

Chicken Tagine With Lemon and Olives

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Servings: 4



This is one of the most renowned of Moroccan tagines, those gently spiced stews of meat and vegetables - and often fruit as well - that hold their name from the earthenware dish with a conical lid that they are cooked in. One Moroccan cook told me firmly that anything that is cooked in a tagine is called a tagine, not just the stews. You could scramble eggs in it, or cook spaghetti bolognese and, to a Moroccan, these would then become a tagine. So, I guess, technically speaking, if you cook this subtle dish of semi-stewed, semi-steamed chicken in a saucepan then it shouldn't be called a tagine at all, just a straight pot roast. Ah, but what a pot roast, spiced mildly with ginger, cumin, turmeric and saffron, and with the salty tang of preserved lemons and juicy olives. Unlike a couscous, this is a dish which should end up with just a small amount of sauce, enough to moisten the meat and that's about all, for it is usually served on its own, or perhaps with a selection of salads, but certainly without any starchy accompaniments other than a wedge of bread. Preserved lemons are available at Middle Eastern specialty stores or Kalustyan's, 800-352-3451 or <http://www.kalustyans.com/>.

Ingredients

1 large free-range chicken
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cumin
4 garlic cloves, crushed
1 onion, grated
2 chicken livers
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1¼ cups water
Pinch saffron threads (optional)
1 preserved lemon
⅔ cup pinky red and green olives (assuming you can't get Moroccan ones, try either Gaeta, or Greek Kalamata olives)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cooking Method

Trim the flaps of excess fat from the chicken at the opening to the stomach cavity, and remove any other lumps of fat you can locate.

1. Truss the bird firmly, by tucking the ends of the legs into the opening and tying them in place with string.
2. Rub the turmeric, ginger and cumin over the chicken, and then smear over half the garlic.
3. Season lightly with salt and pepper, then cover and set aside for up to 12 hours (covered and in the refrigerator).

Put the remaining garlic, the onion, the chicken livers, the olive oil, and water into a casserole or saucepan, or a Tagine large enough to hold the chicken.

1. Stir and bring to a boil.
2. Now, add the chicken and reduce the heat so that the liquid barely simmers.
3. Cover the pan, leaving just a small gap for steam to escape, and cook for 1½ to 2 hours.
4. Turn the chicken frequently so that the flesh is partially steamed and partially simmered to a melting tenderness.

Meanwhile...

1. Soak the saffron, if using, in a tablespoon of hot water.
2. Scrape the pulp out of the lemon and discard.
3. Cut the skin into strips, rinse thoroughly, drain and reserve.
4. Rinse the olives.
5. Bring a pan of water to a boil, add the olives and blanch for 1 minute, to remove excess salt.
6. Drain thoroughly.

When it is done, hold the chicken out of the pan, and keep warm.

1. Find the livers, quarter them and reserve them too.
2. Stir the strips of preserved lemon, the olives and the saffron into the remaining sauce in the pan, then simmer for 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Taste and adjust the seasoning.

Serve the chicken with the sauce spooned over and around it, scattering the bits of liver in among the olives and lemon.