Main dishes / Ethiopia

Berbere-Braised Lamb Shoulder

Bone-in lamb shoulder painted in berbere's fiery, deeply aromatic spice blend, seared in niter kibbeh until ruddy-dark, then braised for hours with sweated onions until the meat falls from the bone in tender, spice-saturated shreds.

Time 300 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 1400 g Bone-in lamb shoulder, cut into large pieces
- ☐ 60 g Niter kibbeh (Ethiopian spiced butter) or ghee
- ☐ 5 cloves Garlic cloves, minced
- ☐ 400 g Canned diced tomatoes
- ☐ 120 ml Tej (Ethiopian honey wine) or dry white wine
- ☐ 45 g Berbere spice blend
- ☐ 350 g White onions, finely diced
- ☐ 25 g Fresh ginger, grated
- ☐ 400 ml Lamb or beef stock
- ☐ 10 g Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Pat the lamb pieces completely dry with paper towels — moisture is the enemy of a good sear. In a small bowl, mix 2 tablespoons of the berbere with the salt and rub this mixture thoroughly over every surface of the lamb. Work it into any natural seams and pockets. Allow to sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before searing — a cold piece of meat chills the pan and prevents proper Maillard browning.

02 Heat the niter kibbeh in a large heavy pot (Dutch oven) over high heat until it shimmers and begins to smoke lightly. Working in batches — never crowding the pot — sear the lamb pieces for 3-4 minutes per side until deeply browned, almost mahogany. The berbere spices will darken and bloom in the spiced butter, releasing an intoxicating, complex aroma. Press each piece firmly against the pot bottom with a spatula. Between batches, do not scrape up the fond — it will dissolve into the braise later.

03 In the same pot over medium heat, add the diced onion and cook in the remaining niter kibbeh and fond for 20-25 minutes until deeply golden — almost caramelized. This long, slow onion cook is fundamental to Ethiopian wat cooking. Add garlic and ginger, cook 2 minutes. Add the remaining berbere and stir for 1 minute to fry in the fat. Pour in the tej and scrape every bit of fond from the pot bottom — this is pure flavor. Add tomatoes and stock, stir to combine, then nestle the seared lamb pieces back in. The liquid should reach halfway up the meat. Bring to a simmer, cover tightly, and braise at 150°C in the oven or on the lowest stovetop flame for 3-4 hours.

04 Remove the lamb pieces to a warm plate. Increase heat under the braising liquid and boil uncovered for 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sauce reduces to a thick, glossy consistency that coats a spoon heavily. Skim any excess fat from the surface if desired — but some fat is traditional and carries the berbere's flavor. Return the lamb to the pot and baste with the reduced sauce. Taste and adjust salt. Serve over injera (Ethiopian flatbread) or rice, with additional sauce spooned over generously.

Recipe & provenance ForkRecipe Kitchen / ForkRecipe / FoodML and contributors / CC BY-SA 4.0.
Original recipe and attribution CC BY-SA 4.0
Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
recipes.dvs-services.be / berbere-lamb-shoulder