather, chestnut, and fir. If you get the opportunity, compare them to your local honey. Nutritionally, honey has many anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and antioxidant properties. Research is exploring other health benefits.



Greek Yogurt

Greek yogurt is made by heating milk and then adding a bacteria culture to start fermentation, turning the liquid into more of a solid. It is then strained, leaving a thicker product. This type of yogurt is made around the world, but Fage[®] and Chobani[®] popularized it in the U.S., so Americans came to associate all strained yogurts as one with "Greek" in the name. Actual yogurt made in Greece can be made from cows, sheep, or goats. It has a thick creamy texture and deliciously sour flavor. Greek yogurt typically has twice as much protein as regular yogurt and is a great source of calcium (to maintain bone health) and probiotics (to maintain gut health). Read the label for the nutritional value of Greek yogurts. To add more flavor and nutrients, try pairing your favorite Greek yogurt with nuts, fresh fruit, honey, or sweet fruit preserves (Glyko tou Koutaliou).

Legumes

Legumes are a major source of protein in the Mediterranean diet. In Greece, chickpeas, blackeyed peas, split peas, broad beans, and lentils have a long history in the kitchen. The gigantes, which resemble a large lima or butter bean, are popular in creating an earthy-flavored dish. Beans are inexpensive and rich in antioxidants, fiber, and protein. If you're looking for an opportunity to go meatless on Mondays, there are many hearty soups, stews, and salad recipes for you to try.

Herbs

Herbs grow easily in Greece thanks to the climate. Many traditional dishes use spearmint, basil, thyme, rosemary, and dill. For best results, chop or mince herbs before cooking. Volatile oils are released when the leaves are bruised, which provides their unique flavors. If you are substituting dried herbs for fresh, use one-third of the quantity of fresh herbs called for in the recipe. For dishes that require a long cooking time, add delicate-flavored and ground herbs at the end of the cooking time so their flavor will not escape with the steam.

Greek Cheeses

Greek cheeses are among the finest in the world. Most of them don't make it out of the country. Many varieties have protection under the European Union's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) terms. This means that no other EU member nation can use the name of a particular cheese and that these cheeses must meet processing and location-of-origin standards. Feta cheese is an example; it can only be produced in Greece, and it must be 100% sheep's milk or a mixture of sheep's and goat's milk. It is aged either in barrels or in tins. Since it is made using a brine, it has a slightly salty flavor.

But there are other Greek cheeses available in the U.S. to eat as a table cheese, with fruit, and in baked goods and casseroles. Look for these cheeses the next time you are in the grocery or specialty store: Kefalotyri (harder and saltier version of Gruyère), Graviera (nutty, mild-to-sharp flavor, made from sheep's or goat's milks), Kasseri (semihard sheep's milk cheese), and Manouri (creamy whey cheese similar to Italian ricotta). Two cheeses that are exceptional with red wine are Metsovone (log-shaped, aged, smoked, and then dipped in wax) and Ladotyri of Mytilene (hard cheese aged in olive oil).



Fruits and Vegetables

With a year-round growing season, it is common to eat what's fresh and in season. In a typical Mediterranean diet, fruits and vegetables are consumed and incorporated into recipes daily. From apples in winter to citrus in the summer to berries in the spring, there is no end to recipes using fresh or dried fruits. Seasonal vegetables are also used in a plethora of meals found in Greece, and many meals are meat-free. Some delicious vegetarian meals to try are Greek salad, Briam (Greek zucchini and potatoes), Spanakopita (Spinach Pie), and Gemista (Stuffed Vegetables). Fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and many phytonutrients. They also add color and flavor to our meals.

Fish and Seafood

Consuming fresh fish and seafood has long been important to coastal countries on the Mediterranean Sea and one of the reasons for the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet. The health benefits of being low in calories and saturated fat and rich in omega-3 fatty acids are well researched. Oily fish, like sardines, mackerel, and anchovies, are less expensive. And fish can be prepared in so many ways. Mussels and octopus are widely consumed in Greece. But did you know that Greece is one of the world leaders in fish farming of sea bream, gilthead bream, sea bass, and trout? These exports have overtaken olive oil exports in recent years.



