THE MOROCCAN TABLE

Traditional meals & recipes

A simple home-cooking collection from Morocco — comforting soups, slow-cooked tagines, couscous, salads and classic breads.

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A note before you cook

Moroccan cooking varies from family to family and from region to region. Treat these recipes as approachable home versions: taste as you go, adjust the seasoning, and use the vegetables and herbs available to you. Measurements are practical guides rather than strict rules.

Kitchen basics

Keep cumin, paprika, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, black pepper, saffron (optional), olive oil, preserved lemon, olives, fresh parsley and coriander on hand. A heavy pot with a lid is useful for tagines and soups. Wash fresh produce well and cook meat, poultry and seafood thoroughly.

Contents

• Harira — tomato, lentil and chickpea soup

• Chicken tagine with preserved lemon and olives

• Moroccan vegetable couscous

• Kefta tagine with eggs

• Zaalouk — smoky aubergine and tomato salad

• Taktouka — pepper and tomato salad

• Rfissa-inspired chicken and lentils

• Msemen — layered pan-fried flatbread

• Mint tea and serving ideas

1. Harira — tomato, lentil and chickpea soup

Serves 4–6 · About 60 minutes

Ingredients

• 250 g beef or lamb in small cubes (optional)

• 1 onion, finely chopped

• 2 celery stalks and a handful of coriander, chopped

• 2 tbsp olive oil

• 400 g chopped tomatoes

• 100 g brown or green lentils, rinsed

• 1 cup cooked chickpeas

• 1 tsp each ginger and turmeric; ½ tsp black pepper

• 1.5 litres water or stock

• 2 tbsp flour mixed with 4 tbsp cold water

• A small handful of vermicelli; salt and lemon

Method

1. Soften onion and celery in olive oil. Add meat if using and brown lightly.

2. Stir in tomatoes, lentils, chickpeas, spices and water. Simmer until lentils and meat are tender, around 35–45 minutes.

3. Stir the flour mixture until smooth, then pour it in gradually while stirring. Add vermicelli and simmer until tender.

4. Finish with chopped coriander, salt to taste and lemon. Keep the soup gently thick, not pasty.

2. Chicken tagine with preserved lemon and olives

Serves 4 · About 75 minutes

Ingredients

• 4 chicken thighs or legs

• 1 large onion, sliced

• 2 garlic cloves, crushed

• 1 tsp ginger, 1 tsp turmeric, ½ tsp black pepper

• 2 tbsp olive oil

• ½ preserved lemon, pulp removed and rind sliced

• A handful of green olives

• Parsley and coriander; salt; water

Method

1. Mix chicken with garlic, spices and a little salt. Rest for 15 minutes if time allows.

2. Warm oil in a heavy pot. Cook onion until soft, then add chicken and turn to coat.

3. Add about 250 ml water, cover and simmer gently, turning chicken occasionally, until fully cooked and tender.

4. Add olives and preserved lemon rind for the final 10 minutes. Reduce the sauce until glossy; finish with herbs.

3. Moroccan vegetable couscous

Serves 4–6 · About 60 minutes

Ingredients

• 400 g couscous

• 2 carrots, 2 turnips and 2 courgettes, cut into large pieces

• 1 onion, 1 tomato, 1 cup chickpeas

• A small piece of pumpkin or cabbage (optional)

