

A Recipe from KNOPF



DJAJ BIL ASSAL

Chicken with Caramelized Baby Onions and Honey

This is one of the classics of Moroccan cooking and this version, with shallots or baby onions, is sensational. The art is to reduce the sauce at the end until it is rich and caramelized. It is important to taste it in order to get the right balance between sweet and savory.

INGREDIENTS

1 pound shallots or baby onions
1 onion, chopped
4 tablespoons sunflower oil
a good pinch of saffron threads
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 chicken, cut up in 6 or 8 pieces

salt and black pepper
1 to 1 ½ tablespoons clear honey

To garnish:

½ cup blanched almonds or a handful of
sesame seeds (optional)

SERVES 4 to 6

To peel the shallots or baby onions, blanch them in boiling water for 5 minutes, drain, and when cool enough to handle, peel off the skins and trim the root ends.

Sauté the chopped onion until softened in the oil over a medium heat in a pan or casserole large enough to hold the chicken pieces in one layer. Stir in the saffron, ginger, and cinnamon, then put in the chicken pieces. Season with salt and pepper, and turn to brown them lightly all over.

Add about 1 cup water and cook, covered, over a low heat, turning the pieces over, for 15 minutes, or until the chicken breasts are done. Lift out the breasts and put them to one side. Add the shallots or baby onions and continue to cook, covered, for about 25 minutes, or until the remaining chicken pieces are very tender. During the cooking, turn the chicken pieces and stir the onions occasionally; add a little water, if necessary.

Lift out the chicken pieces and set to one side. Stir the honey into the pan. Check the seasoning. You need quite a bit of pepper to mitigate the sweetness. Cook, uncovered, until all the water has evaporated, and the onions are brown, caramelized, and so soft that you could crush them, as they say in Morocco, "with your tongue."

Return the chicken pieces to the pan, spoon the onions on top of them, and heat through. A few minutes should be enough. Serve, if you wish, sprinkled either with blanched almonds fried in a drop of oil until they are lightly golden, or with toasted sesame seeds.

