

**You could blame it on the Columbus Day Weekend** but I've had meatballs on my mind for several days now. A holiday fraught with controversy, both cherished and despised, Columbus Day nonetheless reminds us of the Italian-American part of our heritage. Although he never set foot in North America, we still claim Columbus as our first Italian-American. Stereotype or not, meatballs are a beloved part of the Italian in America.

**That said; meatballs are not just Italian.** You will find them all across Europe, the Americas, Middle East and Asia. More than some vague cultural reference, they are pure comfort food. They are one of the many dishes made by hand with love by our Nana, Nonni, Meme or Mormor. That connection to our past elevates them to the top of the comfort food pyramid. Think of meatballs as comfort food with a capital C and capital F.

**Of course, they are not alone.** Up there at the pinnacle of comfortdom sits mac & cheese, chicken noodle soup and chili. Of course, there is a long list of easy comfort foods. Indulgent snacks like fast food French fries and dumplings from the Chinese take-out come to mind. The quickest way to mend a broken heart is a pint of Rocky Road. Generations of Moms' have served grilled cheese with a cup of tomato soup after a lost soccer game.

**So why are meatballs so special?** What puts them at the pinnacle? I have a theory but it may only apply to those of us who like to cook. Here goes. Meatballs provide comfort at both the destination and throughout the journey. In case you haven't guessed, making them is the journey and enjoying them with family and friends is the destination.

**Comfort food is all about love.** Preparing a comfort dish is part of the Zen of everyday life. Although comfort food is rarely complicated, its preparation is often time consuming. The very nature of these recipes invites us to slow down.

**The day my mother died, I made two batches of chili.** It sounds strange, doesn't it? I had been awake half the night. Sometime in the wee hours, I remembered that two pounds of black beans had been soaking for almost two days. I could have thrown them out. Instead, around five-thirty, I stopped tossing and turning and began making chili. Dad left for the hospital and I promised to relieve him by noon.

**Mom had been ill for several years.** The rhythmic chopping of onions and mincing of garlic helped me find peace. The easy back and forth from cutting board to stove, pantry and refrigerator was steady. I had space and time alone for quiet reflection. The act of cooking simple comfort food was grounding on a difficult day. The first batch of chili went to a nonprofit fundraiser. The second was for the family.

**Mom and I spent a quiet afternoon together.** I told her about my peaceful morning, I think she approved. I read to her and then she was gone. After three hurricanes, an earthquake and the horrific mass shooting in Las Vegas, perhaps we can all find peace in both the journey and destination of cooking and sharing comfort food.

Chili or chicken soup, mac & cheese or meatballs, take comfort in simple food and bon appétit!

*Susan*

Like what you read? Like to cook? For recipes, menus, tips and more subscribe to my blog

Susan Nye – Around the Table at [www.susannye.wordpress.com](http://www.susannye.wordpress.com)

© Susan Nye, 2017



## Mediterranean Meatballs and Couscous

*I like to combine the flavors of different cultures. Here my mother's Swedish meatballs meet the flavors of North Africa, Turkey and Greece. Enjoy!*

Serves 6-8

### Mediterranean Tomato Sauce (recipe follows)

2 pounds ground turkey  
1/2 cup instant oatmeal  
1/3 large onion, minced  
1 small carrot, finely chopped or grated  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
2 tablespoons finely chopped mint  
1 tablespoon finely chopped oregano  
1 teaspoon cumin  
1 teaspoon coriander  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
Pinch nutmeg  
2 large eggs  
2 teaspoons white wine vinegar  
1/4 cup sour cream  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
Flour, for dusting  
Olive oil  
2 cups Israeli couscous

Make the Mediterranean Tomato Sauce.

While the sauce simmers, put the turkey, oatmeal, carrot, onion and garlic in a large bowl. Sprinkle with the herbs, spices, salt and pepper. Put the eggs and vinegar in a bowl and whisk combine. Add the sour cream, whisk again and add the wet ingredients to the turkey. Gently toss and mix to combine. You can use a couple of large spoons but impeccably clean hands work best. Roll the mixture into meatballs.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Coat a large sauté pan with olive oil and heat over medium-high. Dust the meatballs with flour, add them to the pan and brown on all sides. You may need to cook the meatballs in batches; don't crowd the pan.

Transfer the meatballs to the pot of Mediterranean Tomato Sauce, bring to a simmer and transfer to the oven. Bake uncovered for about 20 minutes or until the meatballs are cooked through. If needed, add more chicken stock to the sauce.

While the meatballs braise in the sauce, prepare the couscous according to package directions.

Drain the couscous and spoon into individual shallow bowls, top with meatballs and sauce and serve.



*Another recipe from Susan Nye:  
Fall 2017/Volume 574*

## Mediterranean Tomato Sauce

Makes about 2 quarts

Olive oil  
2/3 large onion, chopped  
1 small carrot, finely chopped or grated  
2 tablespoons or to taste Harissa  
2 teaspoons cumin  
1 teaspoon coriander  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 cup dry white wine  
2 (28 ounce) cans crushed tomatoes  
1 cup or more chicken stock or broth  
1 bay leaf  
2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano or 1 teaspoon dried  
2-3 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried

Lightly coat a heavy casserole with olive oil and heat over medium-high. Add the onion, carrot and harissa, sprinkle with the spices and season with salt and pepper. Sauté until onion is translucent, add the garlic and sauté 2-3 minutes more.

Add the wine and simmer until reduced half. Stir in the crushed tomatoes, stock and herbs, bring to a simmer, reduce heat to low and simmer for 30-45 minutes.

*Can be made in advance.*