

Lamb Tagine

This dish is commonly found in North Africa. I have never been there, but those who have tell me you can't walk into a kitchen in Morocco without getting splattered with the stuff. It has a million variations, but I like this one because it is really simple to prepare. It needs to cook for a long time at low heat in an oven-proof, deep-sided, casserole dish. The dish should have a cover, but you can improvise one with aluminum foil and a pot-lid or plate, if necessary.

- 2 cups chopped onion, (1 very large onion)
 - 3 cups lamb shoulder, trimmed, boned and cut into 1" cubes (the meat from one 3 pound shoulder)
 - 6 cups eggplant, cut into 1" cubes (about one medium eggplant)
 - 1 cup dried prunes (4-5 ounces)
 - ½ cup blanched almonds
 - 3 Tbs. ras-el-hanout (see below)
 - ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
 - Salt and Black Pepper
1. Peel and chop the onion coarsely; the chunks should be about 1" cubes. Place them at the bottom of the casserole. Sprinkle with 1 Tbs. Ras-el-hanout.
 2. Cut the meat from a 3-pound lamb shoulder, trimming most of the external fat away. Put it on a plate and season generously with salt and pepper. Distribute it evenly over the onion. Sprinkle with another Tbs. Ras-el-hanout.
 3. If you don't have blanched almonds, throw whole almonds in a small amount of boiling water for 1-2 minutes and the rinse and drain. The skins will then pop right off when you squeeze the almonds.
 4. Add the almonds, prunes, and eggplant in even layers to the dish.
 5. Sprinkle the remaining Ras-el-hanout over the dish and drizzle the olive oil so that it is as evenly distributed as possible.
 6. Cover the dish and place it in a 300 degree oven for 3 hours. Add ¼ cup of water to the dish and re-cover. Cook for another 1-2 hours.
 7. Mix the layers and serve with crisp fried potatoes or a rice pilaf.

It is rumored that this dish, like most stews and casseroles, tastes better reheated on the second day. I've personally never managed to wait that long to eat it. Maybe your moral fiber is tougher than mine.

Ras-El-Hanout

This pungent spice mixture can often be found in Middle-Eastern markets or on the Web. There are infinite variations on the theme—no two mixtures will ever be the same. Some recipes have over 100 ingredients, some unusual and some truly weird, and while I don't

recommend that you try adding Grains of Paradise, Belladonna, or Spanish Fly to your stash, rest assured that others have done so before you, and they are mostly still alive.

This relatively simple mixture is adapted from [*The Essential Mediterranean Cookbook*](#) from Thunder Bay Press (a great book to own). If you don't have all the ingredients, feel free to experiment with what you have. If you use decently fresh spices and stay close to the proportions listed here, it will turn out okay.

- 1 tsp. turmeric
 - 2 tsp. allspice
 - 4 tsp. black pepper
 - 1 whole nutmeg (crushed)
 - 1 whole clove
 - 1/8th tsp. cardamom
 - 1/2 a cinnamon stick (crushed)
 - 3/4 tsp. cayenne powder
1. Put all the ingredients in a spice grinder or mortar and grind into a fine powder. I use an el-cheapo mini-chopper kept for this purpose. At various times in the past I have used an old pepper grinder, a coffee mill, and a snow-blower to grind spices, so use whatever works for you!