

#TECHNOLOGY

Tag, You're It!

Air India and Apple AirTags Team Up to Save Your Sanity (and Your Suitcase)!



Ever felt your heart skip a beat at the luggage belt when everyone's bag shows up except yours? You're not alone. Lost luggage is the villain in every travel story. But hold that panic! Air India is stepping in with a superhero cape and a shiny new gadget: Apple AirTag support. Yes, you heard right. Now, your suitcase can talk to your phone (sort of), thanks to a high-tech team-up between Air India and Apple's AirTag technology.



So, what's the big deal?

With this new update, Air India becomes the first airline in Asia to officially integrate Apple AirTag support into its baggage tracking system. Travelers using iPhones and AirTags can now enjoy Find My luggage the same way they track their keys, wallets, or that one AirPod that always goes rogue.

How it works (a.k.a. luggage-stalking 101)

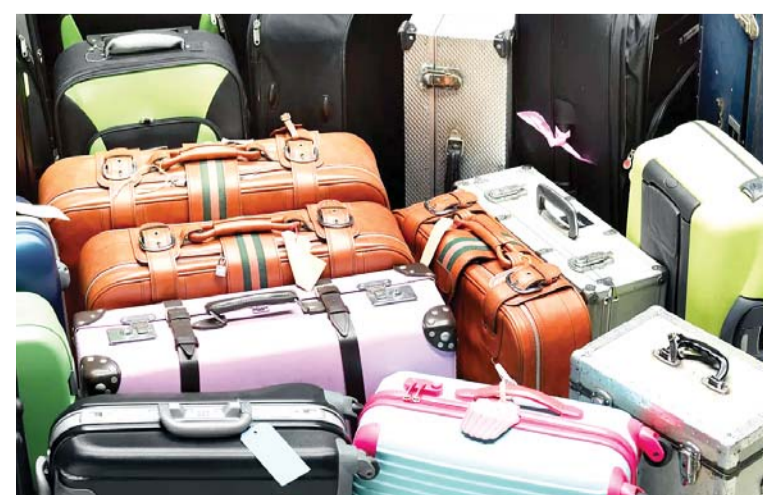
- Before the flight:** Pop an AirTag into your bag. Zip it up with love.
- Flight happens:** Hopefully your bag lands with you. But if not...
- File a report:** Head to the Air India Baggage Counter and file a Property Irregularity Report (PIR).
- Share the AirTag location:**
 - Open your 'Find My' app.
 - Generate a Share Item Location link.

But wait, there's more!

- Privacy-friendly:** You control the tracking and can stop sharing anytime. No sneaky surveillance.
- Reliable system:** Air India already boasts a 99.6% on-time baggage delivery rate. This just adds an extra safety net for the unlucky 0.4%.
- Faster tears at the luggage carousel:** Enough said.

Why this matters (a.k.a. the silver lining for anxious flyers)

Let's be real, no one enjoys spending the first day of vacation buying emergency clothes at the airport gift shop. This techy twist not only gives travelers peace of mind but also streamlines how airlines locate and return misplaced luggage. It's a win-win: you feel more in control, and the airline gets better at solving the age-old mystery of the vanishing suitcase.



Leslie Brenner

The Washington Post called her 'the grande dame of Iranian cooking.' Yotam Ottolenghi called her its 'goddess.' Superchef José Andrés has called her 'a wonderful guide to the Persian kitchen.'

We're talking, of course, about Najmieh Batmanglij, the author of seven books, including *Food of Life: Ancient Persian and Modern Iranian Cooking and Ceremonies*, *Joon: Persian Cooking Made Simple*, *Cooking in Iran: Regional Recipes and Kitchen Secrets* and other titles.

I'm embarrassed to say that

and his girlfriend Nathalie prepared (at my request) an elaborate, insanely delicious rice dish from the book, *Sabzi Polou*, Rice with Fresh Herbs. There are a full seven cups of fresh chopped herbs in the dish, dill, chives, parsley and cilantro, and it sports a crisp tahdig crust. (Once I prepare it myself, soon, I'll be sure to write about it.)

