

Mum's food



global
kitchen



Monda Dehaini prepares the mixture for the Lebanese pizza (lahama be ajeen).

Picture: CHRIS McKEEN - PP434957

The food from her Lebanese homeland plays a major role in Monda Dehaini's family gatherings, reports **VERA BERTOLA**.

ALTHOUGH Monda Dehaini left Lebanon 23 years ago, she still lives and breathes its cuisine.

There's not a day, the Campbelltown mother-of-three says, that she doesn't cook a Lebanese dish.

"It's our tradition. I have never been back and my children - aged 21, 18 and 13 - are Australian, but it's still part of who we are," she said.

"I might cook an Italian or Chinese dish, but I still have to do Lebanese."

When most of us think of Lebanon, we think of kebabs and tabouleh, but

the country's contribution to the culinary delights of the world is far-reaching.

Its kitchens have been influenced by a history often fraught with turmoil.

For four centuries the Ottoman Turks ruled, introducing their own tastes, which included dishes using lamb and eggplants and sweet desserts with filo and honey.

After the Ottoman defeat in WWI, France played a pivotal role in Lebanon, its renowned pastry cooks leaving a little bit of Europe in the Middle East with their flans and croissants.

is a tradition



Family get-togethers include favourites like this dish and the recipe is featured (right).

Monda grew up the oldest of 12 and thinks her place in the family laid down the foundations for later years.

"I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with my mum ... I love my own kitchen so much," she said.

"I can't be in there enough. Even my mum is surprised how much I love it."

It's no wonder then that she also loves her family to be happy and, to her, a well-fed family is a happy family. Food plays a major role in get-togethers especially during Ramadan when family and friends

have "breakfast" just after sunset to break the day's fasting.

Monda often falls back on favourites such as lahama be ajeen (Lebanese pizza) to feed a gathering.

"Some Lebanese dishes can be time-consuming, such as using vine leaves, zucchini or cabbage, while this one can take just half-an-hour," she said.



TANTALISE TASTEBUDS:

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Lebanese pizza Lahama be ajeen

INGREDIENTS:

Base: 2kg SR flour, 1 cup milk, 1/2 cup vegetable oil, 1 tspn yeast, 1 tbspn salt, 3-4 cups water. Topping: 1kg mince meat, 2kg tomato, 1kg onion, 1 tbspn mixed spice, 1 tbspn salt.

METHOD:

1. In a large bowl sift flour and salt. Add yeast and mix.
2. Make a well in centre of flour and slowly add water. Mix until combined.
3. Turn dough onto floured board and knead for 10 minutes.
4. Shape into round ball, return to clean bowl, cover and leave in a warm place to double in size about two hours.
5. Cut dough in half using sharp knife then cut each into four. Form each into a ball, rest in warm spot for 20 minutes.
6. Make individual pizza bases.
7. Preheat oven to 250C.
8. Cook sauce in pot. Cook onions, add mince and brown, add tomatoes and seasoning. Spread sauce over pizza base, cook for 10 or 15 minutes or until base is crisp.