

More of a delicacy than a plague: Swarm of locusts that descended on Israel are welcomed with open arms by kosher chefs

- **A swarm of more than one million has crossed border from Egypt to Israel**
- **Local chefs are cheering at the prospect of 'wild' locusts - which are kosher**
- **Mimicking one of the ten plagues of the Bible week before Passover**
- **Israel's Agriculture Ministry set up an emergency hotline and task force**

By Sara Malm

Israel has been invaded by a swarm of more than one million locusts, sending the nation into panic that the country could be plagued by the insects over the forthcoming Passover holiday. However, local chefs welcome the insects as the grasshopper-relatives are not only tasty, but also kosher. Said to taste like a mix between a sunflower seed and a baby shrimp, what may appear to be a plague, may in fact be the perfect Passover treat.



Super swarm: More than one million locusts have crossed the border from Egypt to Israel



Crackdown: A man holds locusts as the swarm is tested on the Israeli border with Egypt

A swarm of an estimated 30 million insects had been devastating crops in Egypt, putting authorities on high alert as sparrow-sized locusts began making their way into Israel earlier this week.

Reports suggest that the insects are mainly concentrated in areas of southern Israel, but sightings have been reported elsewhere.

Chef Moshe Bassoon who cooks locusts in his Jerusalem restaurant says he counts himself 'lucky' to have been able to get wild insects for his eatery.

'You want them plump and meaty,' he told The Times, suggesting different ways of cooking the insects, including rolling them in chickpea batter and frying them in oil until they 'turn red - like a lobster.'



Holiday food: Locusts are not only delicious, local Israeli chefs say, but also kosher and the perfect treat



Damaging: A swarms of locusts fly near Kadesh Barnea, in Jerusalem, Israel, yesterday after crossing the border from neighbouring Egypt

Mr Basson ensures the winged creatures are kosher, as he himself had to prove their status to a rabbi before he began serving them at his restaurant.

'I had to bring a male and a female and the eggs to the rabbi for his examination,' he said.

'And I had to prove that there was a local tradition of Jews eating them.'

The locust alert comes ahead of the week long Passover festival, which begins on March 25. It recounts the biblical story of the Israelite exodus from Egypt, during which, according to the Bible, a huge swarm of locusts was the eighth of 10 plagues God imposed on Egyptians to persuade Pharaoh to free the ancient Hebrews from slavery.

Pharaoh did not agree to let them go until after the 10th plague, the death of the first born in every Egyptian family.



Delicacy: While many fear the effect they may have on crops, some chefs celebrate the locusts' arrival

Israel's Agriculture Ministry sent out planes to spray pesticides over agricultural fields earlier in the week to prevent damage by the locusts and set up an emergency hotline and asked Israelis to report sightings. Miriam Freund, director of plant protection in the Agriculture Ministry, called it a 'medium-sized swarm' and her office set up a hotline for farmers to call in case they see it advance. 'We hope our actions are effective,' one of the pilots of a plane spraying the fields said on Army Radio. 'Let's hope the damage will be minimal.'

CREEPY CRAWLIES ON PLATES ALL OVER THE WORLD



A bag of bugs please: A saleswoman and her wares of bamboo worms and other fried insects in northern Thailand

Insects are not just something which features in Heston Blumenthal's recipes, and are eaten as snacks or part of healthy meals across the globe.

The practice is most common in Asia, but has not been unheard of in the western world.

'Insects are a healthy, nutritious and tasty alternative. Many contain as much – or more – protein as meat or fish.

'Some insects, especially in the larval stage, are also rich in fat and contain significant percentages of amino acids and essential vitamins and minerals,' says food writer Stefan Gates, a panellist on BBC Radio 4's Kitchen Cabinet.

In Thailand it is not uncommon that schools feed crickets for lunch and in Cambodia young boys go hunting for tarantulas which they fry and eat.

In China beetles and roaches are sold as snacks at markets.

More than 1,000 insects are eaten in 80 per cent of countries around the world - mainly those in the tropics.

The tradition might be spreading to the UK as Giant Toasted Ants are already available at Selfridges for £14.99 a pack.

Rene Redzepi, head chef at award-winning Danish restaurant Noma, recently served ants at a £195-a-head lunch at Claridge's in London.