A couple months later, I spent a luxurious afternoon preparing *abgusht-e morgh ba kufteh-ye nokehchi*, Persian chicken soup with chickpea-and-lamb meatballs. The aromas of dried rose petals, cardamom, saffron and fresh herbs lifted my spirits and transported me to another time and place.

I can't think of a better way to celebrate Nowruz than with

Food Is The Gateway To Happiness

If you're cooking with kids this weekend, consider quick-ordering Batmanglij's *Happy Nowruz: Cooking with Children to Celebrate the Persian New Year*. Najmieh's other six books are all on my wish-list. (Joon is at the top.) Still, if I had to choose only one cookbook to cook from for the rest of my life, I would seriously consider *Food of Life*. The 330-recipe volume has enough delicious culture.

#COOKING GOOD

For 'Top Chef' judge Nilou Motamed, the Iranian herb platter, sabzi khordan, is a way of life

Ever since the pandemic cooped us up back in March, beautiful, generous flurries of fresh, soft, fragrant herbs have felt like an antidote to everything awful. My kitchen windowsill has become a garden, next to the pots, lemongrass sprouts and flourishes in a vase. When I can make it to my favourite Middle Eastern grocery, I come back with armfuls of dill and tarragon. I bring back ridiculous volumes of shiso, Thai basil, mint. Because I've developed an acute fear of running out, I just installed an LED-powered hydroponic Aero Garden outfitted with dill, spearmint, thyme, parsley and two kinds of basil.

Toss a handful of fresh herbs on the plainest dish, potato salad, hummus, grilled zucchini, and it instantly becomes gorgeous, alluring, uplifting and even life-affirming. So, why not just eat herbs? That's the idea behind sabzi khordan, the platter of herbs and accompaniments that anchors every Iranian table. "It's essential to any meal we have, always," says Nilou Motamed. Like just about everyone, I know who cooks, the former editor-in-chief of *Food and Wine*, current 'Top Chef' judge, global food and travel guru and co-founder of Story Collective, who has been planting herbs profusely.

"Our entire fire escape is an herb garden," she says, "something we've never done before." Nilou also shows up early to line up for herbs from Lan's Farm at her local farmer's market in Brooklyn. She describes them as phenomenal. "Our farmers mar-

ket has gotten really competitive, and she has cilantro. I'm trying to sprout, with incredible, deep, almost anise flavor. It has a purple stem."

Nilou, who was born in Iran, grew up eating Persian food at home every afternoon after she moved with her family to New York when she was 13. Because of that, fresh herbs have always played an outsized, aromatic role in her life. (I'm calling her Nilou because I've known her more than 25 years, and referring to her by her last name just feels too weird.)

She fondly remembers spending time back in Iran at her father's family house in an orchard ('bagh' in Farsi) in the town of Hamedan, amid groves of sour cherry, apricot, plum, almond and walnut trees. They'd lay down a Persian carpet outside under a big shade tree and picnic on kababs made from a just-slaughtered lamb.

"Coming from the mountains, there were these qanat that run through all the countryside, mini mini mini streams, and all these herbs, the mints and watercresses would grow there," says Nilou. "We'd pick the herbs and put our bottles of Coca-Cola in the ice cold water and drink it with the kabab. There's something about herbs that makes you feel like you're connected to your environment." Maybe, that's why herbs are speaking to us so sweetly just now, we need them to connect to the natural world.

They're celebrated lushly on the sabzi khordan platter, which generally includes arragon, dill, parsley, mint, cilantro and rehyhan (Thai basil), along with scallions, radishes and/or Persian cucumbers, feta cheese, and sometimes walnuts, being there to nibble on throughout any Iranian meal, including kabab, of course. "On Friday, every family does kabab," says Nilou. "It's very basic, we don't use a ton of spices. It's beautiful, grilled meat, very plain, the meat basted in butter and saffron, a great cut char-grilled on

aromatic wood, and then with the sabzi khordan, you can do whatever you want to create the flavours."

