



Tomato and Mint Salad

PREP: 25 MINUTES

Sprinkle a pinch of salt on a cutting board. Using the flat blade of a knife, crush a large garlic clove into the salt. Finely chop the clove with the salt to create a chunky paste. In a screw-top jar combine the garlic mixture, ¼ cup olive oil, ½ tsp. lemon peel, 1 Tbsp. lemon juice, and 1 Tbsp. white wine or cider vinegar. Cover and shake well. Slice 3 large tomatoes crosswise. Snip enough fresh mint to equal ½ cup. Place half the tomato slices in a single layer on a serving platter. Top with half of the mint. Drizzle with half of the dressing. Top with remaining tomato slices and remaining mint. Sprinkle with freshly ground black pepper and drizzle with remaining dressing. Serve immediately. Makes 6 side-dish servings.

savory and sweet, use such familiar spices as cilantro and cinnamon, and can feature chicken, beef, or lamb. Tagines also include such ingredients as almonds, chickpeas, dried fruits, and olives.

Tagines are spiced with *ras el hanout*, an aromatic blend consisting of about 30 different spices. A simpler version is used (see photo, below) for our Chicken and Squash Tagine. Its subtle perfume suggests the warm spiciness of cloves and cardamom and the meaty bite of cumin and garlic.

A familiar side dish to a tagine dinner would be a Tomato and Mint Salad (left). Although couscous is also a Moroccan staple, surprisingly, it isn't usually served with a tagine, which is considered a meal by itself.

Traditionally, tagines are prepared in a vessel of glazed earthenware or terra-cotta with a conical lid (the vessel is also called a tagine), although tagines turn out fine cooked in a Dutch oven. The secret is slow-cooking in a pot with a tight lid. The tagine's cone-shaped lid traps the steam generated during the long cooking time and results in a succulent, tender dinner. (And if you want to know the answer to the "which came first" question, the culinary dish is named after the utensil.) ♪



MOROCCAN SPICE MIXTURE: In a bowl, mix together 2 tsp. salt; 1 tsp. each of crushed red pepper, ground cardamom, ground cloves, turmeric, ground cinnamon, ground ginger, and ground coriander; and ½ tsp. black pepper. Makes about 3 Tbsp.

WHAT'S THE DISH?

If you're looking for a true-to-life experience, cooking in an authentic tagine really rocks the Casbah.

Use only glazed terra-cotta tagines for cooking; use unglazed or decorative ceramic pieces for serving only. Be sure to use a heat deflector, available at hardware and gourmet shops, when using tagine vessels on the stove. Cure glazed tagines before using them by soaking both pieces overnight in water in a large plastic tub. Le Creuset's tagine (above, right) features a bright red glazed earthenware lid with a cast iron base suitable for any heat source. Sheherazade Imports' version, imported from Morocco (left), sports a steam vent in the lid and a ridged bottom that results in tagine dinners that are still moist without getting watery. For information: Le Creuset, 11.25 qt, \$115; 877/273-8738. Sheherazade Imports, three sizes, \$35 to \$55; 212/539-1771 or www.sheherazadenyc.com.

