

## PEOPLE

#yiyiasyrmascookies  
#yiyiasyrmaskoulourakia  
#yiyiasyrma

# DIMITRIS SIDIROPOULOS

## *Yiayia Syrma's Koulourakia A Journey of Excellence, Family and Love*

WORDS BY DESPINA YEARGIN PANAGAKOS  
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### *Excellence*

**B**orn in Drama, Greece, Dimitris exemplifies the Mediterranean lifestyle and its values such as desire to travel, laughter, cooking, eating a balanced whole-foods diet, love of family and philoxenia. That's a beautiful word—it encompasses sharing, kindness and authentic hospitality. It is this Greek hospitality and the strong bond with his yiayia that's guided him on a career in the hospitality industry and propelled him towards excellence. Following graduation from the Hellenic Army Academy with a degree in Military Science, Dimitris served his country honorably for seven years. In 2009, he embarked on a new career path, pursuing his passion for cooking to culinary school. "I was ready to follow my childhood dream of becoming a chef," he says. His professional training prepared him for work in the hospitality industry. Attending Le Monde Institute of Hotel & Tourism Studies in Athens, Greece, Dimitris learned all aspects of managing a professional kitchen and staff as well as all of the classic cooking techniques. In 2013, well into his second career as a chef, and having worked with restaurants, catering venues, hotels and for the luxury resort AmanZoe in the Peloponnese, Greece, he took his culinary training and desire for outstanding customer service to a new level. Dimitris joined the culinary team of a multi

award-winning cruise company in various chef roles, including chef de partie, sous chef, and the highest onboard culinary position, executive chef. The French word chef translates as chief, a manager, a leader. A big part of the training and development for an executive chef position, is learning to manage inventory, people, finances, customer service and efficient systems, which is why it seems natural that the next stage in Dimitri's career path would lead him to the top Hotel management role on board any of the company's cruising vessels. Thus, in 2017 Dimitris was honored with a promotion to the position of resident Hotel Manager, offering his service to several vessels from the North to the South of France during recent years. He has continued to work with the same company in the Bordeaux, France, area since 2019. Dimitris is passionate about travel. He has a strong desire to learn about other cultures, and it has become a good habit of his to discover a new country or region of the world at least once a year. Most recently, pre-Covid, he was in the Philippines. He enjoys travel, people, food and scuba diving among many other pursuits. "I am a really passionate person, always trying to give my best for whatever responsibilities I commit to," he says. "I love and believe in humanity, and everything in my life is about sharing. I believe that sharing is caring."

