

Eating in: Dipping into the Middle East



Spiced lamb shank

Rawia Bishara - 01 February 2014

Rawia Bishara, chef and proprietor at Brooklyn's Tanoreen restaurant and author of 'Olives, Lemons and Za'tar' shares with Weekend the secrets of Middle Eastern homecooking

Spiced Lamb Shank (MOZZAT MHAMMARA)

"This is most certainly a Tanoreen dish. We rarely, if ever, prepared lamb shanks in Nazareth, because when we purchased lamb, we got the whole animal, which meant there were only four shanks for a family of seven.

"The meat on this part of the lamb is tough. It is full of connective tissue that when cooked over a low heat for a long time tenderises the meat. Though this braises for three hours, very little of that is active cooking time, but the meat falls right off the bone." Serves 6-8.

YOU WILL NEED

2 tbsps ground allspice

1 tbsp freshly ground black pepper

½ tsp ground cardamom

½ tsp ground cinnamon

½ tsp ground nutmeg

1 tsp ground cumin

6 large lamb shanks

250ml olive or vegetable oil

2 white onions, chopped

6 garlic cloves, finely chopped

60g chopped fresh basil

30g chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

60g chopped fresh coriander

6 plum tomatoes or 3 beefsteak tomatoes, chopped

120ml fresh lemon juice

1 tbsp sea salt

6 baking potatoes, peeled and halved lengthways and sliced into 6mm-thick half moons

2 carrots, halved lengthways and sliced into 6mm-thick half moons

2 chillies, deseeded and finely chopped (optional)

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 250°C/gas mark 9. In a small bowl, combine the allspice, black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg and cumin. Rub half the spice mixture all over the lamb shanks.

Now place 120ml oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat and, working in batches, sear the shanks all over, for about 3-5 minutes per side, and then remove them to a plate.

Add the onions to the frying pan and saute until soft and golden, for about 3 minutes. Then add the garlic and the remaining spice mixture, until fragrant, for about 1 minute.

Stir in the basil, parsley and coriander and cook until the herbs begin to turn colour, for 2-3 minutes. Now add the tomatoes and saute, stirring occasionally, until they become soft, for about 5-7 minutes. Stir in the lemon juice and salt and turn the heat off.

Place the potatoes, the carrots and the chillies, if using, in a large deep roasting tin, and brush them with the

remaining oil. Roast the vegetables for 10 minutes, tossing once halfway.

Remove pan from oven and arrange shanks on top of the vegetables. Using a large spoon, place a scoop of the remaining onion and spice mixture on the top of each shank.

Fill the roasting tin halfway with hot water, cover the shanks with greaseproof paper and cover it tightly with foil. Bake for 1 hour, but check the water level and fill to halfway again if it has evaporated.

Reduce the temperature to 200°C/gas mark 6 and bake for a further hour. Check the water level and add enough to return it to its original level. Bake for a final hour or until the meat falls easily off the bone.

To serve the dish, place each lamb shank on a plate and spoon the vegetables alongside them.

HUMMUS

Hummus is perhaps the single most recognisable Middle Eastern dish in the world and is essential on the mezze table. Rawia serves hummus more than any other dish at Tanoreen.

She recommends boiling dried chickpeas until they not only lose their skins but are easily crushed between your thumb and forefinger.

If using dried chickpeas, she suggests adding half a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda to the boiling water in order to speed up the cooking time, which can vary depending on the quality of the chickpeas.

“I always boil more than I need, drain the excess and freeze them for up to six months,” says Rawia. Serves 6-8.

You will need

500g dried chickpeas, soaked and boiled, keep 250ml of the cooking liquid, or

2 (400g) tins of chickpeas, keep the liquid from one of the tins

300g tahini (sesame paste)

370ml fresh lemon juice, or to taste 5 garlic cloves or to taste, finely chopped 1 tsp sea salt

60ml extra-virgin olive oil

2tbsps chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

Method

In a bowl, place 50g of chickpeas and set aside for garnish.

In a food processor, combine the remaining chickpeas, reserved liquid, tahini, lemon juice, garlic and salt. Process until mixture gets smooth and creamy, adding water or lemon juice to reach the desired consistency.

If you plan to refrigerate the hummus before serving, make it a little looser – it thickens up when chilled. Taste and adjust the lemon juice and the salt if necessary.

Transfer the mixture to a serving dish and, using the back of a spoon, make a well in the centre of the hummus.

Drizzle oil into the well and garnish with the reserved chickpeas and parsley. Serve with Arabic bread.

FLOURLESS TANGERINE APRICOT CAKE

"As time goes on, more and more of my customers are requesting gluten-free dishes. It is easy to put together a meal with this in mind as many of our savoury dishes are naturally free of gluten.

"Of course, cakes and pastries are a challenge, but one I was happy to take on. I experimented with alternatives to flour and found that a combination of ground almonds and pistachios result in a wonderful texture.

"Grind the nuts in a grinder to a consistency similar to farina. Take care not to grind them too finely or it will affect the texture of the cake, which is perfect for a party." Makes 10-12 servings (one 40cm round cake)

You will need

8 tangerines, peeled, segmented and deseeded

8 apricots, peeled and pitted, or 125g dried apricots

185g sugar

500g peeled raw almonds, ground to

the texture of farina

150g pistachios, skinned and ground to

the texture of farina

150g crushed walnuts

40g dessicated coconut (optional)

2 tbsps baking powder

8 medium eggs

4 tbsps Frangelico liqueur (optional)

2 tbsps vanilla extract

Method

Place the tangerines in a large saucepan with enough water to cover and bring to the boil. Continue to boil until the fruit is soft, for 25-35 minutes, depending on the ripeness of the fruit. Transfer to a colander to drain, then put the tangerines in a blender and puree until smooth. Alternatively, you can use a hand mixer for the same job.

Place the apricots in the same pan, with enough water to cover, and bring to the boil. Continue to boil until the fruit is soft, for 15-20 minutes depending on the ripeness of the fresh apricots or the freshness of the dried apricots. Transfer to a colander to drain, then put the apricots in a blender and puree them until smooth. Alternatively, you can puree the apricots using a hand mixer.

Preheat the oven to 175°C/gas mark 4. Prepare a 40cm round baking tin with non-stick cooking spray.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, combine the sugar, almonds, pistachios, walnuts, coconut, if using it, and baking powder. Now set the mixture aside.

In the bowl of a freestanding mixer, beat the eggs until pale yellow. Add the pureed apricots, the Frangelico, if using it, and the vanilla, and beat until thoroughly incorporated.

With the motor running, gradually add the nut mixture to the egg mixture and mix until smooth, for 3-5 minutes.

Pour the batter into the baking tin and bake for 35-40 minutes, until a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean. Transfer to a wire rack to cool slightly.

To serve, run a knife around the edge of the cake tin to loosen it. Invert a large plate over the tin and flip it over to release the cake. Serve the cake warm with whipped cream, fresh fruit or ice cream.

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