



★ **Pomegranates and Artichokes: A Food Journey from Iran to Italy**

Saghar Setareh

Interlink Books (Jun 20, 2023)

Hardcover \$35.00 (288pp)

978-1-62371-740-7

Pomegranates and Artichokes is a cookbook, a travelogue, and a master's class in foodways.

As seen through Saghar Setareh's transition from her childhood in Iran to her adulthood in Italy, three distinct regions—Iran, the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean, and Italy—form a Venn diagram that transforms the monolith of food culture into a gradient of discoveries and felicitous reinterpretations, tracing the movements and mingling of people into a common language: deliciousness. Setareh's experiences give her the ability to perceive this world that's hiding in plain sight: one where people ebb and flow across borders, and cultural distinctions are merely ingredients in a recipe that spans time and place.

One of the book's best examples of regional cross-pollination is the eggplant. Setareh notes that it is a prized ingredient in all three cultures—introduced to Italy by Arabs in the Middle Ages and initially disliked. Today, it's the base of eggplant parmigiana, a recipe that bears more than a passing resemblance to Turkish *Imam bayildi*. By way of the Levant's *baba ghanoush*, it becomes a cousin of the Iranian dish *mirza ghasemi*. Although technically very different dishes, "what brings them together ... are the ingredients and cooking methods that have migrated through these territories over centuries, appearing in different forms and with different condiments."

A delight for the senses, *Pomegranates and Artichokes*'s photographs are jewel-toned images of abundant tables, finished dishes, and phenomenal cultural backdrops. Setareh also uses space, as with the recipes' headnotes, as a place to muse on personal identity—a territory that transcends concepts of singularity or nationality. Whether she's discussing the origin of an ingredient or the invisible lives of migrants, her intellectual curiosity chips away at the idea of rigid barriers and borders.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July / August 2023)

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