

Berkana's Lamb and Pear Tagine

Detailed instructions. Serves 4

Equipment

Tagine

You can substitute any heavy pot for this, or even use a slow cooker, but it must have a lid.

Big bowl

For marinating the meat.

Melon-baller

For coring the pears.

Ladle

for skimming off the excess fat

Vegetable peeler

Plastic wrap

Knife

Ingredients

2 lbs. lamb shoulder or stewing meat
6 cloves garlic, pressed through a garlic press
1 tablespoon honey
1/4 cup olive oil
3 tablespoons chopped cilantro
2 tablespoons sun-dried tomato paste
2 or 3 Bartlett pears, peeled, cored, and cut into large chunks
2 carrots, peeled and cut into chunks
2 yellow onions, peeled and cut into wedges
1 1/2 cups vegetable stock
1 cinnamon stick
1 bay leaf
1 cup cooked or drained canned chickpeas (a.k.a. garbanzo beans)
1/2 cup golden raisins

Spices

Simplified version:

Pinch of saffron threads
2 teaspoons paprika

2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground pepper

Traditional version

The traditional spice blend gives many more dimensions to the flavor, and is a complex blend of many spices, somewhat like curry. If you have the time to make this blend, it's worth it. Make the following spice blend, and scoop out as much as you need each time you make tagine. In this particular recipe, you use two tablespoons of this blend:

3 teaspoons cumin
2 teaspoons cinnamon
2 teaspoons paprika
2 teaspoons dried ground ginger
2 teaspoons fine ground pepper
1 teaspoon coriander
1 teaspoon saffron
1 teaspoon allspice
.5 teaspoon cayenne pepper
.5 teaspoon ground cloves
.5 teaspoon cardamom

Procedure

Whether you're using the simplified spice blend or the traditional blend (use two tablespoons of the blend), put your spices into your marinating bowl, and add the oil and mash the spices around until there are no clumps. Then add the honey, the tomato paste, and the garlic to the mix and mash them up until its all thoroughly blended. Last, mix in the cilantro. Add the lamb last, and mix the whole thing up well so that every last piece of lamb is coated with the mixture. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and marinate it overnight in the refrigerator.

Before you cook the meat, leave it out of the refrigerator for about half an hour to warm up a bit. Meanwhile, chop, peel, and prepare the rest of the vegetables. Put the carrots and onion and lamb into your tagine, and add the vegetable stock, the bay leaf, and the cinnamon stick, and a couple of pinches of salt, and bring it to a simmer. As soon as it simmers, put the lid on and turn the heat to low, and let the tagine stew for at least two hours, up to four if you have really tough stew meat. (If you're using a slow cooker, just stick it in, and set it on high. When it simmers in about half an hour to an hour, turn it down to low. With the slow cooker, it'll take about four hours at least. Don't stick really cold meat into the slow cooker; it'll warm up too slowly, and can actually incubate bacteria in the process and get you sick. Pan fry it to warm it up a little if you need to.)

Half an hour before the end of the stewing process, stir in the raisins, the chickpeas, and the chopped up pear.

Serve with couscous or rice. Enjoy, and thank God for inventing taste buds!