But serve it with freshly baked *nane-barbari* (Persian flatbread), and sabzi khordan can also be a meal in itself.

I know what you're thinking: Where are we going to get nane-barbari, especially during a pandemic? "I cheat and make it with pizza dough," says Nilou. "If you use a pizza stone, it's amazing, and it's so easy to make." Five minutes to pull and stretch the dough onto the pizza stone or baking sheet, press in some grooves, brush with a yogurt wash and sprinkle on nigella and/or sesame seeds, then 20 to 25 minutes in the oven and you've got barbari.

We tested her recipe using a couple different brands, including Trader Joe's, and it turned out stunningly well.

Once you're at the table, with your splendid sabzi khordan and your golden, crisp barbari bread, the idea is to create the perfect bite for yourself or a tablemate. There's even a word for that bite: *loghme*. "You put some feta cheese in the bread, and then whatever your perfect complement of herbs is, whether you're a dill or a tarragon person, or you like both, maybe, the little tail of a scallion."

Treat yourself to one sabzi khordan fest, and you may find yourself hooked. The herb habit is truly addictive. If you're anything like me, you'll find yourself scattering herbs over all kinds of dishes with abandon. Untreated, you may even turn into someone like Nilou, who will 'literally buy bushes of herbs, and spend way too much time stemming and freezing. If you dry everything really well, and freeze them in Tupperware containers, they stay fresh. I'm like my own Jolly Green Giant."

Go ahead. Treat yourself. Live a little. I'm pretty sure that even if the fix is fleeting, it'll make you feel better.

Celebrate Norooz, Persian New Year, with an emerald-green ash-e-reshteh, New Year's bean soup

We could all use a little lift, even on the first day of spring, the day Norooz (also known as Nowruz), Persian New Year, is celebrated.

This gorgeous vegetarian soup, which traditionally celebrates the spring holiday, involves ingredients you might well have on hand, dried sparmint and saffron are about as exotic as the ingredient list gets. Both of those are used to accompany delicious lamb kababs that my friends grilled outside on the Weber.

linging might actually be the ingredient that, in normal times, would seem the most mundane: dried linguine. If you have just a little, a third of a pound is all the recipe calls for, and you could certainly use just a quarter pound or less, or really use any kind of long noodle, you'll be good to go.

The recipe starts with a cup of mixed dried beans and lentils, and you could use almost any kind in any combination, so, gotta love that, too. Simmer them till they're nearly tender, then throw in a

bunch of greens, spinach, parsley and scallions. If you don't have fresh spinach, frozen will work just fine. Cook the pasta and drop it in. That's basically the soup, which then gets garnishes, sliced onions sautéed with turmeric, the mint oil, a dollop of yogurt and saffron water.

It's so beautifully green and herbal and perfumed that it seems to promise that everything's going to be all right. We hope you enjoy it as much as we do. Happy spring. Happy new year!

Ring in the new year with soulful Persian soups starring The Black Eyed Peas



If you live in the American South, you know that black-eyed peas bring good luck for New Year. Hence the tradition, down where we live, of eating 'Texas caviar,' sort of a cold bean salad starring the world's cutest legume, along with chopped tomatoes, bell peppers, jalapeños, onions and such, dressed in vinaigrette.

And yet, the chill of January is when we crave hot, soul-sustaining, legume-happy soups.