• 1 tsp each ginger and turmeric; ½ tsp pepper

• 2 tbsp olive oil, salt and coriander

• Hot water or stock; butter or olive oil for couscous

Method

1. Cook onion and tomato in oil. Add spices, chickpeas and about 1.2 litres water or stock.

2. Add firm vegetables first; simmer until nearly tender, then add courgettes and pumpkin.

3. Prepare couscous according to its packet directions, fluffing with a fork and a little butter or oil.

4. Pile couscous on a large plate, arrange vegetables on top and spoon over some broth. Serve extra broth separately.

4. Kefta tagine with eggs

Serves 3–4 · About 40 minutes

Ingredients

• 400 g minced beef or lamb

• 1 small onion, grated

• 2 tbsp chopped parsley and coriander

• 1 tsp paprika, ½ tsp cumin, black pepper and salt

• 2 garlic cloves

• 400 g grated or chopped tomatoes

• 2 tbsp olive oil; 3–4 eggs

Method

1. Mix mince with onion, half the herbs, cumin, paprika, pepper and salt. Shape into small meatballs.

2. Simmer tomatoes, garlic and olive oil for 10 minutes. Add meatballs and cook gently for 12–15 minutes.

3. Make small spaces in the sauce and crack in the eggs. Cover until whites are set and yolks are cooked to your liking.

4. Scatter with the remaining herbs and serve hot with bread.

5. Zaalouk — smoky aubergine and tomato salad

Serves 4 as a side · About 35 minutes

Ingredients

• 2 aubergines

• 3 ripe tomatoes, chopped

• 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

• 2 tbsp olive oil

• 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp paprika

• Chopped coriander and parsley; salt; lemon

Method

1. Roast or grill aubergines until very soft and the skins are charred in places. Cool, peel and chop the flesh.

2. Cook tomatoes, garlic, oil and spices in a pan until the tomatoes collapse and thicken.

3. Add aubergine and mash gently while stirring. Cook until most liquid evaporates.

4. Finish with herbs and a squeeze of lemon. Serve warm or at room temperature.

6. Taktouka — pepper and tomato salad

Serves 4 as a side · About 30 minutes

Ingredients

• 3 green or red peppers

• 3 ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped

• 2 garlic cloves

• 2 tbsp olive oil

• 1 tsp paprika, ½ tsp cumin

• Parsley, salt and a little lemon

Method

1. Char peppers under a grill or over a flame, turning until blistered. Cover briefly, then peel and remove seeds.

2. Cook tomatoes, garlic, oil and spices until thick and jammy.

3. Chop peppers and stir them into the tomato mixture. Cook for 5–8 minutes.

4. Season with salt, parsley and lemon. Serve with fresh bread.

7. Rfissa-inspired chicken and lentils

Serves 4 · About 75 minutes

Ingredients

• 4 chicken pieces

• 1 onion, sliced

• 1 cup brown lentils, rinsed

• ½ cup fenugreek seeds (optional; use less for a milder taste)

• 1 tsp each ginger and turmeric; pinch saffron (optional)

• 2 tbsp oil, coriander and parsley

• 4–5 cups water or stock

• Shredded msemen or thin flatbread to serve

Method

1. Soak fenugreek for several hours if using, then drain. Season chicken with ginger, turmeric, pepper and salt.

2. Soften onion in oil, add chicken, lentils, fenugreek and herbs. Pour in water or stock.

3. Cover and simmer until chicken is cooked and lentils are tender, adding water if needed to keep a generous sauce.

4. Arrange torn msemen on a serving plate, place chicken on top and spoon lentils and broth over everything.

8. Msemen — layered pan-fried flatbread

Makes 6–8 · About 60 minutes plus resting

Ingredients

• 300 g plain flour

• 150 g fine semolina

• 1 tsp salt

• About 250 ml warm water, added gradually

• Oil and melted butter for folding and cooking

Method

1. Mix flour, semolina and salt. Add water gradually and knead until smooth and elastic. Rest covered for 20 minutes.

2. Divide into balls. Oil the work surface and hands. Stretch one ball very thin into a large square.

3. Brush with oil-butter, fold the sides toward the centre, then fold again to make a square parcel. Rest briefly.

4. Flatten gently and cook in a lightly oiled pan over medium heat, turning until golden and cooked through.

Serve it the Moroccan way

Harira is often served with dates, lemon and chebakia during Ramadan. Tagines and kefta are excellent with khobz or another crusty bread. Couscous is traditionally shared from a large platter. Salads such as zaalouk and taktouka add colour and balance to a meal.

Moroccan mint tea

Rinse a small handful of green tea with a little boiling water and discard the rinse. Add fresh mint and sugar to taste, pour in hot water and steep briefly. Pour from a little height into small glasses to create a light foam, taking care with the hot tea.

Food safety & substitutions

Refrigerate leftovers promptly and use within a safe timeframe. Reheat soups and stews until steaming hot. If you do not eat meat, omit it from harira and add extra chickpeas; use vegetable stock for couscous. Adjust chilli, salt and preserved lemon to your taste.

ANRAX · A practical guide to traditional Moroccan home cooking