

Food Musing – Super Hummus

By Wendy Dennis, Wakefield MA

(published 7/18/08 in the Wakefield Observer)

I have never understood why some people refuse to share their recipes. “Breaking bread” together is the most fundamental of social acts, from ancient tribal rituals to a simple relaxing meal for two, home cooked or not. And, as many studies point out, the demise of the traditional “dinner hour” has had negative effects on families, especially children.

Sharing a meal is not about the food. It is about interacting, spending time sharing experiences and ideas with others, giving and receiving. But, it certainly helps if the food tastes good! And, I can think of no bigger compliment than being asked for one of my recipes.

In fact, I had a number of recipe requests for the hummus I served last week at our July 4th gathering. Hummus is a Middle Eastern dip or spread made from a base of garbanzo beans (also known as chick peas) and tahini, which is a “butter” made by grinding up sesame seeds.

I've been making hummus for years. However, given that I am prone to experimenting and just plain guessing on measurements, sometimes the results have been less than spectacular. But now, I have a fool-proof recipe that I am pleased to share.

Super Hummus (Makes around 3-4 cups)

1 15 oz can of garbanzo beans (chick peas) drained and rinsed
2 cloves of garlic, minced (I use big cloves)
1/3 cup chopped parsley – (somewhat firmly packed when measuring)
1 medium carrot, grated
1/4 cup lemon juice
1/8 cup olive oil
1/3 cup of tahini (sesame paste from lightly toasted sesame seeds)
1 medium sized roasted red pepper

Put the rinsed and drained garbanzo beans in a food processor along with the minced garlic, chopped parsley, and grated carrot, and run/pulse until the mixture is coarsely ground.

Next, add the lemon juice, pulsed a bit, then the olive oil, and pulse a bit more.

Add the tahini and process until well-mixed, stopping occasionally to scrape down the sides with a spatula.

Then, toss the roasted red pepper in whole, and don't bother patting it dry, first. It will blend in nicely. And that's it. Ready to serve or put in the fridge where it will keep for at least 3-4 days.

Now, for the flavor boosters. This hummus is great when using store-bought tahini and bottled lemon juice. And, obviously, it uses canned garbanzos. I also use store-bought, jarred roasted red pepper. But, I can tell you for sure that squeezing the lemon juice fresh and making your own tahini really adds a punch!

Freshly squeezed lemon juice is easy. A medium-sized lemon should give you ¼ cup of lemon juice.

Making tahini isn't difficult, but it is more time consuming (and messy!) than squeezing a lemon. But the flavor is well worth it. To be honest, I only recently started grinding my own. I was prepping hummus ingredients and discovered I had no tahini. Luckily, I had a bag of sesame seeds in the fridge.

Tahini can be made from either toasted or raw sesame seeds. My understanding is that Asian tahini is made from raw sesame seeds and Middle Eastern tahini is from toasted sesame seeds. So, how to toast?

Many recipes say to spread the seeds on a baking sheet and put in the oven, but I prefer the quick, easy, and more energy efficient method of dry-roasting in a heavy frying pan. I prefer a cast iron pan for dry-roasting nuts, seeds, and grains, but a sturdy stainless steel pan works, too.

To make just a tad more tahini than you need for this recipe, put ¾ cup raw sesame seeds in a 10 inch or larger skillet/fry pan, that has been preheated on medium. Just stir them around here and there until they start popping, get a bit darker, and release a wonderful nutty aroma. Lightly toasted will do the trick.

Let them cool down, then put them in the blender and run on "grind" until they are of an even texture. Next, add about 1 ½ Tablespoons of oil (I use canola) and grind until well-blended. Then add a bit more oil, a teaspoon or two at a time, scraping down the sides and bottom as you go until it has the consistency of an oily peanut butter. Any extra will keep for weeks in the fridge.

Enjoy – and if you have time, try it with home-roasted red peppers!