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## A Taste of Sun & Fire - Gaziantep Cookery

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# A TASTE OF SUN & FIRE

GAZIANTEP COOKERY

EDITOR: AYLIN ÖNEY TAN



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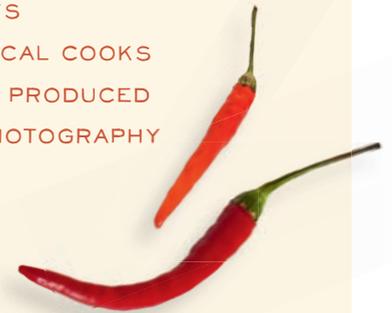
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# THE FEAST THAT IS GAZIANTEP...

Gaziantep's heritage as a major centre of trade, industry and culture on the Silk Road is reflected in every area of life in the city. Throughout its history Gaziantep has drawn its social and economic strength from the skills and knowledge of local artisans, from diligence and hard work, from its traditions, enterprise and innovation. Above all, a culture of solidarity and the determination to succeed against all odds are at the root of Antep's achievements - a veteran city of the Turkish War of Independence, which earned it the epithet of 'Gazi', or 'veteran'.



The Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce initiates a wide range of projects encompassing these traditional characteristics, and expands their application in the context of our modern world to forge a path into the future. Undoubtedly one of the most comprehensive and in every way the most satisfying of these projects is that which focuses on our outstanding cuisine. Our object is to preserve not only the dishes themselves but the special ingredients which give them their unique flavour.

From field to table every stage in producing the proverbial dishes of Gaziantep cuisine depends on the labour, skills, craftsmanship, capital investment and services of local people and the members of Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce. Gaziantep cuisine owes its unique and distinctive character to solidarity and cooperation between those involved in all the processes before the ingredients reach the kitchen and the dishes reach the table. Whether drying vegetables and herbs for winter or boiling grape molasses, making bulgur balls for festive occasions or preparations for picnics in the countryside, sharing both the work and the fun with family and friends is part of life in Gaziantep.

Craftsmanship is at the heart of this spectacular cuisine, from that required to make the cooking pots, butchers' cleavers, cooks' knives, kebab skewers and copperware to that of rolling out tissue-thin sheets of *baklava* dough. All these traditional skills play their part in the unique diversity and flavour of Gaziantep's cuisine, which stands out among regional cuisines, even in a land of culinary excellence like Turkey.



This book brings you recipes contributed by five esteemed food researchers, all five born and bred in Gaziantep. Working together with the Tourism and Cultural Commission established by Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, they have compiled this collection of traditional recipes, including some that are on the verge of disappearing. The recipes have been prepared for publication by a team of experts and the editor has added a wealth of background information, making this book not just a simple recipe book, but an indispensable source of reference. With the dedicated contributions of each individual the team has produced a lavishly illustrated cookery book that does justice to Gaziantep's remarkable culinary culture.

We now invite you to our table to enjoy dishes that have been perfected by countless generations. As we say in Turkey - *afiyet olsun!*

**Mehmet Aslan**

President of the Board  
Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce

## OF SUN & FIRE...

Gaziantep cuisine is rooted in the soil. Fresh produce ripens in the summer sun and dishes are cooked in wood ovens and over charcoal fires, with rich yet subtle flavours. Whether roasted to a perfect golden brown in the oven, simmered gently over glowing embers, or grilled over a flaming barbecue, all these flavours owe their intensity to the combination of sun and fire.



 One aspect of Gaziantep's culinary diversity is the use of many different cooking methods. The kebabs for which this cuisine is celebrated are just the beginning of a whole range of stewed, fried and steamed dishes. Pilafs can be full-scale feasts while the countless yogurt-based stews and soups are a culinary category all their own, unmatched anywhere else.

In Gaziantep the whole city is part of the food preparation process. Customers just tell the butcher what dish they are planning to cook and he not only chooses the right cut of meat but even does the initial preparation for some dishes. Trays of *börek*, *baklava* and topped flat breads are carried to the local bakery to be cooked in the wood-fired stone oven for perfect results impossible in a domestic oven. The grocer chooses which of the many varieties of bulgur, wheat berries, rice and pulses is right for each dish his customers are planning to cook, and the herb and spice shop keepers prepare mixes according their customers' taste in spices. Consequently there is constant interchange between home, market, grocery, butcher's shop and bakery, each one contributing their skills to the preparation process, as if a magic wand were orchestrating a city-wide symphony of flavours.