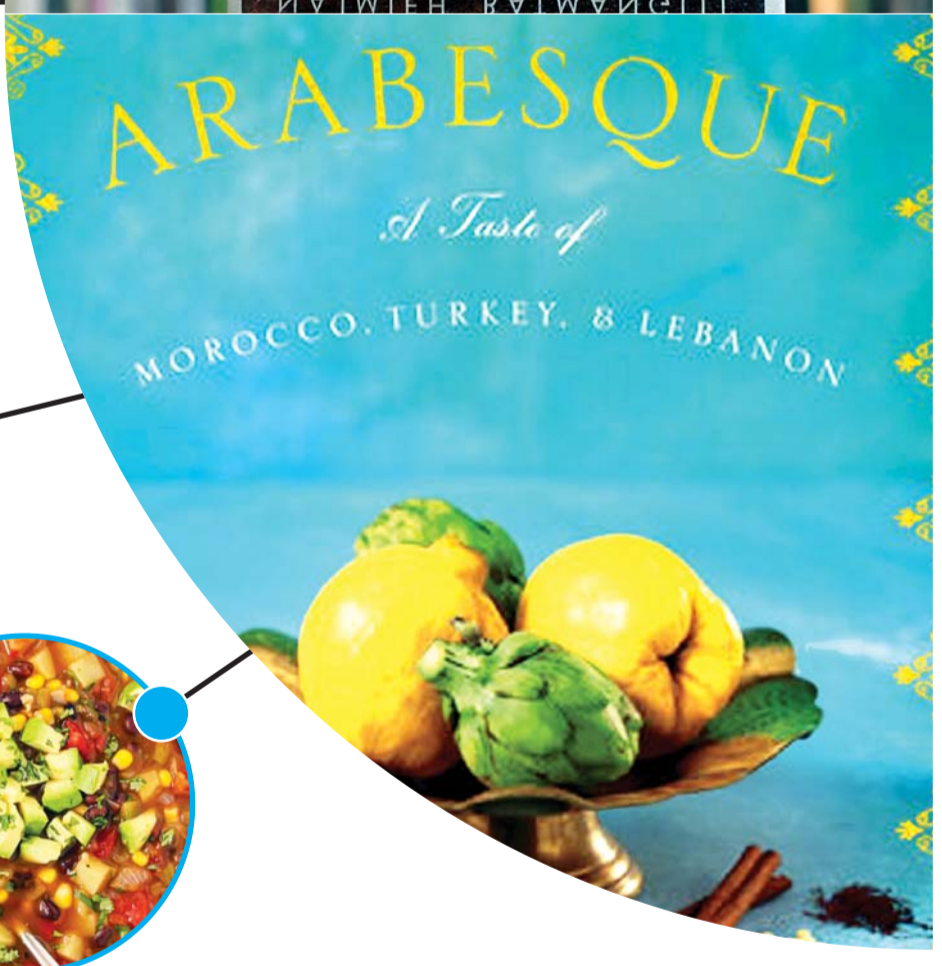
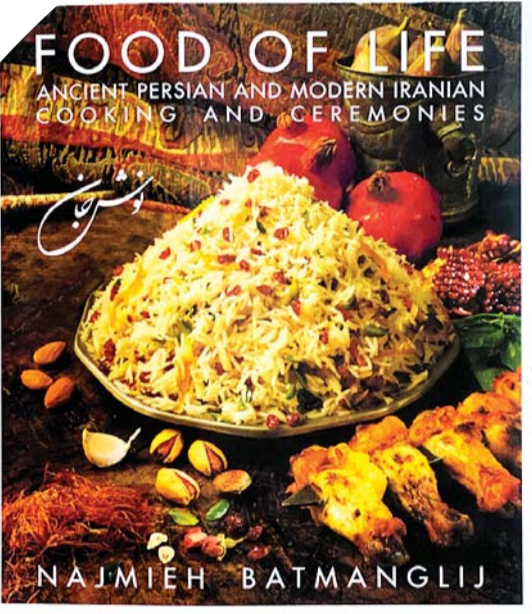
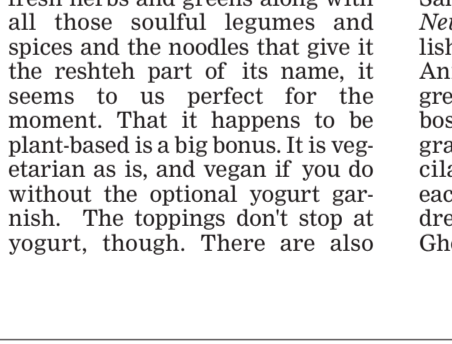
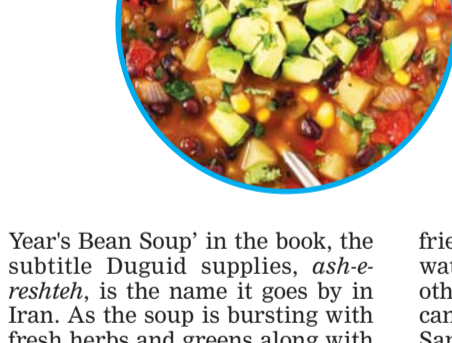
Ately obsession, which largely consists of poring through a few enticing cookbooks on our shelves that hadn't yet explored, and madly, impulsively intrepidly cooking from them. A few years back (following a years-long Yotam Ottolenghi crush), we fell head-over-heels in love with *Zahav: A World of Israeli Cooking*, by Michael Solomonov and Steven Cook. Batoursh, a Syrian dish that layers lamb cooked with onion and pine nuts with eggplant and yogurt, from Claudia Roden's *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food*. These days, Lebanese and other Middle Eastern flavours have been front-of-mind again.