Traditional Greek Dishes

We now know some of the common ingredients that can be found in a Greek kitchen. Dining in Greece is a social event, where friends and family often gather to cook and eat together. Since Greek cookery is full of a wide variety of flavors, there are countless opportunities to prepare new dishes to try. There are also countless good red wines to sip with dinner. Research suggests that wine enjoyed in moderation may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer. The following recipes should give you the occasion to develop a taste of the Mediterranean.

Tzatziki Sauce (Cucumber Yogurt Dip and Sauce)

Yield: 2 cups Prep time: 20 minutes Cook time: 1 hour

Nutritional analysis per 2 tablespoon serving: 30cal; 1.5g fat; 45mg sodium; 1g carbohydrate; 2g protein

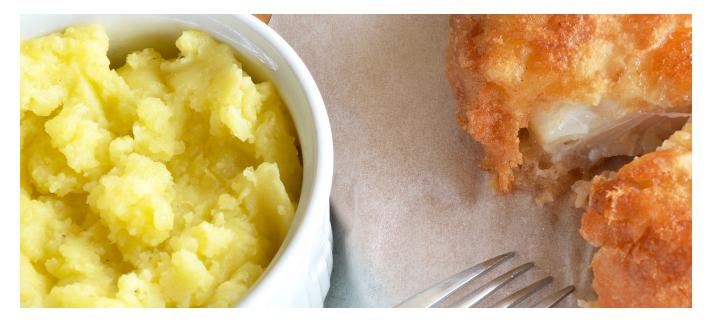
Ingredients

- 1 medium-sized cucumber, peeled, seeded, and shredded
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 small garlic clove, peeled and finely minced
- 1 cup whole-milk Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh mint and/or dill, minced

Instructions

- 1. In a small colander, add shredded cucumber and toss lightly with the salt. Allow it to drain for about 15 minutes. Then squeeze the cucumber in a paper towel to remove excess moisture.
- **2.** In a small bowl, combine remaining ingredients. Add shredded cucumber. Cover and refrigerate for at least one hour or up to two days. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.
- **3.** Serve with pita chips or a variety of raw, cut vegetables for dipping. Or serve over grilled chicken or lamb or meat kabobs.

Note: For more color, flavor, and nutritional value, add 1 small, shredded carrot. If you like a tangier flavor, add 1 tablespoon of red wine vinegar. For a smoother dip, use a blender to combine all ingredients.



Skordalia Sauce (Greek Garlic Dip and Sauce)

Yield: 2 cups Prep time: 10 minutes Cook time: 1 hour

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 70cal; 4g fat; 5mg cholesterol; 65mg sodium; 1g carbohydrate; 2g protein

Ingredients

- 1 12-ounce Russet potato, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced to a paste
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 slices of white bread, crusts removed and torn into 1-inch pieces
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 1/4 cup Greek yogurt
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Instructions

- 1. In a medium saucepan, add the potato pieces and enough water to cover by one inch. Bring water to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, or until potatoes are fork tender.
- 2. While potatoes are cooking, in a small bowl, combine garlic and lemon juice. Allow to sit for 10 minutes. In a separate medium bowl, combine bread, ¼ cup warm water, and salt. Mix with a fork into a paste. If more water is needed, add 1 tablespoon at a time. Do not use a food processor as it will become a gluey consistency.
- **3.** Combine all ingredients together, then rice the potatoes into the bowl with the other ingredients. (If you do not have a ricer, carefully use a fine grater, and then fluff the potatoes.) Stir until all ingredients are well combined, adding additional water, if needed. Cover and refrigerate for at least one hour or up to three days. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.
- **4.** Serve with pita chips or a variety of raw, cut vegetables for dipping. Or serve with fried fish.

Note: If you desire more garlic flavor, add additional cloves of garlic, one at a time, to taste.



Fasolakia Giahni (Greek-Style Green Beans)

Yield: 6 servings Prep time: 30 minutes Cook time: 45 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 130cal; 2g fat; 10mg cholesterol; 330mg sodium; 13g carbohydrate; 4g protein

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove of garlic, finely chopped
- 1 pound ripe tomatoes, finely chopped
- 1½ pounds green beans, trimmed and cut into 2- to 3-inch pieces
- a pinch of sugar
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper

Optional Garnish Ingredients

- 1/4 cup feta cheese, crumbled
- 1/4 cup Kalamata olives, pitted and sliced in quarters

Instructions

- 1. In a large skillet, over medium heat, heat the oil until sizzling. Add the onions and sauté until translucent and tender, about 3 minutes.
- **2.** Add remaining ingredients, less the garnishes and parsley and combine. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cover with a lid. Simmer for about 45 minutes, until the beans are soft and most of the juices have evaporated. Add additional water during cooking, if needed to prevent sticking. Stir in parsley.
- **3.** Serve warm or at room temperature. Garnish with feta cheese and Kalamata olives.

