

How to make chicken musakhan



“Chicken musakhan is the hugely popular national dish of Palestine and is a dish to eat with your hands and with your friends,” explains Tara Wigley, co-author of new cookbook *Falastin*, along with Ottolenghi chef, Sami Tamimi.

“It should be served from one pot or plate, for everyone to then tear at some pita or flatbread and spoon over the chicken and topping for themselves.

“Traditionally, musakhan was made around the olive oil pressing season in October or November to celebrate

(and gauge the quality of) the freshly pressed oil,” adds Tara.

“The bread would be cooked in a hot taboon oven lined with smooth round stones, to create small craters in the bread in which the meat juices, onion and olive oil all happily pool together.

“Chicken musakhan is cooked year-round nowadays, layered with shop-bought taboon or pita bread, and is a dish to suit all occasions: easy and comforting enough to be the perfect week night supper as it is, but also special enough to stand alongside other dishes at a feast.”

CHICKEN MUSAKHAN - THE NATIONAL DISH OF PALESTINE

Ingredients (Serves four)

1 chicken (about 1.7kg), divided into 4 pieces (1.4kg) or 1kg chicken supremes (between 4 and 6, depending on size), skin on, if you prefer
120ml olive oil, plus 2-3tbsp extra, to finish
1tbsp ground cumin
3tbsp sumac
Half tsp ground cinnamon
Half tsp ground allspice
30g pine nuts
3 large red onions, thinly sliced 2-3mm thick (500g)
4 taboon breads - or any flatbread (such as Arabic flatbread or naan bread) (330g)
5g parsley leaves, roughly chopped
Salt and black pepper
300g Greek-style yoghurt
1 lemon, quartered

Method

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C fan.
2 Place the chicken in a large mixing bowl with two tablespoons of oil, one teaspoon of cumin, one and a half teaspoons of sumac, the cinnamon, allspice, one teaspoon of salt and a good grind of black pepper. Mix well to combine, then spread out on a parchment-lined baking tray. Roast until the chicken is



cooked through. This will take about 30 minutes if starting with supremes and up to 45 minutes if starting with the whole chicken, quartered. Remove from the oven and set aside. Don't discard any juices which have collected in the tray.

3 Meanwhile, put two tablespoons of oil into a large saute pan, about 24cm, and place on a medium heat. Add the pine nuts and cook for about two to three minutes, stirring constantly, until the nuts are golden brown. Transfer to a bowl lined with kitchen paper (leaving the oil behind

in the pan) and set aside.

4 Add the remaining 60ml of oil to the pan, along with the onions and three quarters of a teaspoon of salt. Return to a medium heat for about 15 minutes, stirring from time to time, until the onions are completely soft and pale golden but not caramelised.

5 Add two tablespoons of sumac, the remaining two teaspoons of cumin and a grind of black pepper and mix through, until the onions are completely coated. Remove from the heat and set aside.

6 When ready to assemble the dish, set the oven to a grill setting and slice or tear the bread into quarters or sixths. Place them under the grill for about two to three minutes, to crisp up, then arrange them on a large platter. Top the bread with half the onions, followed by all the chicken and any chicken juices left in the tray. Either keep each piece of chicken as it is or else roughly shred it as you plate up, into two or three large chunks.

7 Spoon the remaining onions over the top and sprinkle with the pine nuts, parsley, one and a half teaspoons of sumac and a final drizzle of olive oil. Serve at once, with the yoghurt and a wedge of lemon alongside.

● *Falastin: A Cookbook* by Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley, is published by Ebury Press, priced £27