

Tabouli Taboula Tabouleh

Tabouli, Taboula, Tabouleh, etc. is a Middle Eastern dish that has become very popular in this country and is also known as "Cracked Wheat Salad." As many ways as there are to spell it, there are countless more ways to prepare it, depending upon your taste.

The following is a recipe that is very similar to the way the Lebanese people prepare it with parsley being the predominant ingredient, not the wheat (bulgur).

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup fine cracked wheat (bulgur). Be sure to get the "cracked" or "light" variety of bulgur and not the "whole" variety. See **TIPS** section below.

2 bunches green onions or 1 medium onion chopped fine. On the green onion, you just need the white part and up to and maybe including a little of the green part.

4 - 5 large or 8 - 10 Roma tomatoes chopped fine and drained well. Romas have less juice and tend to be a little riper than other varieties. I prefer them.

1/2 - 3/4 cup lemon juice (concentrate okay)

4-6 bunches of parsley, washed well, dried, stemmed and chopped fine, stored in refrigerator until ready to use.

1/2 - 3/4 cup olive oil

Salt & Pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a fine sieve, rinse wheat several times in cold water.
2. In a bowl or large measuring cup, cover the wheat with at least 2 inches of cold water and soak wheat until just soft - 45-60 minutes.
3. Drain and squeeze wheat between hands to remove excess moisture.
4. Mix wheat with chopped onions and tomatoes and lemon juice. Set aside for 1 - 2 hours in refrigerator.
5. Combine above with parsley & olive oil, mix very well & salt & pepper to taste.

Should make about 8-10 cups.

TIPS:

For the bulgur, Bob's Red Mill, a producer of a wide variety of grain products makes this and can be found in most grocery stores - you may have to ask. Also most health food stores carry it. Of course, it can be found at any Mediterranean, Greek, etc. specialty store.

In Oklahoma City, go to the Mediterranean Imports and Deli, 5620 N. May Ave., Oklahoma City 73112 405-810-9494. If headed north on May, it's on the east side of the street shortly after you pass over the Northwest Expressway overpass.

As soon as you come over the overpass, make an immediate right on NW 56th St. as you cannot make a right turn at the light - the corner is too sharp. If headed south on May, get in the left hand lane after you pass through the light that is just past the Barnes & Noble store as you will want to make a left hand turn at the next light which will be United Founders Blvd/NW 56th St.

Or try Sweis Pita Bakery on 2115 N May Ave.

I wear latex rubber gloves, the surgical kind, when squeezing out the bulgur because it really sticks to your hands and just isn't very sanitary to do it that way anyhow. If you get the gloves, be sure to get the ones that DO NOT have the talcum powder on the OUTSIDE of the gloves. Many varieties that you buy at the drug stores DO have the powder on the outside, but some don't, so be sure to read the labels. If you do make a mistake and get the kind with the powder on the outside, just put them on and rinse them off very well before handling the food. Why is this a concern? Well, some people are allergic to the talcum powder.

Prepping all that parsley can be a real chore. You want as few parsley stems as possible. To do this, hold the stems with one hand and with the other, pull towards the ends to strip off the leaves/tips. Plan on about 30-45 minutes for this task. This is a great task to get the children involved with and it will obviously really cut down your prep time.

Chopping the parsley can be a real chore too. I suggest you get a food processor. Now, unless you're a professional chef or caterer, you don't need one of those big honkin' Cuisinart or Kitchen Aid models for \$300+. I do a lot of cooking and baking and I have a 10-cup, 500 watt, Black & Decker Model #: FP1550T that works great and only costs about \$40. It also works very well with making hummus. You can always chop the parsley with a knife, but the food processor yields a much more uniform chop - about 3 - 4 two-second pulses is usually adequate. By the way, don't let the kiddos chop the parsley or any of the other ingredients for that matter!!!

Also, I recommend chopping the onions and tomatoes by hand.

You don't want the tabouli to "sogg out," so it is important to drain the tomatoes and parsley well. You can drain the tomatoes in a sieve or colander, and the best way to dry the parsley is to run it through a salad spinner AFTER you have stemmed it. One of the best salad spinners is made by Oxo/Good Grips (plastic, not steel model) and you can find them at Bed, Bath & Beyond for around \$25. Note: Be sure to take one of those 20% off coupons to B,B&B and they don't mind if they're expired.

This is obviously a dish that takes a while to make, so I do the prep work the night before, cover well and store each item in separate containers in the refrigerator and assemble all of them together at one time a couple of hours before serving to allow all the flavors to develop.

Some people are allergic to the preservatives (sodium bisulfite and or sodium benzoate) found in the lemon juice concentrate you get in the NON-refrigerated section of the grocery store. You can the the concentrated juice WITHOUT the preservatives in the frozen foods section. I've only seen in from Minute Made in a 7 ounce bottle that is in a black and yellow box - price around \$1.50+. Note that it might not be located in the same area as the other frozen juice concentrates and you may have to ask for it and not many stores carry it. Crest Foods has it.

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