

In other countries, appetizers consider as a normal dish but in Turkey, it has a rich meaning & history. Yes! In Turkey, Turkish appetizers have a special name called Meze.

Well, today I'm going to talk about it in detail to clear up any doubt you've about Meze.

So, let's get started!

### What Are Turkish Mezes?



Turkish mezes commonly referred to as meze is a small dish popular in Turkey and the rest of the Mediterranean. In the course of enjoying a one big dish on the table, people order single portioned meze and they can always converse and relate. This way of eating involves communing and makes meals a special occasion.

Common examples of mezes include hummus, a creamy purée of chickpeas; dolma, rice-stuffed grape leaves; and köftes, grilled meat patties. These dishes are usually accompanied by fresh and crusty bread, pita bread, or other types of crackers. They are the kind that can be vegetarian, vegan, or with meat, so literally, everyone is able to find something they like.

Mezes are not just food but they are much more than that in Turkey. They demonstrate courtesy and are served during many events and occasions. Because of all the options that can be tasted, to start with various mezes allows to get acquainted with Turkish food heritage.

### **The Significance of Meze in Turkish Culture**

The tradition of meze in Turkey does not end with a simple food; instead, it is a cultural necessity. Traditionally, the meze was taken on a short journey or a longer trip because it could be prepared in advance. However, it is no longer a mere symbol of nomadic life as people have attached so many other meanings to it.

Today, meze is a common and important part of Turkish dining, especially in meyhanes. Meyhanes are places where friends and family gather to enjoy food and celebrate together. Meze dishes are often served at these gatherings, making them a central part of the experience.

Meze is one of the wonders of the Turkish kitchen area. So, it is not just an individual course to eat, not even a dessert but small portions of food that prepares one for the gravy. Meze is usually a combination of several dishes most of which are appetizers such as salads, dips and small preparation. These small servings increase the range of options for each dish and help create a topic for conversation among the guests.

The concept of sharing food such as meze promotes togetherness and strengthens friendship bonds especially during supper. No matter if it is a small, intimate dinner with close family or a big banquet, meze is a constant in Turkish cuisine.

### **How Meze is Enjoyed**



When consuming, it will be wise to know that the more times meze isn't about quantity. Rather than loading your plate, choose a few foods that appeal to you and take an appropriate amount of each of those. This way, all are given the chance to take a bite of the variety.

Meze does not serve as a primary meal. It reminds people of what is next in a way without prolonging the event too much more. Sip on something like raki or water as you savor each of the morsels. Turkish people can hardly mistake the point of a meal; the primary purpose has to do with food, friends, and conversation, rather than the quantity of food consumed.

Lastly, food lovers marvel at the true essence of meze and that is the enjoyment found with good company and talk. However, as nice as the taste of the meals may be, the essence of a meze-oriented event is the company of friends and family. Therefore, get comfortable and enjoy the experience.

### **Common Ingredients in Turkish Meze**

## Turkish Meze: A Must-Try for Food Lovers



Turkish meze is a delightful assortment of small dishes that can vary widely from region to region. Each family has their own favorite meze recipes, but there are some common ingredients you'll find across the country.

- **Legumes:** Chickpeas, fava beans, navy beans
- **Dairy:** White cheese, yogurt
- **Vegetables:** Pickles, grape leaves, cabbage leaves, salads, wild greens
- **Seafood:** Fish, shrimp, octopus
- **Herbs and Spices:** Mint, garlic, lemon
- **Other:** Olive oil, rice

You can find most of these meze in big cities like Istanbul. However, the specific dishes can differ depending on where you are in Turkey. In the west, you might find more vegetable-based meze. In the east, meat and seafood dishes are more common. This is because different regions have different ingredients available.

