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EDUCATIONAL SERIES

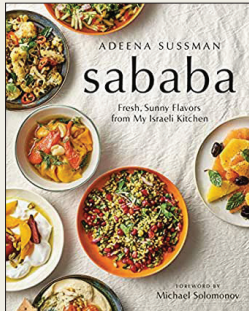
A Seat at the Table

A JOURNEY INTO JEWISH FOOD

sponsored by EDWARD BLANK AND FAMILY, THE COVENANT FOUNDATION, and THE SHINE TRUST

RECIPE COURTESY OF

ADEENA SUSSMAN



Excerpted from SABABA: FRESH,
SUNNY FLAVORS FROM MY ISRAELI
KITCHEN, Avery/Penguin Books.

YERUSHALMI KUGEL

During the year I spent between high school and college at a religious-studies program in Jerusalem, my dormitory was at the edge of Ge'ula, an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood where men shielded their eyes to avoid visual contact with women. We'd venture out late Thursday nights—knees, elbows, and any other potentially offensive parts covered—to watch as the city prepared for the Sabbath that would begin the next night. Thousands of people milled around running errands, buying holy books, and shopping for food from counters that sold delicious Ashkenazi takeout: roast chicken and oily paprika-dusted potatoes, endless varieties of yeast-risen cakes, and my favorite, Yerushalmi (Jerusalem) kugel. Towering and majestic, the peppery, golden noodle pudding was sweet-and-spicy comfort food, a side dish

that ate like dessert. Our purchases almost never made it back to our dormitory unopened; on the way, we'd tear off the kugel piece by piece, the tender noodles surrounded by a chewy-crunchy crust where the LUKSHION (Yiddish for "noodles") had made contact with the pot. I've made Yerushalmi kugel many times, but one challenge has always been the oil-based caramel at its base (butter can't be eaten with meat dishes at a kosher Shabbat table), which tends to clump upon contact with the noodles. I solved the problem by loosening the caramel with just enough water so that it coated the still-warm noodles. In Jerusalem, the kugel is baked in giant, family-sized vessels, sometimes overnight. I bake my kugel for only 2 hours, but it still yields a delicious crusty layer, which hardens as it cools. You can go up in pot size; just remember—the larger your pot, the less dramatic height your final kugel will have.

- ▶ **SERVES 12**
- ▶ **ACTIVE TIME: 35 MINUTES**
- ▶ **TOTAL TIME: 2 HOURS 55 MINUTES**

3 cups sugar

Two 12-ounce packages of thin egg noodles

2/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1¾ tablespoons freshly ground black pepper, plus more if desired

1½ tablespoons kosher salt

6 large eggs, at room temperature, beaten

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce to medium-low, cover, and keep at a simmer while you make the caramel.
3. Add the sugar to a 4-quart oven-safe saucepan (make sure there's a good amount of headroom on top of the sugar, like 5 or 6 inches, since there will be some sputtering later). Sprinkle $\frac{2}{3}$ cup cold water evenly over the sugar so it's completely saturated and the consistency of wet sand, gently tilting the pan (but not stirring) to saturate any dry spots. Melt the sugar and water over medium heat until it reaches a uniform simmer, about 6 minutes, then raise the heat to medium-high and boil the liquid, not touching the caramel or swirling the pan, until it's a beautiful deep, dark maple color, 8 to 9 minutes. (At this point the difference between minutes is important, so don't move away from the pot. It can make the difference between a sweet kugel and a burnt, smoky one; the darker the caramel, the darker the kugel.) Turn off the heat and remove the caramel from the flame.
4. Using a $\frac{1}{3}$ cup measure, lift out $\frac{1}{3}$ cup hot water from the simmering pot and immediately add it to the caramel; the mixture will sputter and bubble wildly for a minute, then calm down and become a thick, dark golden liquid; swirl a couple of times, cover the caramel, and set it aside. While the caramel is cooling, return the pot of salted water to a boil over high heat and cook the noodles until al dente (no need to wait for the water to return to a boil), about 3 minutes.
5. Drain the noodles, rinse well in warm water, and return the noodles to the pot you cooked them in. Using a silicone spatula, scrape as much of the warm caramel as you can into the warm noodles and stir to combine; it's okay if there's a little sticky caramel left in the pot. Stir in the vegetable oil, followed by the pepper, and salt. Cool the noodle mixture until lukewarm, 10 to 15 minutes, then stir in the eggs to combine (if you do this too soon you might cook the eggs). Pour the mixture back into the pot you used to make the caramel (any hardened caramel will dissolve during baking).
6. Transfer to the oven and bake until the color deepens and the top develops a crust, 1 hour and 45 minutes to 2 hours. Cool for 30 minutes, loosen the edges of the kugel with a knife, and invert it onto a serving platter. Serve immediately, sliced into wedges, or allow to cool completely. If you wait, the outer shell of the kugel will be chewier.

JERUSALEM (KUGEL) OF GOLD

*According to chef and food researcher Shmil Holland, kugel—a term that today is a catch-all for all sorts of baked, starchy casseroles—got its start in Alsace, France, where kugels were made of bread and apples bound with fat (as eloquently described in Joan Nathan's lovely cookbook *QUICHES, KUGELS, AND COUSCOUS: MY SEARCH FOR JEWISH COOKING IN FRANCE*). Eventually the tradition spread to Eastern Europe, where kugels were made with apples, berries, and nuts. When the first Hasidic Jews settled in Jerusalem in the 1800s, a lack of familiar ingredients led them to make a simpler, but no less delicious, kugel with little more than oil, sugar, noodles, and any eggs they had. The addition of pepper and the sour pickle with which Yerushalmi kugel is traditionally served (I skip the pickle) are nods to the local Israeli and Arabic traditions.*