## WELCOME TO GAZIANTEP CUISINE...

When I was told that the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce was planning to publish a cookery book, I did not have to think twice about the project. The thought of those delicious flavours drew me back there like a magnet. I selected a team immediately and we set about producing this book. The experience has been every bit as exciting as the food of Gaziantep.

All of us have immensely enjoyed our journey of discovery as the book has taken shape. Tuba Şatana took the beautiful photographs, and in the process got to taste every dish! Suzan Aral, our book designer and illustrator, spent days absorbing the sights of Gaziantep's shops and markets and drawing the delightful sketches that capture the culinary spirit of this special place.

As for me, writing the background information about local ingredients, cooking methods and cooking utensils for the recipes provided by five eminent researchers from Gaziantep was the final stage in a reading marathon that began with Prof. Ömer Asım Aksoy's book about the local dialect of Gaziantep and continued with all the innumerable books and articles about Gaziantep cuisine that have been at hand in my research over the past year.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Mehmet Aslan, President of Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, for his unflagging support and enthusiasm at every stage of the project, and Assistant General Secretary Figen Çeliktürk who has gone out of her way to help remove any obstacles we have encountered.

Last but not least, my greetings to all the people of Gaziantep, who have invited us to share the superb flavours of their cuisine and whose conversation has made every meal memorable.

Aylin Öney Tan

Editor

# ANTEP – CUISINE FOR ALL SEASONS

Gaziantep has been home to some of the oldest civilisations in the world. Owing to this heritage and the wide variety of foodstuffs available due to its geographical position, the region has developed a unique cuisine with its own distinctive flavours.



The cuisine of Gaziantep is acknowledged to be the richest in Turkey, and visitors will savour its fusion of Anatolian, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern tastes. The strength of Gaziantep's cooking tradition comes from the land. Local crops, ripened under a strong sun, are further infused with flavour as they cook over the fire's embers, adding delicious depth to the taste. Whether slow-cooked on the range or flame-grilled, Gaziantep's food keeps the taste of the sun and the fire.

In winter, the day usually begins with soup. In the morning at downtown restaurants people have a bowl of beyran, which is much more than just a soup - it is a feast all by itself. Slow-cooked meat is shredded, rice sizzled in fat, and the whole lot is doused in meat stock. For those not quite ready for garlicky soup at the start of the day, there is always the option of an Antep-style breakfast. The most popular breakfast items are salads made with various pulses and local olives, sautéed meat, pastries called *börek*, grape molasses made from the famed Antep grapes, and layers of thick cream skimmed off the local milk when boiled. The *piece de resistance* of the breakfast table is *katmer*, an enticing pastry of very thin dough layered with bright green pistachio nuts and thick cream. During Ramadan, expect to see crowds of people enjoying a pre-dawn breakfast of liver kebabs at tables set out on the pavements around the city.

Yogurt dishes are the hidden strength of Gaziantep cuisine. Yogurt is combined with spring crops such as crisp green garlic, tender new broad beans, fresh whole green almonds, or earthy truffles, and with meatballs in the holiday dish of *yuvarlama*. *Yuvarlama* is one of the most special Antep dishes, made with tiny meatballs of kneaded rice and meat cooked in yogurt. Spices in sizzling melted butter drizzled over the pure white of the yogurt - coloured yellow by safflower, green by mint or red by pepper depending on the dish - add a pleasingly festive final touch to the meal.

In rich and varied stews, fruit is as likely an ingredient as seasonal vegetables. The half-sweet, half-tart taste of fruit makes the perfect foil for the richness of the meat. Every season is marked by a dish of a fruit. In winter, tangy fruits such as apples and quinces are indispensable, while green plums take over in spring along with fresh garlic and lettuce as spring vegetables. When the plums are over, wild apricots take their place, and with the coming of summer, sour cherry kebab is the queen of the meal table. Sun-ripened tomato, aubergine and squash dishes follow...



