Persian Quince and Dried Plum Stew

khoresh-e beh-o-ālū

A seasonal Iranian stew combining quince with dried plums. It can be made with soy for a vegan version, or with lamb.

Vegan Version with Soy

Serves 4
Preparation: 20 minutes, plus soaking
Cooking: approximately 40 minutes

Ingredients

200 g soy chunks
2 quinces
300 g dried plums (alu Bukhara)
1 medium onion
2 tbsp tomato paste
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp black pepper
¼ tsp ground cinnamon
2 tbsp brewed saffron
1 tbsp sugar, optional
1 tbsp lemon juice, optional
Salt, to taste
Oil, as needed
Boiling water, as needed

Method

Prepare the soy and plums: Soak the soy chunks for at least 2 hours, then drain and rinse. Soak the dried plums in water for a few hours.

Cook the onion and soy: Finely chop the onion and sauté in oil until golden. Add the tomato paste and cook for a few minutes. Add the soy, turmeric, garlic powder and black pepper. Stir to coat, then add about 1 cup of boiling water. Cover and simmer over low heat.

Prepare the quince: Wash and cut the quince into large dice or wedges, removing the core and seeds. To prevent browning, keep the pieces in water with a little lemon juice while preparing them. Drain, then sauté in a separate pan with a little oil until lightly golden.

Finish the stew: Add the quince to the soy and simmer, covered, until it begins to soften. Add the dried plums and cinnamon. Continue cooking until the quince is tender but still holds its shape.

Season: Add the brewed saffron during the final 15 minutes. Season with salt, then add sugar or lemon juice, if desired, to balance the flavour.

Serve with steamed rice.

Notes

The flavour should be sweet-sour (*malas*). Adjust with a little sugar for sweetness or lemon juice for acidity.

Avoid adding too much tomato paste. The dried plums naturally give the stew a darker colour.

Don't overcook the quince. It should be tender but retain its shape.

The amount of liquid may need adjusting during cooking. The finished stew should be thick, with some sauce, rather than watery.

Lamb Version

Serves 4
Preparation: 20 minutes, plus soaking
Cooking: approximately 1½–2 hours, depending on the cut of lamb

Ingredients

400 g stewing lamb, cut into pieces
2 quinces
300 g dried plums (alu Bukhara)
1 medium onion
2 tbsp tomato paste
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp black pepper
¼ tsp ground cinnamon
2 tbsp brewed saffron
1 tbsp sugar, optional
1 tbsp lemon juice, optional
Salt, to taste
Oil, as needed
Boiling water, as needed

Method

Prepare the quince and plums: Wash and cut the quince into large dice or wedges, removing the core and seeds. To prevent browning, keep the pieces in water with a little lemon juice while preparing them. Drain well. Soak the dried plums in water for a few hours.

Brown the quince: Heat a little oil in a pan and sauté the quince until lightly golden. Remove and set aside.

Cook the lamb: In the same pan, sauté the chopped onion until golden. Add the turmeric, garlic powder and black pepper. Add the lamb and brown on all sides.

Add the tomato paste: Stir in the tomato paste and cook for a few minutes. Add enough boiling water to mostly cover the meat. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat, cover and simmer until the lamb is nearly tender.

Finish the stew: Add the dried plums, browned quince and cinnamon. Continue simmering until the lamb is tender and the quince is cooked but still holds its shape. Add the brewed saffron during the final 15 minutes. Season with salt, then add sugar or lemon juice, if desired.

Serve with steamed rice.

Notes

The flavour should be sweet-sour (*malas*). Adjust with a little sugar for sweetness or lemon juice for acidity.

Avoid adding too much tomato paste. The dried plums naturally give the stew a darker colour.

Don't overcook the quince. It should be tender but retain its shape.

Add the quince later in the lamb version so it doesn't become too soft while the meat cooks.

The amount of liquid may need adjusting during cooking. The finished stew should be thick, with some sauce, rather than watery.