Wylie, who is now on *The Cooks Without Borders* R&D team, graduated from Occidental College in May, and we're thrilled to have him at home as he's job-hunting, having earned a degree in Diplomacy and World Affairs. His girlfriends, Nathalie (who also graduated this spring from Oxy, in Psychology), is staying with her parents in Qatar, as she applies to grad school. It turns out Wylie has the cooking gene, not to mention a passion for it, and that passion is perhaps not coincidentally (as Nathalie's mom is Lebanese and her father is Syrian) expressing itself in a craving for babaganouj and warm pita bread and spice-laden lamb dishes and baklava, and an irrefragable urge to learn how to cook all of it.

So, we'll have plenty of delicious recipes coming to *Cooks Without Borders* in the near future, from all over the Middle East, a region whose culinary borders are rather more porous than its political ones.

But for now, we celebrate New Year's, the Julian calendar's New Year's, that is. And that brings us back to soups that feature black-eyed peas. We turned up two of them last week, both Persian, both easy to make and both outstanding.

The first, from *Taste of Persia*, traditionally celebrates Persian New Year, Now-Roz, which is commemorated not in the dead of winter, but (more poetically) on the spring equinox. It's called 'New



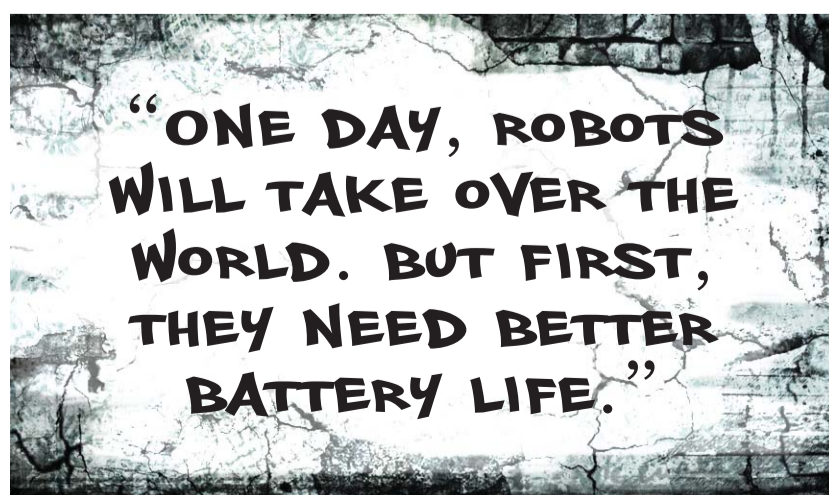
'Year's Bean Soup' in the book, the subtle Dugid supplies, *ash-reshteh*, is the name it goes by in Iran. As the soup is bursting with fresh herbs and greens along with all those soulful legumes and spices and the noodles that give it the reshteh part of its name, it seems to us perfect for the moment. That it happens to be plant-based is a big bonus. It is vegetarian as is, and vegan if you do without the optional yogurt garnish. The toppings don't stop at yogurt, though. There are also

