



CHICKEN PASTILLA

Serves 4

Ingredients

For the chicken:

1 whole chicken (approximately 1 ½ kilos)
The juice of 2 lemons
A large handful of chopped fresh parsley and coriander
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tablespoon ras al hanout
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon turmeric
Just a pinch of freshly ground nutmeg
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 red onion, diced
Salt and pepper, to taste

For the eggs:

4 eggs

For the almonds:

150 grams raw almonds
2 tablespoons sunflower oil
4 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon cinnamon

To assemble:

4 large circular sheets of filo pastry (or cut rectangular sheets into circles if needed)
1 egg
1 tablespoon butter

To top:

Powdered sugar
Cinnamon

Method

Rub the chicken with lemon juice and plenty of salt. Remove any fat, then rinse under running water before placing in a pot with the rest of the ingredients and 100 millilitres of water. Cover and cook over medium high heat for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, blanch the almonds and then fry in sunflower oil until golden brown. Strain out any excess oil and then toss into a grinder with sugar and cinnamon. Blitz until very finely ground. Set aside.

Once the chicken is cooked through, remove from the pot and set on a plate to cool. Turn the heat up under the remaining sauce until bubbling and drop in 4 eggs. Whisk and stir until the mixture resembles a soft scramble. Set aside.

Once the chicken has cooled for 10-15 minutes, remove the bones and shred finely.

To assemble the pastilla, lay out 2 sheets of filo pastry flat on a large workspace. Place the chicken mixture in the middle and flatten until about 2 centimetres thick. Be sure to leave about 5 centimetres of uncovered filo dough around the edges. Then layer on the egg mixture, flattening to about 1 centimetre thick, and finally the almond mixture which will be about half a centimetre thick.

Crack an egg into a bowl and whisk. This is your adhesive. Fold the uncovered edges of filo dough up and on top of the filling. Then brush the visible part of the filo dough with egg wash. Top with 2 more sheets of filo dough, and fold them underneath the pastilla to seal in the filling. Brush egg wash all over the top of the pastilla, and then brush with melted butter. Bake in a preheated 180° C (350° F) oven for 45 minutes, or until golden brown.

Top with powdered sugar and cinnamon. Serve.

Notes:

- This crowd-pleasing dish is traditionally made for special occasions with pigeon meat.
- For a vegetarian pastilla, use 1 ½ kilos grated mixed vegetables and vermicelli in place of the chicken and follow the recipe as normal.
- For a seafood pastilla, sauté ½ a kilo each of shelled shrimp and cubed white fish with 2 bay leaves, a teaspoon each cumin, paprika and salt, 1/2 a teaspoon ground ginger, 2 minced garlic cloves, some olive oil, chopped fresh parsley and coriander, and a handful of dried black mushrooms in a pot over medium high heat. Boil 1/2 a kilo prawns separately and then shell before adding in with the rest of the seafood. Once combined, add 1 tablespoon of tomato paste and a cup of water. In a separate bowl, soak a large handful of vermicelli in warm water for 5 minutes to soften. Drain, cut to desired length, and add in with the seafood. Squeeze a lemon on top and throw in a bit of harissa if you want some spice. Once cooked through, remove the bay leaves and cool. Assemble the pastilla as stated above. Bake until golden brown and then top with shredded edam cheese once out of the oven. Serve immediately.

