

01/11/11 - Butternut Squash with Kooba

As of yesterday I finally am organized and ready for the New Year. I have plans for 2011 and the year is off to a great start! My friend Nina Bassa was kind enough to come over yesterday and cook with me for 3 hours. Nina is an amazing cook and fountain of culinary knowledge. She is not a foodie or professional in any way, but if there was a category for chefs called reality versus made for TV fantasy, she would



Nina is Israeli, her parents originally from Romania. Her husband is Iraqi. She cooks Sephardic, Romanian, Iraqi, Israeli and all kinds of other cuisines, like Moroccan. I love when she comes to 'play'. Yesterday we made a sweet and sour soup full of succulent squash chunks and Kooba (filled dumplings) filled with spicy ground beef. Wow! This soup-stew, packs an incredible flavor punch, very healthy, and so satisfying in this unseasonably cold weather.



You will need:



1/2 large Spanish onion, finely diced

2 teaspoons, safflower oil

1 14 ounce can tomato sauce

1 can of water to rinse can

2 and ½ quarts water

1 butternut squash, peeled and cut in 1 to 1 and ½ inch chunks

2 teaspoons sugar

¾ cup sour Persian Zareshk (barberries)

1/3 cup raisins

3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

1 teaspoon salt or more

1 teaspoon turmeric

3 teaspoons Baharat

Fresh ground pepper

Kooba



1 pound of ground beef

½ large Spanish onion, finely diced (use the other half of the first onion for the soup)

½ cup finely chopped Italian parsley

1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper

Salt to taste

1 teaspoon paprika

1 teaspoon Baharat

3 cups Farina

1 and ½ cups water, this is approximate, do it by feel

Preheat a large Dutch oven on medium, add the oil and then add the onions. Sauté the onions until translucent, then add the tomato sauce, water, squash, and spices. Add the Zareshk, raisins, lemon juice and cover to simmer for about ½ hour while you prepare the Kooba.



Mix the ground beef with all of the spices, parsley and onions. In a separate bowl add the farina. Pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the cold water to the farina and let it sit for a moment to begin to absorb the liquid. Next add cold water until it creates a formable loose paste consistency. Prepare a small bowl of cold water for wetting your hands





Take a small walnut size ball of farina batter, and roll it smooth in your wet hands. Using the index finger on the opposite hand spread the ball, in your palm, into a flat disk about two inches in diameter. Take a small mounded teaspoonful of meat

filling and place it in the center of the farina disk. Bring up the sides of the disk to cover the meat. Pinch to seal and roll the ball in your palm until smooth with all the meat enclosed. Set each Kooba aside on a wet board until you have formed all of



Take the lid off of the simmering soup, taste the soup and adjust the seasoning. Carefully drop the Kooba into the soup one by one. Cover and let simmer for another 25 minutes until the Kooba are cooked through. Now the dish is ready to serve as thick soup, over rice, with fresh pita or however you like.



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