Main dishes / Ethiopia

Misir Wot (Red Lentil Stew)

Ethiopia's everyday vegan red lentil stew — red lentils cooked down in a base of caramelized onion and niter-kibbeh, spiced with berbere until the lentils dissolve into a thick, earthy, brick-red mass full of aromatic depth.

Time 50 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 300 g Red lentils (masoor dal), rinsed
- ☐ 400 g Yellow onions, finely minced
- ☐ 60 g Niter kibbeh or clarified spiced butter
- ☐ 40 g Berbere spice blend
- ☐ 15 g Garlic cloves, minced
- ☐ 10 g Fresh ginger, grated
- ☐ 700 g Water or light vegetable stock
- ☐ 8 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 15 g Fresh lemon juice

Let's make it.

01 Place the finely minced onions in a heavy-bottomed pot with no oil over medium heat. Stir every 2–3 minutes for 20–25 minutes — the onions will first release water and steam in it, then dry out and begin to colour. The goal is a reduced, dark-tan, sweet-smelling onion base. This dry caramelization without fat is the traditional Ethiopian method (called 'dry frying' the onions) that gives misir wot its characteristic depth. The onions should shrink to about one-third of their starting volume and turn a warm golden-brown before any fat is added.

02 Add the niter kibbeh to the caramelized onions and stir until melted. Add the berbere, garlic, and ginger. Stir vigorously and cook over medium heat for 4–6 minutes, stirring constantly — the berbere will foam slightly as it hits the hot fat, then the fat will begin to separate at the edges as the spices cook. The mixture will become a very thick, dark, fragrant paste. The cooking of berbere in fat is non-negotiable: raw berbere tastes sharp and acrid; bloomed berbere tastes rounded, deep, and complex.

03 Add the rinsed red lentils to the spiced base and stir to coat them in the dark paste — they should turn a dark brick-red immediately. Add the water or stock and the salt. Stir to combine, scraping any stuck paste from the bottom. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring occasionally. Reduce to a medium simmer, cover partially, and cook for 20–25 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes to prevent sticking. Red lentils cook quickly and dissolve completely — misir wot is not chunky; the lentils should entirely melt into the sauce to form a thick, uniform, porridge-like texture.

04 Add the lemon juice and stir through. Taste and adjust: more berbere for heat and depth, more salt for savory presence, more lemon for brightness. Let the stew rest for 5 minutes off the heat — it will thicken slightly as it sits. Serve on injera: spoon the misir wot in a mound on top of a large round of injera and allow it to spread and be absorbed. The injera tears into pieces that scoop the stew. Traditionally served alongside other wots on a single large shared plate.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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