meze burger

M yields 4 burgers

*I kicked off my 2015 Israel Foodie Tour with a cooking demonstration. In developing the burger for that show, I wanted to use as many Middle Eastern ingredients as possible, to whet the appetites of the participants for what they would experience in the upcoming days. The chickpeas in the burger, the crunch of the sumac onions, the creaminess of the techina, the hit of za’atar in the olive oil, the crisp grilled eggplant: this one rang every bell. You will LOVE it.*

1 cup chickpeas (may be canned)

1 pound ground beef

2 teaspoons schwarma spice

1 medium eggplant

extra-virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 onion, halved, thinly sliced

1 tablespoon sumac

1 teaspoon za’atar

2 teaspoons techina

1 small beefsteak tomato, thinly sliced

1 English or Persian cucumber, not peeled, cut into paper-thin slices

6 Kalamata olives, pitted and chopped

4 burger buns

Place the chickpeas into a large bowl. Using a potato masher, mash the chickpeas. Add the ground beef and schwarma spice. Mix well to combine. Divide and shape into 4 burgers.

Slice the eggplant into 4 (½-inch-thick ) slices, the same diameter as the burgers. Place into a bowl; drizzle with olive oil and kosher salt. Rub the oil in; allow to tenderize for a few minutes.

Place the onion slices into a small bowl. Toss with the sumac and 2 teaspoons olive oil. Set aside.

In a small bowl or ramekin, combine the za’atar with 1 tablespoon olive oil.

Coat a nonstick grill pan with nonstick cooking spray. Heat the pan until very hot but not smoking. Grill the eggplant, trying not to move it around so you get nice grill marks on both sides. Remove to a platter; set aside. Re-spray the pan; sear the burgers, 6-7 minutes per side.

Assemble the burgers: Spread ½ teaspoon techina on one side of the bun and spread a little of the za’atar mix on the other side. Place a burger on the bottom half of a bun. Top with eggplant slice, tomato, cucumber, sumac onions, and olives. Top with second half of bun. Repeat with remaining burgers and buns.