## **Must-Have Meze Dishes in Turkey**

Here are some popular meze dishes you'll find in Turkish homes and restaurants:

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1. **Patlıcan Şakşuka** This dish features sautéed eggplants, tomatoes, and peppers in a tangy tomato sauce. Served cold, it offers a rich and zesty flavor.
2. **Acılı Ezme** A spicy vegetable salad made with chopped tomatoes, onions, and peppers. Red pepper flakes and cumin add extra heat.
3. **Girit Ezmesi** Originally from Crete, this meze includes tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, and feta cheese. Drizzled with olive oil, it's light and refreshing.
4. **Midye Dolma** Stuffed mussels filled with rice, herbs, and pine nuts. The savory taste is enhanced with a hint of spice.
5. **Deniz Börülcesi** This dish uses samphire, a sea plant, served cold with olive oil, lemon juice, and garlic.
6. **Hummus** A popular chickpea dip made with tahini, garlic, and lemon juice. It's creamy and pairs well with pita bread.
7. **Köfte** Turkish meatballs made from lamb or beef, grilled and seasoned with spices like cumin and paprika.
8. **Köpoğlu** A smoky dish made from roasted eggplant, garlic, tomatoes, and green peppers.
9. **Grilled Halloumi Cheese** Sliced halloumi cheese is grilled until golden, resulting in a crispy outside and soft inside.
10. **Zeytinyağlı Yaprak Dolması** Grape leaves stuffed with rice and herbs, soaked in olive oil. They are tender and flavorful.
11. **Kısır** A bulgur salad mixed with parsley, tomatoes, and onions. Pomegranate syrup adds a sweet and tangy touch.
12. **Cacık** A yogurt-based dip with grated cucumbers, garlic, and mint. It's cool and refreshing, similar to Greek tzatziki.
13. **Muhammara** A spicy dip made from roasted red peppers, walnuts, and bread crumbs, giving it a bold, nutty flavor.
14. **Sarma** Grape or cabbage leaves rolled with rice, herbs, and spices. This dish is common in Turkish meals.
15. **Haydari** A thick yogurt dip mixed with garlic and herbs, served with a drizzle of olive oil.
16. **Bakla Ezmesi** A spread made from mashed fava beans, seasoned with garlic, lemon, and olive oil.
17. **Mercimek Ezmesi** Similar to hummus but made with red lentils. This spread is a healthy, tasty option for any meze platter.

## Principles for Making Meze

When you make meze, remember these tips:

- **Balance the flavors.** Mix up salty, fatty, and acidic tastes. This keeps the meal light, especially if you drink raki.
- **Add different textures.** Try creamy things like hummus, crunchy things like pickles, and fresh greens. This makes meze satisfying without being heavy.

Meze should go with your drink and make the meal more social. In traditional meyhanes, friends and family talk and have fun. The meze dishes are made to help you relax and enjoy your time. Don't talk about serious things like politics or business during these meals. Instead, talk about lighter things, like things you've done together and how much you like the food.

## Drinks to Pair with Meze

The best drink with meze depends on personal taste. Here are some common choices:

1. **Raki** This is the traditional drink of choice when eating meze. It's a strong, anise-flavored alcohol. When mixed with water, it turns cloudy. Raki is part of Turkish culture and often called "Lion's Milk."
2. **Turkish Wine** Turkey produces both red and white wines, especially from the Cappadocia and Thrace regions. The fruity and acidic notes of these wines go well with meze dishes.
3. **Ayran** A yogurt drink that is slightly salty, *ayran* is a perfect non-alcoholic choice to balance the rich, savory flavors of meze.
4. **Şalgam Suyu** A fermented drink made from black carrots, *şalgam suyu* is sour and a little bitter. It's popular in southern Turkey and pairs well with spicy dishes.
5. **Fruit Juices** Pomegranate and sour cherry juice are refreshing options that give a sweet contrast to the savory meze.

## Last Words

Meze is not just a group of small plates; it is an exposure to Turkish history about its food. Nonetheless, due to variation in the taste, shared serving style, and social values, meze

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makes the dining experience more enjoyable.