

squash and chickpea moroccan stew

Our first night in Paris in October, we had dinner at a great, inexpensive Moroccan restaurant in the 3ème called Chez Omar. The specialty is couscous, and the various stews you ladle over it. Alex had the chicken, I had the vegetables, but I hear we really missed out on the Royal, which is a big mess of meat. Served family style, the food was unpretentious, light and so healthy, I made a mental bookmark to try my hand at it when I got home.



Which, being me, I promptly forgot about. What jogged my memory was a version of a Moroccan vegetable stew on [Ask Aida](#) on the Food Network last week. I think that Moroccan cooking can be intimidating: I don't have a [1 3/4-Quart Le Creuset Cast Iron Moroccan Tagine in Caribbean Blue](#) for the low price of \$200, nor do I have one I picked up for \$2.95 at the central souk in Marrakesh in 1968. (Okay, I wasn't even alive in 1968 but for some reason, everyone but me seems to have a story about something fabulous they bought there when backpacking across the world and I am jealous.) I also don't have a *couscoussier*, yet astoundingly, I was able to pull off this squash and chickpea stew for dinner on Sunday, and it was delicious.



This is the kind of food that's perfect for this time of year. The ingredients are fairly simple — and the harder-to-find ones, like saffron and preserved lemons are optional — the dish is incredibly healthy and it's a nice healthy break from the heavier stews and soups that usually get us through the cold winters.

Squash and Chickpea Moroccan Stew

Adapted from [Aida Mollencamp](#)

So, about those [preserved lemons](#): This isn't the first Moroccan dish I've made, but I've always been on the fence about the inclusion of preserved lemons. What if I searched all over town for them and ended up dropping \$10 on something I hated. Would I like salt-pickled lemons? This time, I took the plunge (found them at Garden of Eden, for you New Yorkers, gourmet/specialty shops for everyone else or you can try [Elise's homemade recipe](#)) and well: I think they're an acquired taste that I haven't acquired yet, but hope to. Yet they were wonderfully fragrant in the dish and if you're looking to try out something new, or if you're already smitten with them, go for it.

To veganize this, replace the butter with additional olive oil, use vegetable broth and skip the yogurt.

Serves 6 to 8

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, small dice
4 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 (3-inch) cinnamon stick
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 pound butternut squash, large dice
3/4 pound red potatoes, large dice
2 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
2 cups cooked chickpeas, drained
1 (14-ounce) can diced tomatoes, with juices
Pinch saffron threads (optional)
1/2 preserved lemon, finely chopped
1 cup brined green olives (Aida recommended Cerignola)
Steamed couscous, for serving (directions [here](#) and elsewhere on the web)
Fresh cilantro leaves, roughly chopped, for garnish
Toasted slivered almonds, for garnish
Plain yogurt, for garnish
Hot sauce of your choice (for serving)

Heat butter and olive oil in a 3- to 4-quart Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed saucepan with a tight fitting lid over medium heat. When oil shimmers, add onion, garlic, cumin, and cinnamon, and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until spices are aromatic and onions are soft and translucent, about 5 minutes.

Add squash and potatoes, season with salt and freshly ground black pepper, stir to coat, and cook until just tender, about 3 minutes. Add broth, chickpeas, tomatoes and their juices, and saffron, if using. Bring mixture to a boil then reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer until squash is fork tender, about 10 minutes.

Remove from heat and stir in preserved lemon and olives. Serve over couscous garnished with cilantro, almonds, and yogurt.