fried onions, mint oil and saffron water. We also found a number of other versions of the soup that we can't wait to try, such as one from Samin Nosrat published in *The New York Times*. Another, published in 2012 in *Savour* is care of Anissa Helou. They all build on greens and beans in varying combos, with piles of different fragrant herbs (fresh mint, dill, cilantro, parsley) going into each, and they all sound positively dreamy. The second soup, Ab Ghooshte Fasl (Iranian Bean and

Vegetable Soup), is one we adapted from a recipe in Roden's *The New Book of Middle Eastern Food*. Roden calls for either starting with either lamb or beef as a base; we chose lamb. The only real prep involved is slicing an onion, chopping some parsley, dicing an eggplant and a couple of bell peppers and cutting a few potatoes in half, but the delicious effect is outsized, this one's going straight into our repertoire.

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THE WALL

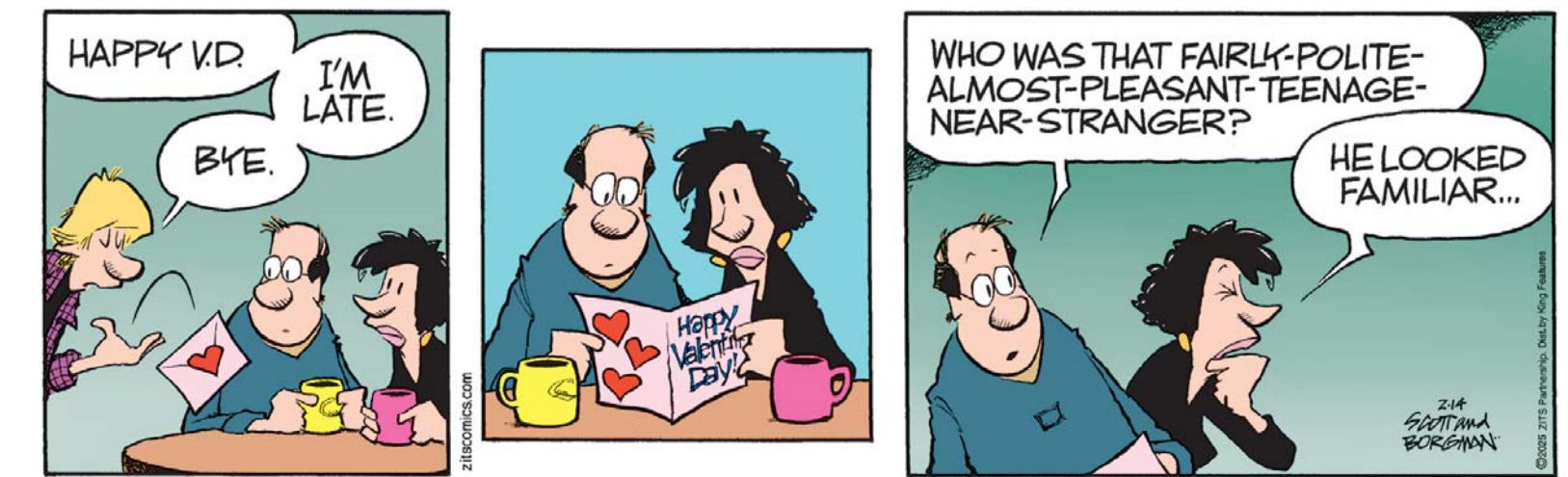


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman