

Matbucha madness



Red peppers post roast

Several weeks ago, this Ashkenazi Jewess found herself at the shabbat dinner table of some hardcore Sephardic folk. And seriously, I'm not talking about your garden variety Sephardic couple who can identify that slippery slope between too many hamsas on a wall and just enough while also putting paprika and hot chili peppers on everything. I mean REAL Israeli Sephardic folk. On top of the Sephardic-ness glory of the couple themselves, the hostess' mother AND brother are chefs at a local kosher grocer so needless to say, I was packing Tums and my appetite when we arrived that night. See, the benefit of being a Southern Jew is that I don't have a fear of the spice (oh, I should clarify. The Tums were for my hubby who is so deeply Ashkenazi I truly think male babies of his family are born craving bourbon and herring and end up settling for breast milk). This was truly one of the yummiest meals I'd been too in a while—one of those meals where, if you close your eyes and open your nose and taste buds, you swear you're back in Israel eating at the shuk. So, this of course made me run home to see if I could replicate any of the

yummiest of the night. I'm not about to jump into Sephardic cooking thinking I know what I'm doing. I'm aware that there is a learning curve so it might behoove me to take it slow. I decided to try making matbucha. Matbucha (pronounced maht-boo-kah) is a cold tomato salad/relish dish served as an appetizer along side hummus, tahini, grape leaves, etc. The great thing about matbucha is that it's one of those dishes that takes hours but the majority of the time is taken up by just letting it do it's thing on the stove. And for all my fellow Eastern European Jews out there, feel free to serve your matbucha next to the smoked white fish at your next kiddish lunch. I'm telling you, you're Uncle Sol is gonna LOVE it!



Stewing and stewing

What?!

- 2 lbstomatoes
- 1 lb red bell pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, quartered
- 3 dried chilies (optional)
- 1 1/2 teaspoonshot paprika

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 lemon

How! ?

Preheat oven to 350°F and put a big pot of water on to boil.

Place bell peppers on a cookie sheet and roast in the oven until the skins have browned. Submerge tomatoes in boiling hot water for 10 minutes or until the skin falls off. Cut tomatoes in half and squeeze out the juice and seeds. Cut tomatoes in chunks and put in medium-sized pot on stove (don't turn stove on yet). When red peppers are done, peel the skin from the bell peppers and remove the seeds and stem. Cut bell peppers in chunks. Add all ingredients to pot filled with tomatoes and pour oil over top. Bring contents to a boil, then turn down to a medium heat. Cook covered for 2 hours. Remove cover and cook uncovered until most of the liquid has evaporated. Stir occasionally to prevent burning. When liquid is done, before refrigerating, stir juice of 1/2 a lemon into the finished matbucha. Refrigerate and serve cold.