

MAFTOOL WITH BUTTERNUT, CHICKPEA, AND CHICKEN STEW

THE PALESTINIAN TABLE by Reem Kassis

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 2 hours

Serves: 4

INGREDIENTS

For the broth (stock)

- 2 1/4 lb/1 kg chicken joints (about 4 bone-in breasts or 4 legs, or two of each)
- 1 whole onion
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 teaspoons Nine Spice Mix
- 2 teaspoons ground caraway
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ teaspoon tomato paste (purée; optional, just for color)

For the Nine Spice Mix

- 6 tablespoons allspice berries
- 6 cassia bark or cinnamon sticks
- 3 tablespoons coriander seeds
- 1 tablespoon black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 10 cloves
- 2 blades mace
- ½ nutmeg, crushed

For the stew

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, sliced into half-moons
- ½ butternut squash, diced
- 1 x 14 oz/400 g can chickpeas, rinsed and drained

For the maftool

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 lb 2 oz/500 g maftool (see note)

INSTRUCTIONS

To make the Nine Spice Mix

Place all the ingredients in a large skillet (frying pan) over medium-low heat. Stir with a wooden spoon periodically to ensure the spices do not burn, until you begin to smell the aroma of the spices, about 10 minutes.

Remove the pan from heat and set aside to cool completely, about 1 hour. This step is

crucial because if the spices are not cooled properly, they will form a paste when ground rather than a powder.

Place all the roasted spices into a heavy-duty spice grinder and grind until you achieve a fine powder consistency. Store the spice mix in an airtight container. It will keep for several months although the aroma will fade with time.

To make the Maftool with Butternut Chickpea

First make the broth (stock). Put the chicken into a large stockpot and cover with 8 cups (3½ pints/2 liters) water. Bring to a boil on high heat, skimming away scum from the surface, then add the onion, salt, spices, bay leaf and tomato paste, if using, and reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook until the chickens are done but not falling apart, about 1 hour. When done, remove the chicken pieces and set aside, covered in aluminum foil to keep warm.

To prepare the stew, heat the olive oil in a pot over medium heat and add the sliced onions. Sauté for about 5 minutes until softened and golden brown at the edges. Add the squash, toss to combine, and cook for a further 2–3 minutes. Using a fine-mesh strainer, pour in 4 cups (1¾ pints/1 liter) of your broth into the pot, then add the chickpeas and allow everything to simmer until the squash is cooked and the flavors have all melded together, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil and butter in a pot with a tightfitting lid over medium heat. Add the *maftool*, tossing to coat, and stir to toast lightly, about 5 minutes. Using a fine mesh strainer, pour 2 cups (18 fl oz/500 ml) of your broth into the pot, cover, and bring to a simmer. Once the *maftool* has absorbed about half the liquid, turn off the heat and allow to sit for 15 minutes. This method, which is halfway between the absorption and steaming methods, produces the best texture for the *maftool*: fully cooked but still fluffy.

To assemble, preheat the broiler (grill). Drizzle the chicken with olive oil, salt, and black pepper and place under the broiler, skin side up, for 3–5 minutes or until the skin is a crispy golden brown. Meanwhile, tip the *maftool* into a large serving platter and ladle some of the stew over it. Top with the chicken and serve with bowls of the stew on the side.

Note: Maftool is becoming widely available in supermarkets and online, but if you can't find it, use *moghrabieh*, fregola sarda or giant couscous.