Note: Canned tomatoes (24-ounces) can be substituted for the fresh tomatoes. Frozen French green beans (24-ounces) can be substituted for fresh green beans.

The Fasolakia Giahni recipe adapted from https:// www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/greek-green-beansrecipe-fasolakia-giaxni/, accessed February 2022.

Kotosoupa Avgolemono (Lemon Chicken Soup)

Yield: 6 servings Prep time: 20 minutes Cook time: 8 hours (using a slow cooker)

Nutritional analysis per 1-cup serving: 380cal; 15g fat; 75mg cholesterol; 460mg sodium; 36g carbohydrate; 22g protein

Chicken Soup Ingredients

- 1 2-pound whole chicken, giblets removed
- 1 medium red onion, peeled and quartered
- 2 large carrots, rough cut
- About 2 quarts water
- 1¹/₂ cups short-grain rice, like Arborio
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¹/₄ teaspoon pepper

Chicken Soup Instructions

- 1. Place whole chicken in a 6-quart slow cooker. Place onions and carrots over meat. Make sure there is enough water to cover the chicken at least 1 inch.
- **2.** Cover the slow cooker and cook eight hours on high. After five hours, remove the onions and carrots and discard.
- **3.** Add the rice. Cover the slow cooker and cook the additional time.
- **4.** Remove the chicken from the broth. Pull the chicken meat from the bones and discard the skin. Add the chicken meat back to the broth. You should have about 1 quart of liquid still in the chicken soup.

Egg Lemon Sauce Ingredients

- 2 large eggs
- 1 large lemon, juiced (or 5 tablespoons prepared lemon juice)



Egg Lemon Sauce Instructions

- **1.** In a medium bowl, crack the eggs into a bowl and whisk until foamy.
- 2. Add the lemon juice and whisk again.
- **3.** While rapidly whisking, add a small ladle of soup into the bowl. Continue whisking while adding another ladle of soup to warm up the eggs.
- Pour the egg mixture back into the pot, constantly stirring so your eggs do not curdle. Then put the lid on and set it aside for 3 to 4 minutes. It will thicken slightly.
- 5. Serve soup while still warm.

Note: If you don't have a slow cooker, you may prepare the chicken recipe in a large pot or Dutch oven. If you are stretched for time, buy a roasted chicken at the grocery and pull the chicken meat from the bones to use for the soup. Then cook the rice separately in chicken broth for about 20 minutes or until soft. Then complete the rest of the steps in making the soup on top of the stove.

Kotosoupa Avgolemono recipe adapted from https://www.mygreekdish.com/recipe/greek-lemonchicken-soup-kotosoupa-avgolemono/, accessed February 2022.

Keftedes Arni (Lamb Meatballs)

Yield: 4 servings Prep time: 25 minutes Cook time: 30 minutes

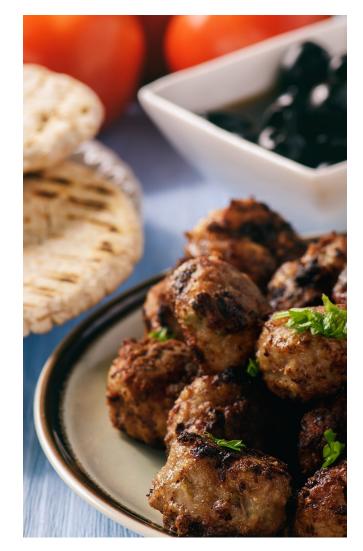
Nutritional analysis per ¹/2-cup serving: 390cal; 25g fat; 125mg cholesterol; 560mg sodium; 13g carbohydrate; 24g protein

Ingredients

- 1 pound ground lamb
- 1 small red onion, grated
- 1 large egg
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon fresh mint, finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano, dried
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin, ground
- ½ teaspoon coriander, ground
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¹/₄ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup flour, with extra for dredging
- ¹/₂ cup breadcrumbs

Instructions

- In a large mixing bowl, add all the ingredients together and mix by hand until well blended. Place covered in the refrigerator for 15 minutes to make the mixture easier to handle.
- 2. Remove the mixture from the refrigerator and roll into 1½-inch balls. Dredge meatballs in flour to lightly coat.
- **3.** Using cooking spray, lightly coat a cookie cooling rack. Place the rack on top of a larger sheet pan, with short sides. This will allow any excess fat cooking out of the meatballs to be collected into the bottom of the pan. Place meatballs on the greased rack and bake at 375 degrees F for about 25 to 30 minutes or until a thermometer inserted into a meatball registers 165 degrees F.