The end of summer is full of excitement. There is a flurry of activity as winter provisions are prepared... Coral red peppers, beguiling purple aubergines, mottle-striped emerald green hairy snake cucumbers and ivory *haylan* squashes are dried. In September, great clusters of multi-hued vegetables that have been dried over the summer appear in Elmacı Market, the riot of colour turning it into a carnival scene. There is nowhere else that turns winter preparations into such a festival!

*Kebabs* are the trademark dishes of Antep cuisine. The secret of a good *kebab* lies in the choice of meat, and in the skill of the chef who prepares it. The heat of the fire brings out the full flavour of the liver, hand-minced and cubed meat all lined up on skewers. *Kebabs* have very different flavours according to the season. In spring, they are made with copious amounts of green garlic and parsley. These are followed by garlic *kebab* and later still by loquat and truffle *kebabs*. The underground mushrooms known as truffles complement the flavour of the meat. In summer, the refreshing tastes of spring give way to sun-laden flavours. Sun-ripened tomatoes and aubergines are an essential feature of summer barbecues. When the sun cools in autumn, the comforting taste of onion *kebab* makes you forget the impending winter chill. All year round, liver *kebabs* are a favourite dish both late at night and also with early risers.

The name of Gaziantep is synonymous with *baklava*, but this is far from the only dessert made here. Antep cuisine incorporates many different types of dessert such as milk puddings or fruit syrups, and helva. In fact the list is long, also including *şöbiyet* (pastry with cream filling), *bülbül yuvası* (nightingale's nest- pastry with nuts and syrup), *dolama* (a baklava roll), *burmalı kadayıf* (coiled syrupy pastry strands with pistachios), and *zerde* made with rice and saffron.

Cooking is an art in Gaziantep, where each dish is crafted to perfection. Gaziantep has at least 300 unique dishes to its name, and invites to its bounteous table those who wish to share in the secrets of this delicious cuisine...





