

THE YIDDISHISTS

OUR SERIES DELVES INTO THE TREASURES OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST YIDDISH ARCHIVE AT YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH



Planters Hi-Hat Peanut Oil booklet in Yiddish
46 Ways to Better Passover Meals, 1940s

The booklet presents the oil as a better alternative to other cooking fats for use on Passover, such as shortening and schmaltz (chicken fat), and advertises it as a “quality oil”, which has no taste or odour, does not absorb other food odours, and makes food “nicer in appearance and better in taste”.

The distribution of the booklet coincided with the increased usage of peanut oil during World War II in America, when commonly-used oils were rationed. Peanut production reached more than 750,000 tonnes in 1941. By 1943, it had increased to 1.1 million tonnes.

The Planters booklet was created to appeal to the more observant contingent of the American Jewish population. Forty-Six Ways explains that “rabbis all over the country use [Hi-Hat Peanut Oil] in their homes for Passover and the whole year round”. It informs the home cook that the hechsher (label deeming a food kosher) on Hi-Hat Peanut Oil was received from Rabbi Hersch Kohn of New York, who also certified products for manufacturers such as Maxwell House from the 1930s to 1960s.

For the contemporary reader, it may seem strange that peanut oil, widely considered by rabbinical authorities today to be derived from kitniyot (legumes, seeds, rice, corn, and other grains which are traditionally not eaten on Passover), would have been so popular amongst eastern-European Jewish immigrant households. As scholar Zev Eleff explains, at the time Planters printed their booklet, peanuts were not necessarily understood by these Jews to be kitniyot due to their scarcity in the ‘old country’. While Passover tradition dictated that they shouldn’t be eaten they were never forbidden under dietary laws. In the postwar years, as Orthodox rabbinical authorities began to take a more stringent approach to the interpretation of what should be considered kitniyot, the use of Planters Hi-Hat Oil steeply declined.

In 2015, the Rabbinical Assembly, the governing body for the Conservative movement, issued a ruling that was widely accepted by Masorti and Progressive Jews around the world, including in the UK. This permitted the use of kitniyot and kitniyot-derived oils on Passover. If you are one of the many who consume kitniyot on Passover, why not try a recipe from Forty-Six Ways this year? ■

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PASSOVER COOKING GOES NUTS

During World War II, Planters oil company tapped into the popularity of peanut oil by issuing a special Yiddish Passover recipe booklet. **Stefanie Halpern** reports

In the 1940s, the American firm, Planters Edible Oil Company, distributed a bilingual Yiddish-English booklet of 46 recipes that could be prepared on Passover. The book, *Forty-Six Ways to Better Passover Meals*, includes in every recipe the use of the company’s Hi-Hat Peanut Oil (named for the prominent chapeau of the Mr Peanut logo). Under Jewish dietary laws the oil is ‘pareve’ (kosher foods that contain neither dairy nor meat) and the booklet

outlines how it could be used for dairy and meat dishes “served with a glass of milk, a cup of coffee or a glass of tea”.

Recipes include Passover staples such as kneidlach (matzah balls), chremslach (a matzah meal pancake-like dish), kugel, macaroons, and matzah brei (scrambled egg and matzah), as well as more decadent recipes, such as liver burgers and mock chicken legs (made from ground veal moulded into the shape of a chicken leg).