

Lamb, Chickpea and Prune Tagine with Preserved Lemon Cous Cous

There is something so divine about Middle Eastern food. The use of aromatic spices with slow cooked meat and a pop of something sweet, such as prunes or apricots give the dishes so many layers of flavour that it is disappointing when the meal comes to an end. I have always said that if a genie came along and granted me a wish it would be to have a bottomless stomach. I am pretty sure I was eating a Moroccan Tagine when I came up with that one!

Prep time: 30 Minutes
Medium Budget

Cooking time: 2 Hours

\$\$ Low to

Serves 4

For this dish and other Moroccan meals that I have made in the past, I mix up a traditional spice blend called Ras El Hanout. It sounds complicated, but it literally takes 5 minutes and is a spice blend that can be used as a basis for many dishes from the middle east. If you can't be bothered to make your own, you can buy it at specialty food shops.

Ras El Hanout:

1/2 tsp ground cloves

1/2 tsp cayenne pepper

2 tsp ground allspice

2 tsp ground cumin

2 tsp ground ginger

2 tsp ground turmeric

2 tsp ground black pepper

2 tsp ground cardamom

3 tsp ground cinnamon

3 tsp ground coriander

2 freshly grated nutmegs or 6 tsp ground nutmeg

Throw all the spices in a jar, give a good shake and Mohammeds your uncle!

For the Tagine:

Serves 4

Oil for frying

800gm of diced lamb shoulder (leg will do but not as melt in your mouth)

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

2cm piece of ginger, peeled and finely chopped

1 large brown onion, sliced

2 tbs Ras El Hanout

1/2 a cup of water

1 tin of diced tomatoes

400gm tin of chickpeas, drained and rinsed

1 bunch of coriander, washed and stems and leaves chopped

1 cup of pitted prunes

1 tbs honey

Juice of half a lemon

Sea salt and pepper

Plain yoghurt and coriander sprigs to serve

For the Cous Cous:

3 cups of Chicken or vegetable stock

2 cups of Cous Cous

1 tbs butter

4 preserved lemon wedges, flesh removed and rind finely chopped

1/4 cup of finely chopped coriander

Salt and pepper

Heat oil in a large heavy based casserole dish or tagine pan. Lightly fry the onions, garlic and ginger until the onion is translucent. Add the lamb and lightly brown before adding the spice blend and stirring so that everything is coated nicely. Fry for a couple of minutes until the spices become aromatic. Pour in the tomatoes, water and lemon juice, season with salt and pepper and pop the lid on and allow to simmer on a very low heat for 1 hour.

Remove the lid and add the chickpeas, prunes and honey. Have a little taste and adjust the seasoning if you need to, or add a little more lemon juice to cut through the sweetness if need be. Place the lid back on and allow to

simmer for a further 1/2 an hour before stirring in the coriander leaves and stems, leave the lid off and simmer for a further 15 minutes until the liquid has reduced and thickened and the coriander has cooked down.

To make the cous cous, heat the stock and butter in a large saucepan until simmering. Remove from the heat and pour in the cous cous. Cover with a tight fitting lid or cling wrap and allow to stand for approx 5 minutes.

Remove the lid, add the lemon rind, coriander and salt and pepper and fluff up with a fork making sure you get right into the corners of the pot.

To "plate up" lightly grease a ramekin with olive oil spray and firmly pack the cous cous in it. Turn it onto a plate and serve the Tagine along side, top with yoghurt and coriander sprigs. Repeat with the remaining four plates.

I served this dish with cumin roasted carrots. Peel and cut 6 carrots into quarters lengthways. Drizzle with olive oil. In a mortar and pestle grind one teaspoon of cumin seeds and 1/2 a teaspoon of salt. Sprinkle over the carrots and bake in 180 degree oven for 1/2 an hour...