



Honey & Co.

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at home

Middle Eastern recipes from our kitchen





Baked artichokes with lemony ricotta dip

The Ottoman-era train line from Jerusalem to Jaffa ran through my childhood neighbourhood in Jerusalem. Passenger trains would run a few times a week and the journey took 3½ hours – it is 45 minutes by car, or faster when traffic is good. There's a new train line now, quick and efficient. Last time I was there, the old track had been converted into a promenade, beautifully paved and lined with lovely gardens, but when we were kids, it was quite wild with thick, thorny shrubbery and urban debris. We neighbourhood kids had endless adventures there. It was our favourite place to play, of course. And we loved finding our food there: in the summer, it was prickly pears. The big cactus plants had abundant but very well-guarded fruit; you had to use a stick to detach it from the plant and knock it into a vessel you held in your other hand (usually a rusty old tin we had found). We got quite deft at using two knives to get to the sweet flesh without touching the thorny exterior. In the tail end of winter, it was artichokes: small and grey, each leaf ending in a sharp talon, growing on sinewy, scratchy stalks. More than a bit of blood was shed picking them, but it was all worth it when we had a big pile of artichokes, simply boiled with some lemons. We would pick the leaves, dipping them in salt and scraping the fleshy bit from the end of each one with our teeth, chucking the rest until we had a big pile of leaves in front of us and a tiny, sweet heart covered in choke, that would neatly detach as you pulled the hairs.

The most convivial way to start a meal, bring a tray of these to the table with a big bowl for the leaves, plus the dipping sauce over the page (or just some good olive oil and salt), and see everyone get stuck in with fingers and spoons.