



Famed NYC Grocer Preps for Passover with 1,200 Pounds of Matzo

by Cameron Curtis in Holidays, April 2nd, 2015



The eight-day festival of Passover commemorates the freeing of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. The highlight of Passover is the Seder, which is observed on each of the first two nights of the holiday. In honor of the unleavened bread that the Israelites ate when they left Egypt, leavened grain (including bread, cake, cookies, cereal, pasta) is not allowed at Seder. Instead, matzo (a crisp, unleavened bread) is eaten, along with other traditional Jewish foods.

Eli Zabar is New York City's iconic and pioneering grocer and caterer, with markets, cafes and restaurants on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Namesake company owner Eli and his team cater more than 500 Passover Seders in New York City. And yet the father of two still finds time to host the family's Seder at home. "The Zabar family has divided up all the holidays: One gets Hanukkah, one gets Thanksgiving and so on. We like hosting Passover, since it's a lively, happy time. My whole family shows up! We're going to be about 35 this year. One of the things that's happened over the years is that these little kids who didn't take up any seats and used to spend their time playing or looking for the afikoman are now young adults in need of seats and we're trying to figure out how to fit more people in." His Seder uses everything that is featured in his store, and he makes sure to include his favorite dishes, plus a chocolate-covered matzo sweet treat (recipe below).

While matzo balls and soup are one of his stores' top sellers, Eli's favorite item to serve at home is chunky chopped liver. He likes it with big pieces of chicken liver and golden onions. Brisket is also a favorite of his customers. "It takes a lot of technique to make really good brisket," Eli says. "It's more than just putting meat in the oven; it's a lot of technique and skill." Some of the Passover dishes featured in the market are family recipes: "The gefilte fish is my mother's recipe. We make a stock with fish bones and use a lot of whitefish in the recipe, because it makes it a little bit sweet. Hardly anybody makes gefilte fish anymore, even specialty stores, but we make ours from scratch." Another from-scratch option is the available-only-at-Passover sourdough matzo (not kosher), which, despite customer requests, is not offered year-round. "It's very, very thin, and I only make it right before Passover," Eli says. "It's difficult to make – it follows the same concept as regular matzo, but it has to be made very quickly or it will dry out."

For Eli, not only is Passover an incredibly busy time of year at his stores, but it's also a time for catching up with family. "It's less serious than when I was a kid, and more multid denominational," he says.

Just how much food will Eli Zabar stores make this holiday?



- 1,200 pounds of matzo for Passover
- 8,000 matzo balls and 2,800 quarts of matzo ball soup
- 1,300 quarts of gefilte fish
- 750 Seder plates
- 975 pints of chopped liver
- 400 traditional briskets served with gravy
- 1,000 pounds of potato spinach kugel
- 4,000 potato pancakes and 400 quarts of applesauce

Eli and his wife, Devon Fredericks, make this special dessert at home:

Eli Zabar's Chocolate-Dipped Matzo

Ingredients:

8 sheets of Eli's housemade matzo

14 ounces of nice semisweet chocolate (Valrhona or similar)

14 ounces of nice milk chocolate (Valrhona or similar)

1/4 cup of brown and yellow raisins, dried cranberries and/or slivered almonds, pistachios or other nuts for toppings

Temper the chocolate – do this by placing the chunks of chocolate in a bowl, then setting the bowl over a pot of simmering water. Stir frequently with a spatula.

Using a clean, dry pastry brush, brush the chocolate onto the matzo. You can also drizzle the chocolate onto the matzo if you do not want total coverage. Place the matzo on a baking sheet and sprinkle with raisins, dried cranberries, and slivered almonds and/or pistachios. Refrigerate until set.

Make sure all equipment is completely dry. Any moisture on the utensils or in the container may cause the chocolate to seize, or stiffen. If this happens, stir in 1/2 to 1 teaspoon shortening (not butter) for every ounce of chocolate.

Be careful to keep water from splashing into the chocolate. A single drop will cause the chocolate to seize.