***Burekas***

**Cheese and Rice Stuffed Pastries**

By Kaye (Hasson) Israel and Marcia Israel Weingarten

Bendichas Manos

Makes about 84 burekas

**Filling**

5 cups water

1 teaspoon salt

2 cups uncooked long- or short-grain rice, rinsed and drained

1 cup cottage cheese

1 cup (4 ounces) feta cheese, crumbled

1 1⁄2 cups grated Romano or Parmesan cheese, plus more for topping pastries

3 large eggs

**Dough**

2 1⁄2 cups water, plus a few drops for egg wash

2 1⁄2 cups vegetable or canola oil

1 teaspoon salt

10-12 cups all-purpose flour, sifted

1 large egg, for wash

To make the filling, bring a medium pot with the water and salt to boil over high

heat. Add the rice, cover, reduce the heat to a simmer and cook until the rice is soft

and all the water absorbed, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and transfer

to a large mixing bowl.

Use a potato masher to mash the hot rice. Add the cottage cheese, feta, Romano or

Parmesan and the eggs, and continue to mash until well blended and there are no

lumps. The mixture should be damp, not dry.

For the dough, put about 1⁄2 cup ice cubes in a large glass measuring cup and add

water to the 3-cup mark.

In a separate, large mixing bowl, add the mixture of water and ice, plus the oil and

salt. Let stand for a few minutes for the water to get ice cold, then add the flour

gradually, 1 cup at a time, stirring with a wooden or large spoon to incorporate

completely until the mixture begins to take on the elastic consistency of dough.

(Usually about 11 cups is the right amount.) Discard any remaining ice cubes.

Take the dough out of the bowl and knead it on a clean, dry surface until the dough

is smooth, not sticky, and has the consistency of pie dough. As with pie dough,

 don’t overwork it.

Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper. Divide the dough into 4 equal

portions. Working with one portion at a time, pinch off walnut-size balls and place

on a work surface. If you are right-handed, work each ball in the palm of your left

hand. Use your right hand to tuck the dough under and into itself, working to make

it a smooth ball. (Reverse the work of the hands if you are left-handed.) As balls

are formed, place them not touching on the baking sheets.

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Once all the dough is formed into balls (about 84 of them), place 6 or 8 of the first

balls made on your work surface. Using your fingers, press out the dough. Then

use a small rolling pin to make flat, slightly oval shapes big enough to hold a

spoonful of filling. Each piece should be no larger than the perimeter of a drinking

glass. Using a small scoop or a tablespoon measure, scoop filling into the middle

of the flattened doughs.

After all 6 or 8 flat pieces of dough have been filled, fold each in the middle so the

edges meet and the filling is covered, making a moon-shaped pastry. Pinch the

edges shut. You can make a beautiful edge by pinching the dough between your

thumb and side of your index finger, then use your thumb to roll the edge, working

your way around the entire *bureka,* or you can use a fork to crimp the edges with

a nice, clean pattern. Place the crimped *burekas,* not touching, back on the baking

sheets. Continue with all the dough, 6 or 8 balls at a time, working in the order the

balls were formed.

In a small bowl, whisk together the egg with a couple drops of water. Use a pastry

brush to coat each pastry with that egg wash, then top with a sprinkle of grated cheese.

Bake one sheet at a time for about 30 minutes or until golden brown. Eat right out of

the oven, or refrigerate for a few days, or cool and freeze. Reheat the *burekas* in a

350°F oven, either defrosted or frozen. Do not microwave, as it makes the pastries

soggy. Great to keep in the freezer for a quick brunch or snack or most any time.

*The mother-daughter duo of Kaye (Hasson) Israel and Marcia Israel Weingarten write*

*about Sephardic and Ladino topics and share family recipes in the Sephardic tradition*

*of the Island of Rhodes on their Bendichas Manos website and active Facebook group.*