Sauces / Georgia

Tkemali

Georgia's indispensable wild plum sauce — shatteringly tart green or red tkemali plums simmered until collapsed, then pureed with garlic, pennyroyal, and cilantro into a sauce that is bracingly sour, herbaceous, and savory all at once, the Caucasian soul-mate to grilled meats and roasted potatoes.

Time 45 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 10 parts Sour plums — green tkemali or firm underripe red plums
- ☐ 2 parts Water
- ☐ 0.5 parts Garlic cloves
- ☐ 1 parts Fresh cilantro (leaves and tender stems)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Fresh dill fronds
- ☐ 0.3 parts Dried pennyroyal (ombalo) or fresh spearmint
- ☐ 0.2 parts Ground coriander
- ☐ 0.1 parts Dried red pepper flakes
- ☐ 0.2 parts Fine salt

Let's make it.

01 Place the whole plums and water in a wide, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover partially, and cook 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until every plum has burst and the flesh has completely collapsed away from the pit. The water will turn deep pink or green depending on your plum variety and will smell intensely of cooked fruit and bright acid. Do not let the pot boil hard — a gentle simmer preserves the clean tartness; aggressive boiling muddies it.

02 Set a medium-mesh sieve over a clean saucepan. Pour the hot plum slurry in batches into the sieve and press firmly with the back of a large spoon or a silicone spatula, working the flesh through the mesh in circular motions. What passes through is the sauce; what remains in the sieve — skins and pits — is discarded. This step determines the texture of the finished tkemali: press until the residue in the sieve is almost dry and nothing of value remains.

03 Return the purée to medium-low heat. Finely mince or press the garlic and stir it into the purée along with the ground coriander and red pepper flakes. Simmer gently, stirring frequently, for 10-12 minutes until the sauce thickens slightly — it should coat a spoon rather than pool off it — and the garlic has cooked through its raw sharpness into a mellow, savory presence. The sauce will spit and pop as it thickens; lower the heat and keep stirring to prevent catching.

04 Pull the pan off the heat. Finely chop the cilantro, dill, and pennyroyal (or mint) and stir them into the hot sauce — the residual heat wilts and integrates them without cooking away their bright volatile aromas. Season generously with salt, stir thoroughly, and taste: tkemali should hit the palate with sharpness first, then herb-green complexity, with a savory, garlicky warmth underneath and heat at the back. It should taste aggressively tart — it is a condiment to cut through rich food, not a jam. Adjust salt and pepper as needed, then cool completely before serving or jarring.

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