# ÇORBALAR

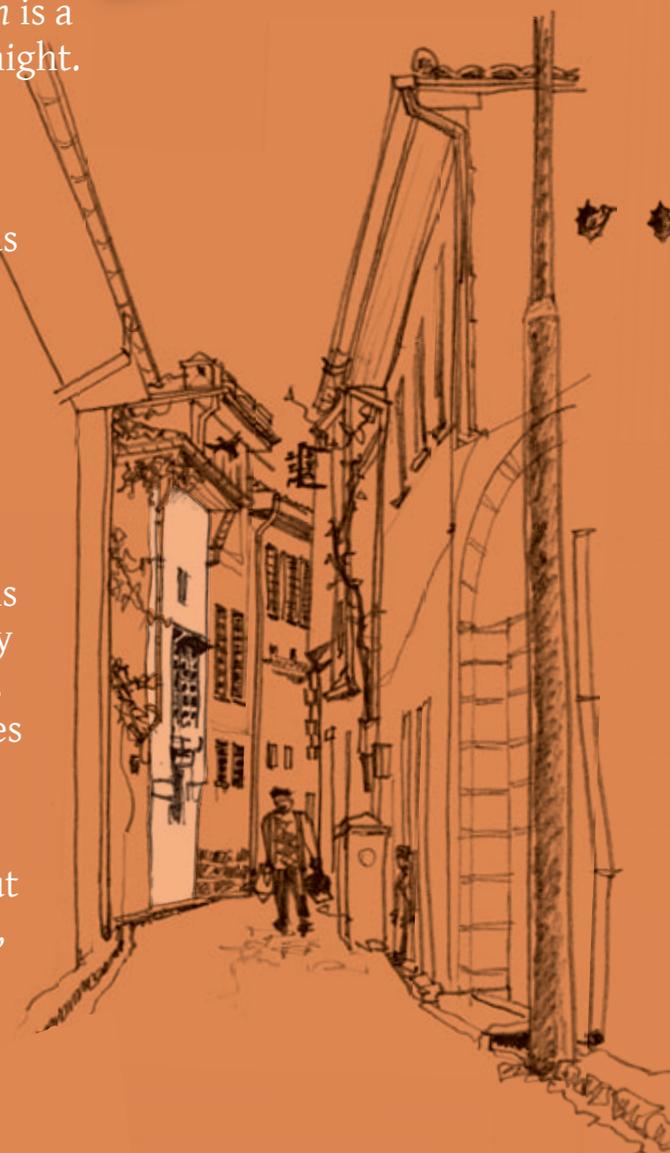
## soups

A steaming bowl of soup... In winter most people in Gaziantep begin the day with soup, the favourite being *beyran çorbası*, a warming broth of rice and meat which is dished up from early morning in special *beyran* soup houses dotted around the town. *Beyran* is a feast in itself. First the meat is left to simmer overnight. In the morning the meat is removed from the bone and as each customer arrives, some of the boiling stock is poured into a bowl containing some fried rice and shredded meat and topped with a generous helping of crushed garlic and red hot peppers.

Another favourite both for breakfast and late at night, is *kelle paça* (sheep's head and feet soup), also flavoured with plenty of garlic. There is even a local saying: 'If you want to skimp on garlic don't eat sheep's feet'!

In Gaziantep cuisine, each soup has its own customs and significance. *Dövmeli alaca çorbası* (wheat berry soup), for example, is always eaten at harvest time. Some soups are traditionally accompanied by dishes like pickles or preserves making an interesting contrast of sweet, savoury and sour flavours.

A bowl of Gaziantep soup is never complete without a liberal dose of sizzling butter coloured with mint, crushed red pepper flakes, tarragon or safflower.





## RECIPES

- 18 BEYRAN – mutton & rice soup with garlic
- 21 KELLE-PAÇA – sheep's head & feet soup; stock
- 22 ÖZ ÇORBA – strained wheat & yogurt soup with nuts
- 24 EKŞİLİ MALHITA ÇORBASI – lentil soup with garlic & lemon
- 25 TATLILI MALHITA ÇORBASI – lentil soup with onions
- 26 TARHANA ÇORBASI – wheat berry & yogurt patty soup
- 27 MAŞ ÇORBASI – mung bean soup
- 28 YOĞURLU DÖVME ÇORBASI – wheat berry & yogurt soup
- 29 PAZILI LEBENİYE ÇORBASI – yogurt soup with Swiss chard  
YOĞURLU ÇORBA – yogurt soup
- 30 YOĞURLU UN ÇORBASI – yogurt & flour soup
- 31 BÖREK ÇORBASI – yogurt soup with tiny dumplings
- 32 DÖVMELİ ALACA ÇORBA – wheat berry soup with lentils & chickpeas
- 33 MUNİ {ŞİRİNLİ} ÇORBA – sweet soup with walnuts





## BEYRAN

### mutton & rice soup with garlic



Gaziantep's shopkeepers and tradesmen traditionally eat an early breakfast of *beyran* soup in restaurants near their places of work. The first *beyran* soup house opened in 1885 and since then it has become an accepted way to begin the day with a bowl of this mutton and rice soup flavoured with lots of garlic. On cold winter mornings it is a warming dish that gives energy for the day's work ahead.



The preparation of *beyran* begins a day in advance, using the shoulders and neck of a young ram less than a year old or a sheep that has not yet lambed. The meat is left on the bone. It is first soaked in water for several hours to remove the blood, then drained. The meat is brought to the boil in a large copper cooking pot with salt, the froth that forms on the surface is skimmed off. Finely chopped or minced suet is added. The pot is covered and the meat and fat simmer overnight on a low heat for 10-12 hours. In the morning the fat that has accumulated on the surface is removed, strained and a tablespoonful poured into each tinned copper bowl. Meanwhile the stock is drained off and while still hot the meat is separated from the bone and shredded. Rice is boiled in salted water until barely tender and garlic is crushed.



These ingredients are combined in different ways according to the customer's wishes. For those wanting a little richness, one of the tinned copper bowls containing meat fat is held over the burner with a pair of pliers until the fat melts, spreading a delicious aroma. Then some rice is added and fried for a few seconds. For those who want a lighter version, plain rice is used. Shredded meat is added, covering the rice and the bowl is then filled to the brim with bubbling meat stock. Last of all, the piping hot soup may be seasoned with plenty of crushed garlic, red pepper flakes and ground black pepper.







Pistachio grove,  
Gaziantep.

