



DATE PALM

Dates have been a staple food for thousands of years. They are nutritious, easy to store, and can be dried. Fossil records indicate that the date palm existed 50 million years ago. Date pits have been found in archeological digs and palm trunks were used to construct ancient temples. They are believed to have originated in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) and were cultivated in Ancient Egypt around 4000 BCE. Egypt is currently the world leader in the production of dates, followed by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

There is a huge variety of dates, each with a different texture, taste, and color. They are divided into three categories depending on their moisture content. **Fresh dates** retain a lot of moisture, have soft skin and flesh, are slightly sweet, and can be yellow, orange, or red in color. **Semi-dried** dates are sweeter, have less moisture, crunchy skin, fibrous flesh, and a light brown color. **Dried dates** have very little moisture content when ripe, they are darker in color, and their flesh is hard and with a sweet taste.

Some of the most popular varieties of dates include **Ajwa** which is soft and black. **Hayani** is dark red, crunchy, and is very popular in Egypt. The **Medjool** date is known as the “king of dates” due to its difficulty of cultivation and popularity. It is large and has a sweet, soft flesh; these qualities make the **Medjool** date one of the most expensive varieties. **Rutab** is medium-sized, dark and soft. **Sukkary** meaning “sweet” in Arabic are very sweet dates and, golden in color, and are cultivated mostly in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The palm tree has many other uses besides cultivating dates. The wood is used for fuel and to build shelters. The fronds are woven into mats and baskets. Date seeds are used as animal feed. Since ancient times, the palm tree has been referred to as a “Sacred Tree” or “Tree of Life”. Palm trees have a great significance in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The whole trees appear on the sculptures of synagogues, and the palm’s fronds are used as ornaments during the Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles. They are also mentioned throughout the Bible and the Quran. Palm branches are used by Christians to celebrate Palm Sunday signifying Jesus entering Jerusalem. In Islamic culture, dates are always used to break the fast during the month of Ramadan.

Dates have an extremely high nutritional content and are an excellent and quick source of energy. They contain a wide variety of essential vitamins (such as A, B, and C), minerals (such as potassium, iron, magnesium, and calcium), and are a rich source of fiber and antioxidants.



Egyptian Date Cookies قراقيش Ara'eesh

Date Filling:

- 1 lb medjool dates (pitted)
- ½ tsp cinnamon powder
- 1 tsp oil or melted butter
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Mix cinnamon and oil or melted butter, form in small balls (grape size). Put aside. Could be prepared ahead.

Dough:

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup milk
- 1/2 cup oil
- ½ cup melted unsalted butter (one stick)
- 1 ½ tps baking powder
- 1 ½ tsp anise seeds
- ½ tsp cardamom powder

- 1- Mix all dry ingredients together
- 2- Add melted butter, milk, oil and knead by hand or use a kitchen machine to form a soft and manageable dough (you may add a little bit of oil or milk if the dough is a bit dry!)
- 3- Form a small piece (1 ½ times the size of the date ball), squeeze and flatten it between your palms
- 4- Place the date ball in the middle, fold the dough and pinch close using your fingers
- 5- Flatten it a little bit, and turn it over. Keep the folded part on the bottom
- 6- Place in the baking sheet on a parchment paper (preferable), 2 inches apart
- 7- Brush with egg wash (you may use a ready-liquid egg) and sprinkle with sesame
- 8- Place on top shelf
- 9- Bake on 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes until light golden color
- 10- Let it cool and store in an air tight container

Topping:

- Toasted sesame
- Egg wash (for brushing)
- You may coat with powdered sugar before serving to make it look festive and fancy

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Candied Orange Peel

Ingredients:

- 3 large oranges – wash and dry
- Boiled water for cooking the peels
- 1 ½ cup sugar + 1 ½ cup water for caramelizing the orange peels

Instructions:

1. Cut off a small section on top and bottom of each orange. Score the skin into 4 quarters. Slice each section lengthwise into ¼ inch-wide strips.
2. Cook in a large sauce pan in boiled water for 5 minutes. Drain and repeat the step one more time (this is to get rid of the bitterness of the orange peels). Drain.
3. Add the peels to sugar and water, bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook for 30 minutes. Stir occasionally. Let it cool in the syrup.
4. Remove from syrup, place on a wire rack over parchment paper. Let it dry for 1 or 2 days.
5. Place in an air tight container and keep refrigerated or in the freezer.

Dip in chocolate, or eat as a snack. Chop and use as topping on ice cream, or use in baking cakes and cookies, or cut in halves and stuff a pitted date.

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Coated Spiced Date Balls

- Mix pitted dates with oil, ghee, coconut oil, or honey to form a soft and easy to work with paste/dough.
- Add pinch of any or all of the following spices: (cardamom, anise, cloves, and cinnamon) and mix well.
- Form into small balls and roll into your favorite dips (shredded coconut, chopped walnuts, toasted sesame, pistachios, cocoa, or chocolate vermicelli).



Stuffed Dates

- Cut open the date side way and keep it intact, remove the pit.
- Stuff with candied orange peel, toasted hazelnut, toasted almond, or walnut halves.
- fold it half way and Place in small decorative doilies and serve.

Can be prepared ahead and has a long shelf life.

