



Moroccan Tagine Meatballs

makes 2 dozen

I had a wonderfully animated Moroccan cooking lesson with my friend Rachael that was taught by two sisters, Dina and Nora, at the La Maison Arabe in Marrakech. Both women, though petite in size, had personalities as big and bold as the scents in their kitchen. Nora was chopping an onion in record time, while whistling to the tunes Dina sang beautifully at the top of her lungs. Rachael and I rolled meatballs to the speed of the beat while Dina lifted the lid from a terra cotta tagine, stirring the sauce with a copper ladle. As our meatballs simmered in the heady sauce, the sisters eagerly described their father's ras el hanout, the traditional Moroccan spice blend we stirred into the meat. Translated as "head of the shop," ras el hanout is a house blend that can be made with as few as eight spices or as many as thirty. For this recipe, instead of using a blended ras el hanout I've added a few of my favorite spices which results in a pot full of meatballs as tasty and distinct as Dina and Nora's. I serve them over buttered rice, or spear each onto wooden picks for a very popular appetizer at parties.

INGREDIENTS

MEATBALLS:

- 1 1/2 pounds ground beef
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 1/2 teaspoon salt

Sauce:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 1/2 cups beef broth
- 1 14 ounce can diced tomatoes, with juice
- 1/4 cup golden raisins
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro



PROCESS:

Meatballs:

Gently mix all meatball ingredients in a large bowl. Using moistened hands, form meat into golf ball size balls. Arrange on a baking sheet and set aside.

Sauce:

Heat oil in a tagine or heavy skillet. Add onions and sauté for 15 minutes. Add garlic, cinnamon, cumin, and turmeric. Stir for 2 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes with juice, and raisins. Bring to a simmer.

Place the meatballs in the pot in one layer, gently pressing them into the liquid to submerge. Sprinkle the cilantro all over. Cover the pot and cook over medium- low heat until the meatballs are cooked through, about 30 minutes. Uncover and cook another 10 minutes, until the liquid has reduced slightly. Serve warm. Meatballs can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days and reheated in a 350-degree oven for 15 minutes.