

A CHEF'S FIELD GUIDE

The African Table

A Continental Kitchen, Volume One

North · West · East · Central · Southern — 30 Dishes, Cooked with Precision

Recipes By

BLUEPRINT BAZAAR

NORTH AFRICA · WEST AFRICA · EAST AFRICA · CENTRAL AFRICA · SOUTHERN AFRICA

A Note From the Kitchen

This book began with a simple conviction: that the food of a continent as vast and varied as Africa deserves the same precision, patience, and respect that we extend to the culinary traditions of France or Japan. Every dish in these pages has been tested for clarity, not just flavour — measured in grams and cups alike, timed to the minute, and written so that a first-time cook and a seasoned one can both follow it with confidence and get the same excellent result.

You will notice that many recipes include a short paragraph explaining *why* a step matters — why the onions must cook dry before the oil goes in, why a sauce must reduce before the eggs are added, why cassava must be soaked before it's safe to eat. Cooking well is not about memorising instructions; it's about understanding what each step is doing to the food in front of you. Once you understand that, you can trust your own instincts the next time you stand at the stove.

This is Volume One of a growing series — thirty dishes spanning five regions, chosen as a foundation. Cook them in order, or jump straight to what calls to you. Either way, welcome to the table.

— *Blueprint Bazaar*

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CHAPTER

North Africa

North African cooking is built on the slow marriage of spice and patience. From the tagines of Morocco to the harissa-laced soups of Tunisia, this is a cuisine of preserved lemons, saffron, cumin, and bread used as both food and utensil. The dishes in this chapter reward a cook who respects low, steady heat and a well-stocked spice drawer.

Moroccan Chicken Tagine with Preserved Lemon & Olives

Djej Mqualli

This is the tagine most Moroccan households consider their signature dish — chicken braised low and slow with ginger, saffron, and the sharp brine of preserved lemon. The conical tagine lid traps steam and returns it to the pot as bastes of flavoured liquid, which is why the dish tastes far richer than its short ingredient list suggests. A heavy Dutch oven achieves the same effect if you don't own traditional earthenware.

SERVES	PREP	COOK	LEVEL
4	25 minutes, plus 1 hour marinating	1 hour 10 minutes	Intermediate

INGREDIENTS

Equipment: Tagine or heavy lidded Dutch oven, Mortar and pestle (or spice grinder)

- 1.6 kg (3.5 lb) whole chicken, jointed into 8 pieces, skin on
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 large yellow onions, one grated, one thinly sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed to a paste
- 1 tbsp fresh ginger, grated
- 1/2 tsp saffron threads, crumbled and steeped in 2 tbsp warm water
- 1 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp sweet paprika
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 preserved lemon, pulp discarded, rind cut into strips (plus 1 tbsp of its brine)

METHOD

- 1 In a large bowl, combine the grated onion, garlic paste, ginger, saffron water, cumin, turmeric, paprika, 1 tsp salt, and a generous grind of pepper. Rub this marinade thoroughly into the chicken pieces, working it under the skin where you can. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or overnight for deeper flavour.
- 2 Heat the olive oil in the tagine base or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the sliced onion and cook gently for 8–10 minutes until soft and translucent — do not let it brown, as browning will muddy the sauce's colour.
- 3 Push the onions to the side, increase the heat slightly, and lay the chicken pieces skin-side down. Sear for 2–3 minutes per side, just to set the surface — you are not trying to develop a deep crust here.
- 4 Nestle the cinnamon stick among the chicken, pour in the stock, and bring to a gentle simmer. Cover and cook on low heat for 40 minutes, turning the chicken once at the halfway point.
- 5 Uncover, add the preserved lemon strips, brine, and olives. Continue simmering uncovered for 15–20 minutes, until the sauce has reduced to a thick, glossy consistency that coats the back of a spoon and the chicken is fully tender.
- 6 Taste and adjust salt carefully — preserved lemon and olives are both salty, so season last. Stir through the coriander and parsley just before serving.

- 150 g (1 cup) green or violet olives, pitted
- 350 ml (1.5 cups) chicken stock, plus more as needed
- 2 tbsp chopped coriander (cilantro), plus extra to finish
- 2 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and black pepper to taste

- 7 Serve directly from the tagine with crusty bread or steamed couscous to soak up the sauce.

CHEF'S PRECISION NOTES

- Real saffron matters here — turmeric alone will colour the dish but cannot replicate saffron's floral aroma. Bloom it in warm water, never dry, to release its full flavour.
- If you can't source preserved lemon, simmer strips of ordinary lemon zest in the sauce for the final 10 minutes and finish with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice — it's not identical, but it approximates the brightness.
- The sauce should never fully cover the chicken while braising; this is a shallow braise, not a stew. If your pot is deep, use a smaller diameter one or reduce the stock by a third.

