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Tips on Making Creamy, Garlicky Toum

APRIL 5, 2011 BY MEGHNA LAMORE COMMENTS (0)

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I grew up in the Middle East where I was partial to a number of mouth-watering delicacies. Among these is one I seek out everywhere I go, but can rarely find in its true form. The Lebanese call this preparation "toum."



Toum in a mixer

Toum is thick, fluffy, creamy garlic sauce, somewhat similar to aioli, but far richer, and packs much more of a punch. It is added traditionally to shwarmas and to grilled meat dishes such as kebabs and shish taouk, but I find it to be very versatile as a dip for all sorts of vegetables (my husband likes to dip his french fries into it), as a spread on toast and sandwiches, even as a layer on a pizza.



Use fresh garlic when making toum

Unfortunately, it's not simple to make: you only need to go to any of the little shwarma places in the GTA to find that the most common version of what they call toum is little more than garlic powder added to mayonnaise, thinned out with yogurt or milk, or even water. Some of the more ambitious restaurateurs attempt to make their version more authentic with the addition of tahini (sesame sauce)... which ruins the flavour of toum altogether. While I lived in Etobicoke, we were fortunate enough to have a real Lebanese running a little shwarma counter at the Hasty Market down the street from us, and not only did he serve a superior shwarma, but his toum was homemade and spectacular. I was a regular there for as long as we lived there, and made it a point to grab my lunch from there whenever I was in the area after we moved away. Much to my dismay, I found on a recent excursion that someone else has since taken the counter over. I did try their shwarma and their toum. I will not be going back.

Since then, I've searched in vain in my neck of the woods for someone serving an adequate toum. I finally decided to try and make my own. The internet is rife with recipes, but I did find one that wasn't too complicated and that rendered a toum which, even to my privileged palette, is rather good. The recipe can be found here:

I do have some caveats and changes to the recipe, however:

- 1- 4 cups of oil was too much for me. If you look at the photo of the finished product in my blender (I used my Ninja), you may be able to make out a ring of oil surrounding the emulsion. I would use only 3 cups.
- 2- *Don't* substitute lime juice for lemon juice. I ran out of lemon juice myself and topped it off with lime... which contributed rather too enthusiastically to the flavour.
- 3- Crush the garlic cloves very lightly to get the skin off: my garlic was unbelievably fresh and so equally unbelievably hard to peel, so I had to disregard the original recipe's instructions to the contrary slightly.
- 4- Use less salt than the recipe calls for if you're using a strongly flavoured salt like kosher or sea salt. Oh, and grind it very finely, else it'll fly up to the lid of the blender... and stay there.

Mind you, this recipe does make a full blender pitcher's worth, which really did surprise me, so be prepared to have very garlicky breath for quite a while. Of course, I find that if I serve this to company, everyone loves it so much that *everyone* partakes... and then no one minds anyone else's breath. So don't be afraid to serve it at your next party... just make sure you make enough for everyone!

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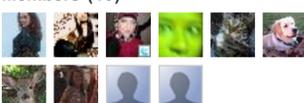
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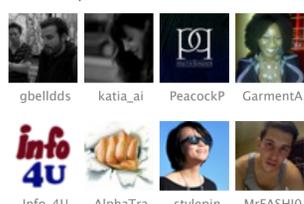


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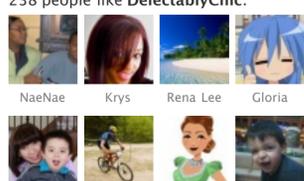
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