

Autumn Lamb Stew

Adapted from Paula Wolfert's *The Cooking of the Eastern Mediterranean*, this is a really nice lamb stew. The final act of sizzling dried mint and black pepper in olive oil and stirring it into the stew is key; it totally changes the flavor profile in a striking way. You can scale this up cheaply for large crowds simply by increasing the proportion of vegetables to lamb, and serve it with rice if that's what you have on hand.

- 1-1/2 pounds lamb shoulder or stew meat trimmed of visible fat, cut into 1 inch cubes.
 - 1-1/4 tsp. ground black pepper
 - 3 Tbs. olive oil
 - 1 cup chopped onion
 - 4 tsp. tomato paste
 - 2 tsp. Turkish red pepper paste (see below) or harissa (more common in middle-eastern food markets)
 - 1-1/2 cups water
 - 1-1/2 tsp. garlic, minced or put through a garlic press
 - 1-1/2 cups cooked chickpeas (I use canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed — a.k.a. garbanzo beans)
 - 1 large tomato, peeled, seeded and chopped
 - 3-4 pounds winter squash, peeled and cubed (squashes such as hubbard, butternut or even sweet potatoes)
 - 1/2 tsp. salt
 - 4 Tbs. lemon juice
 - 2 tsp. dried mint (you can dry your own in a very low oven on a cooling rack set over a baking pan)
 - 1/2 tsp. of Aleppo or other mild red pepper
1. Trim excess fat from the lamb, and sprinkle with half of the black pepper. Heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil in a heavy 4-quart pan over medium heat, and cook the lamb. Stir until excess moisture evaporates, about 7 minutes. Add the onion and cook, stirring, for 10 minutes or until lightly browned.
 2. Add the tomato and pepper pastes and cook them for 5 minutes, stirring. Add 1-1/2 cups water and bring to a boil. Cover and cook over medium-low heat until the meat is tender, about 45 minutes.
 3. Add garlic, chickpeas, tomatoes, squash and salt. Add water to just cover contents, cover, and cook for 25 minutes or until the squash is tender.
 4. Stir in lemon juice and remove from heat. Place in serving dish.
 5. Put the dried mint, the remaining black pepper (a little over 1/2 tsp.) and the red pepper into a coffee grinder, spice grinder, or mortar and pestle. Grind until fine. Heat the last 1 Tbs. of olive oil in a little saucepan until sizzling hot, add the powdered mint/peppers, and quickly stir. Remove from heat and pour over the stew. Stir and serve.

Turkish Red Pepper Paste

Some middle-eastern markets will carry this in jars or tubes. If you live, as I do, a long way from any market, you can make your own. There are lots of recipes. Here is a simple one.

- 2 Red sweet peppers
 - 2 Hot red chilies
 - 3 Tbs. Water
 - 1 tsp. Salt
 - 1 tsp. Sugar
 - 1-1/2 Tbs. Olive oil
1. Cut the peppers into large chunks, discarding the seed core. Slice the chilies in half (discarding the seeds for a milder paste) and trim any stems.
 2. Place the peppers, chilies, water, salt, sugar and olive oil in a food processor and process until smooth.
 3. Transfer the mixture to a saucepan and simmer gently until the mixture is thick and the liquid has reduced, about 1 hour, stirring frequently.
 4. Cool then use as desired in Turkish recipes or any time that you want a little "heat" in your cooking. Alternatively, freezes in small containers or ice cube trays for use later.