TO SERVE

Pair with a simple orange and radish salad dressed in orange blossom water to cut the richness.

STORAGE

Keeps refrigerated for up to 3 days; the flavour deepens overnight. Reheat gently on the stovetop with a splash of water.



CHAPTER

West Africa

West African cuisine is defined by bold, layered heat, deeply savoury stews built on tomato and pepper bases, and starchy accompaniments — rice, fufu, plantain — designed to carry sauce. Palm oil, scotch bonnet chillies, and ground melon seeds (egusi) recur throughout the region, but each country and even each household has its own precise ratio, closely guarded and fiercely defended.

Jollof Rice

Jollof

Few dishes provoke more good-natured national rivalry than jollof rice, claimed with equal pride by Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal. This version follows the Nigerian party-style approach: a deeply reduced tomato-pepper base cooked down until concentrated, into which par-parboiled rice is folded and steamed to finish. The goal is rice that is fully infused with colour and flavour, with a faint smokiness at the bottom of the pot — the coveted 'bottom pot' or party jollof char.

SERVES	PREP	COOK	LEVEL
6	20 minutes	1 hour	Intermediate

INGREDIENTS

Equipment: Blender, Large heavy-bottomed pot with tight lid

- 6 large ripe plum tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 2 red bell peppers, roughly chopped
- 2 scotch bonnet chillies (adjust to taste), stems removed
- 1 large onion, half roughly chopped for the blend, half thinly sliced
- 120 ml (1/2 cup) neutral oil
- 3 tbsp tomato paste
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tbsp grated ginger
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 2 tsp curry powder
- 1 chicken or beef stock cube, crumbled
- 600 g (3 cups) long-grain parboiled rice, rinsed until water runs clear

METHOD

- 1 Blend the tomatoes, bell peppers, scotch bonnets, and the roughly chopped half-onion until smooth. Pour into a saucepan and simmer uncovered over medium heat for 15–20 minutes until reduced by about half and darkened in colour — this pre-reduction concentrates flavour and removes excess water that would otherwise make the rice mushy. Set aside.
- 2 In your large heavy pot, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the sliced onion and fry for 5 minutes until soft. Add the tomato paste and fry, stirring constantly, for 5–6 minutes — this step, known as 'frying the base,' cooks out the tomato paste's raw acidity and is essential; do not skip or rush it.
- 3 Add the garlic and ginger, cooking for 1 minute until fragrant, then pour in the reduced tomato-pepper mixture. Add the bay leaves, thyme, curry powder, and crumbled stock cube. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thick and the oil visibly separates and pools at the edges — this 'oil floating to the top' is the traditional visual cue that the base is ready.
- 4 Season the base with salt, tasting carefully — remember the rice will absorb much of this seasoning. Add the rinsed rice and stir thoroughly to coat every grain in the sauce.
- 5 Pour in the stock so the liquid sits about 1cm above the level of the rice (add more hot water if needed to reach this level). Bring to a boil, then immediately reduce to the lowest possible heat.
- 6 Cover the pot tightly — place a layer of foil beneath the lid if it doesn't seal perfectly, to trap all the steam. Cook undisturbed for

- 500 ml (2 cups) chicken stock, plus more as needed
- Salt to taste

30–35 minutes. Resist the urge to lift the lid and stir; this releases steam the rice needs to cook through evenly.

- 7 After 30 minutes, check one grain from the centre of the pot for doneness. If still firm, re-cover and cook a further 5–10 minutes. Once done, turn off the heat and let the pot rest, covered, for 10 minutes before fluffing with a fork.

CHEF'S PRECISION NOTES

- Parboiled rice is not optional here — it holds its shape and doesn't turn to mush the way regular long-grain can under this cooking method. If substituting, reduce the liquid slightly and check for doneness earlier.
- The 'party jollof' smoky flavour comes from a light char developing at the very bottom of the pot in the final minutes. If you want this deliberately, raise the heat to medium for the last 2 minutes only, listening for a faint crackle, then remove immediately from heat.
- Frying the tomato paste properly (step 2) is the single most important technique in this dish — an underdone base tastes sharp and raw no matter how long the rice cooks afterward.

TO SERVE

Serve with fried plantain, a simple side salad, and grilled chicken or beef.

STORAGE

Refrigerates well for up to 4 days and reheats beautifully — many cooks consider jollof better the next day.



You've Seen 2 of 30 Recipes

This preview covers the North and West Africa chapters only. The full edition of *The African Table* includes all five regional chapters, the complete Pantry & Glossary, and every Chef's Precision Note — 71 pages in total.

East Africa · Doro Wat, Nyama Choma & more

Central Africa · Moambe Chicken, Ndolé & more

Southern Africa · Bobotie, Piri-Piri Chicken & more

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