- **4.** Turn meatballs about midway through cooking time. The meatballs should be lightly browned. Remove meatballs to drain on paper towel-lined plate.
- **5.** Serve warm in a pita pocket with fresh vegetables and your favorite lemon-herb sauce; with a cold cucumber or Greek salad; in your favorite vegetable soup; or just drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

Note: This recipe can be cooked in an air fryer with great results; follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Baked Black-Eyed Peas

Yield: 8 servings Prep time: 20 minutes Cook time: 1 hour 15 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½-cup serving: 110cal; 1g fat; 330mg sodium; 13g carbohydrate; 4g protein

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried black-eyed peas
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and quartered
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 small zucchinis, quartered
- 2 small tomatoes, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh mint
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley
- 1 lemon or lime, juiced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¹/₄ teaspoon pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

Instructions

- 1. Sort and wash the black-eyed peas. Soak blackeyed peas overnight. Drain and rinse peas. OR in a large pot, over medium-high heat, place blackeyed peas and enough water to cover and bring to a boil. Turn off the heat and allow to soak for an hour.
- 2. In a medium pot, add black-eyed peas and enough water to cover the peas. Bring to a boil. Drain and rinse again. Cover with fresh water and boil until soft, about 45 minutes.
- **3.** In a medium baking dish, combine remaining ingredients. Cover with black-eyed peas and one cup of cooking liquid. Place in oven at 350 degrees F for 15 minutes. Stir and bake about 10 to 15 minutes more. Drizzle with olive oil before serving warm.



Note: Black-eyed peas can be cooked in your electric pressure cooker or slow cooker by following the manufacturer's instructions, usually eliminating the soaking step. You can also substitute 2 15-ounce cans of black-eyed peas for the dried peas. Or substitute chickpeas in place of the black-eyed peas. If you have leftovers, add chicken broth and heat for a tasty soup.



Pastitsio (Baked Pasta and Tomato Meat Sauce)

Note: This recipe is a little more challenging and time consuming, but well worth the results.

Yield: 12 servings Prep time: 30 minutes Cook time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis per 3-inch-by-2 1/3-inch square serving: 500cal; 26g fat; 105mg cholesterol, 750mg sodium; 34g carbohydrate; 29g protein

Meat Sauce Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1¹/₂ cups large onion, chopped
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1 pound lean ground lamb

- 1/2 cup dry red wine or unsweetened red grape juice
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes in puree
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- ³/₄ pound penne pasta

Bechamel Ingredients

- 21/2 cups 2% milk
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

- 1¹/₂ cups grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- ²/₃ cup Greek-style yogurt

Meat Sauce Instructions

- 1. In a large pot, over medium-heat, heat olive oil until shimmering. Add onion and sauté for 5 minutes.
- 2. Add the beef and lamb and sauté an additional 8 to 10 minutes, until it's no longer pink. Crumble the meat as it cooks into finer pieces with a wooden spoon. Drain excess liquid.
- 3. Add the wine and cook 2 more minutes.
- **4.** Reduce heat to medium. Add the garlic and spices and continue cooking for 5 minutes.
- **5.** Add the tomatoes and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 40 to 45 minutes. Set aside.
- 6. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Bechamel Sauce Instructions

- **1.** In a small saucepan, over medium-low heat, heat the milk until it begins to simmer.
- **2.** In a medium saucepan, over medium-low heat, heat the butter until melted.
- **3.** Over medium heat, add the flour to the butter and whisk constantly for 2 minutes.
- **4.** Pour the warm milk into the butter and flour mixture, whisking constantly. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally for 5 to 7 minutes, until smooth and thick.
- **5.** Add the spices, ³/₄ cup of Parmesan, and cool for at least 10 minutes.
- **6.** In a small bowl, combine eggs and yogurt before stirring into the cooled Bechamel sauce. Set aside.