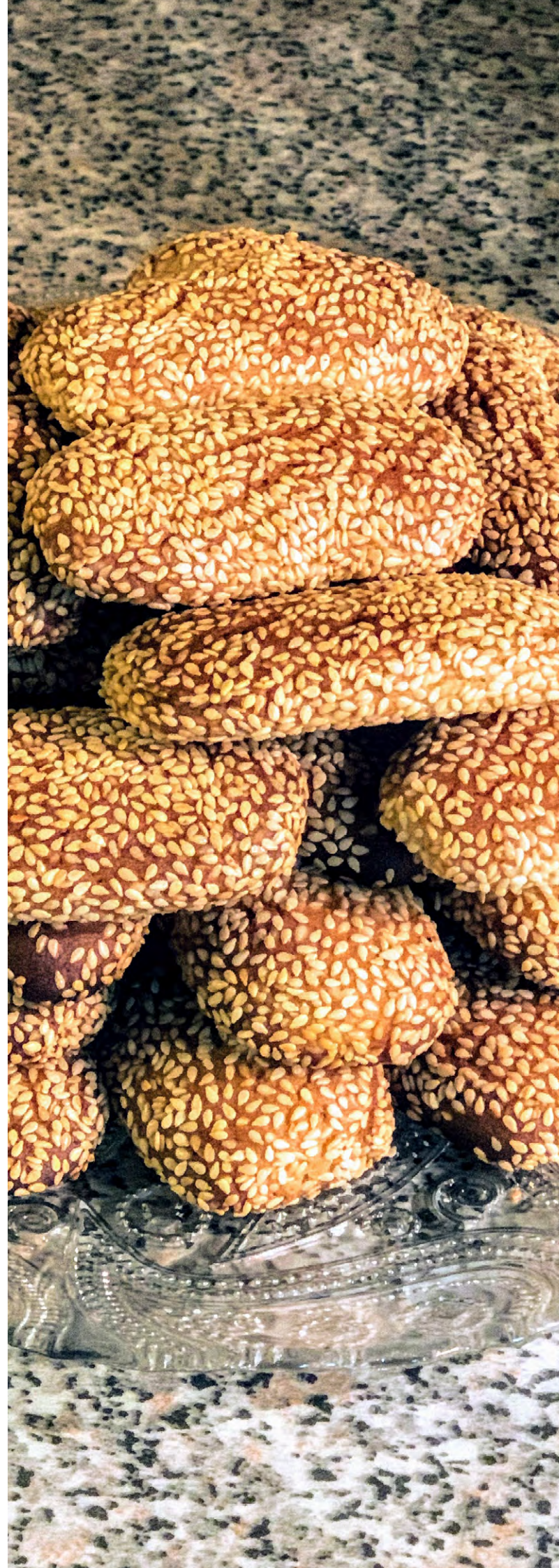






## Family

When Dimitris was born in the city of Drama, Greece, in 1984, his beloved Yiayia Syrma was already living in his family home to help his parents care for their children. This traditional family model allowed Dimitri's parents to work and provide the best economic support for their family, and it helped to shape Dimitri's values and his life. Born Syrma Mylona in the northwest part of Evros, which is no longer a part of Greece, she moved with her family to the city known today as Didymoteicho in the northeastern region of Greece near the Turkish border. She married and had two daughters. After years of working as a master seamstress, and following the death of her husband, Konstantinos, she left Greece for Australia to help her first daughter, Ioanna, and her son-in-law Andreas with caring for the two oldest grandchildren. Following the wedding of her second child, Elisavet, to her son-in-law Eftymios, she returned to Greece to help them and their family. Yiayia Syrma stayed at home cooking during the week and her daughter Elizavet would cook on the weekends. Dimitris remembers that for him, *"she was the first person I saw in the morning and the one I would come home to after school, running to share with her my activities and news of the day. She was the one that I shared my concerns with about life."* Dimitris says, *"Growing up, I was always in the kitchen with her."* Learning to cook from his yiayia, Dimitri mastered the sesame-coated koulourakia around the age of eight. *"She showed me one time,"* he says, *"and then told me I had to try."* As his yiayia watched, Dimitris followed her recipe one time, two times, and by the third attempt they were just right. *"I loved everything she cooked,"* he says, *"but especially her trahana—the soup and giouvetsi- style with chicken--slow cooked pork with cabbage , boiled zucchini served as a salad with mint, lemon and olive oil, feta and paximadi. I also really liked her fricassee of lamb with avgolemono sauce and her koulourakia, of course."* *"Yiayia had the best advice, and always with a modern eye,"* Dimitris remembers. *"She was a beautiful soul with a sense of extreme gratitude, great love and a wonderful sense of humor."*



In 2012, Yiayia Syrma passed away, leaving behind a legacy of generosity and kindness. With eight grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren, her legacy is certain to continue. It has been said that Helen of Troy had the "face that launched 1,000 ships." It is Dimitri's hope that his Yiayia Syrma's cookies will launch 1,000 shares, and so it is with great love and admiration for his grandmother, that Dimitris Sidiropoulos invites you to share by email, on social media, on YouTube or print and make copies of the recipe to share in-person, and before that, make the recipe and offer the koulourakia to friends and loved ones. *"It is my wish,"* he says, *"that my yiayia's koulourakia will be made by many people, and in this way, her memory will be eternal."* It is the Greek custom, upon the death of a loved one, to greet the surviving family members by saying, may their memory be eternal, as a wish that the departed soul will never be forgotten. May Yiayia Syrma's memory be eternal. You can honor Yiayia Syrma by sharing her recipe for the koulourakia:

*Love*







# *Yiayia Syrma's* **KOULOURAKIA**

BY DESPINA PANAGAKOS YEARGIN

## INGREDIENTS

- 400 grams/1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups sunflower oil
- 500 grams/1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups Orange juice
- Zest of two oranges
- 20grams/1 teaspoon powdered cinnamon
- 2 grams/1/3 teaspoon powder clove
- 500grams/2 cups granulated white sugar
- 1 kilo/7 cups all-purpose flour
- 10 grams/1 teaspoon baking soda
- 10 grams/1 teaspoon baking powder
- 500 grams/2 cups baking powder

## METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 160C or 325F. (If not using a fan-forced/convection oven, place two racks in the middle and just below. For even coloring, you should rotate the pans halfway through the cooking time—top to bottom and bottom to top.)
2. In a bowl, whisk to combine the flour, baking powder and soda.
3. In another large bowl combine the oil, orange juice and spice. Add the zest and sugar and whisk well.
4. Add half of the flour mix to the wet ingredients and whisk gently to combine. Switch to a wooden spoon or spatula, add the remaining flour and stir to combine. You may need to use your hand to finish the mixing. The dough should be moist but not sticky and it should roll easily in your hands.
5. Pour the sesame seeds into a bowl or large plate.
6. Using a half tablespoon, scoop out the dough and set it onto the sesame. If you are using a scale, each piece of dough should be between 15 to 18 grams.
7. Roll each piece of dough in the sesame and shape into an oblong piece about the size of your small finger. Place on a parchment-lined tray (or silicone baking mat) and press down on each piece to flatten slightly.
8. Bake for 20-25 minutes for a fan-forced/convection oven or 40-45 minutes in a traditional oven. The dough should be a golden-brown color, but the sesame seeds should still be white.
9. Place the koulourakia on a cooling rack. They will be somewhat soft at first but will harden as they cool. There should be a serious crunch when you bite one, similar to a biscotti or Greek paximathi.

Yield: Anywhere from 120 to around 140 koulourakia, depending on the size

Notes: This is a vegan recipe, perfect for the Lenten fasting period and for sharing with friends and family.