Note: Before adding the eggs and yogurt in the last step, you must cool the Bechamel sauce slightly

to keep from having pieces of cooked eggs in your sauce and curdling the yogurt.

Pasta Instructions

- 1. In a large pot half full of water, add pasta. Cook until al dente, but not overcooked. Drain and set aside.
- **2.** Combine the pasta and meat sauce. Add to a 9-inch-by-9-inch prepared baking dish.
- **3.** Pour the bechamel sauce evenly over the top. Sprinkle the remaining ³/₄ cup of Parmesan cheese.
- **4.** Bake for 1 hour, until golden brown and bubbly. Allow to cool at least 10 minutes before serving warm.

Note: This recipe is high in calories, fat, and sodium. You can reduce this by using a plant-based version of ground burger and sausage for a Meatless Monday Meal.

Greek Baklava

Note: This recipe is a little more challenging and time consuming, but well worth the results.

Yield: 24 servings Prep time: 30 minutes Cook time: 1 hour

Nutritional analysis per serving: 370cal; 25g fat; 30mg cholesterol, 95mg sodium; 35g carbohydrate; 4g protein

Ingredients for the Filling

- 1¹/2 cups melted butter
- 1 pound thawed phyllo dough
- 1 pound finely chopped walnuts
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon cloves
- pinch of allspice

Note: Depending on the region in Greece, different nuts are used, including walnuts, almonds, and pistachios, and occasionally whole sesame seeds. Be adventurous and try different combinations for different flavors.

Ingredients for the Syrup

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup honey
- 1 cup water
- 1 lemon, juiced

Instructions for Syrup

- 1. In a large saucepan, over high heat, combine all ingredients, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves.
- **2.** Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to a simmer for about 25 minutes.
- 3. Remove from the heat and let cool until lukewarm.



Instructions for Baklava

- 1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.
- **2.** Unroll phyllo sheets and place between two damp, clean kitchen towels to prevent it from drying out and tearing.
- **3.** Brush the interior of a 9-inch-by-13-inch-by-2-inch baking dish with butter.
- **4.** In a medium-sized bowl, combine walnuts and spices.
- Separately, place 10 sheets of phyllo dough into the baking dish, brushing each with butter between layers. Sprinkle about ³/₄ cup of nut mixture on the phyllo dough.
- 6. Add the next layer of phyllo dough, with 5 sheets total, brushing each with butter in between layers. Sprinkle with ³/₄ cup of nut mixture on phyllo dough. Repeat this process 4 more times until you have a total of 5 nut mixtures in between phyllo dough layers.

- 7. Finish off with 10 sheets of phyllo dough. Brush the top with remaining butter and trim edges with sharp knife.
- Cut diagonal lines the length of the pan to make diamond shaped pieces, using 6 by 4 slices. Sprinkle with water.
- **9.** Bake 55 to 60 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove from oven and immediately spoon syrup over the baklava.
- **10.** Cool the baklava at room temperature. Allow to sit 4 to 6 hours or overnight to absorb the syrup and soften the layers.

Note: Store at room temperature, covered for 1 to 2 weeks.

Food and Health

Increasing evidence suggests that the Mediterranean diet might reduce the risks of metabolic syndrome, atherosclerosis, cancer, diabetes, obesity, pulmonary, and cognitive diseases. The Blue Zones Project® identified communities around the world where individuals were enjoying an increase in lifespan, often past 100. Ikaria, Greece, is one of these communities. Their secret may be the generous amounts of vegetables, beans, and legumes, along with smaller amounts of dairy and meat products. Couple their Mediterranean diet with copious amounts of outdoor physical activity and you may find the answer to the average eight-year increase in lifespan in both men and women. For more information, check out Dan Buettner's book, The Blue Zones Challenge.

Other traditional Greek foods to explore include, Lahanodolmades (cabbage rolls with an egg lemon sauce), Spanakopita (spinach pie), Moussaka (eggplant casserole), Dolmades (stuffed grape leaves), and Loukoumades (Greek honey puffs). There are many Greek recipes available at your local library or from websites and food blogs. Not all will be authentic or traditional. But exploring the culture and foods of modern-day Greece will be a treat!

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