

# Chicken Tagine

## Chicken Tagine

This dish was a long time in the coming, both figuratively and literally. Several years ago I had an incredible lamb tagine dish at [Luca's Mediterranean Café](#) in Keene, New Hampshire. It was a phenomenal dish (as all of Luca's dishes are) using local pastured lamb and other fresh, local ingredients. This little gem in the heart of Keene, New Hampshire is a bucket list stop. If you are ever in the area, you need to visit. And by "in the area" I mean on the East Coast. The Southeast and Midwest should count as well. Never mind where you are, just go ahead and put it on your bucket list. Since Luca set that high bar some years ago, I've been waiting for the right time to make my own attempt.

The time arrived and I finally got around to purchasing my own tagine, which managed to arrive in about 42 pieces. Due to the complexities of international shipping in this new Covid-age, it took eight months for a replacement to arrive. Fortunately, it arrived as the appropriate two piece that it is supposed to be.

This is a phenomenally, massively brilliant dish. But there are a few caveats. You don't have to cook this in a tagine, but if you've been thinking about getting one I highly, highly recommended it. The shape of the cooking vessel acts to steam the food and retain the moisture, making for a succulent texture that is redolent in the spice blend that permeates every bite. Once you make this, you'll end up using the tagine more than you think.

You don't have to take the extra step of browning; it takes less time and is easier to simply place everything in the tagine to start (if you do this, remove the skin as it just

becomes flabby). However, the few minutes and one extra dirty pan that this step requires more than pays dividends. When you remove the chicken and onions from the marinade, and separate them all the additional spices and flavors you added will track with them. Browning the chicken gives it an additional layer of flavor. When you add the onions to the pan, as the onions release moisture, the mixture will absorb the fond (those little bits of flavor bomb attached to the bottom of the pan after you finish cooking the chicken). All the spices that you added to the mixture will also be heated in the pan giving another flavor profile to the dish. Crisping the skin and adding it as a garnish not only adds intense, concentrated flavor, but also adds a very pleasant textural bite to the overall dish.



Tagine refers to both the dish and the vessel in which it is cooked

I would also highly recommend the inclusion of the [ras el hanout](#) spice blend. If you don't want to make your own, then you can certainly purchase a prepared blend, but take the time to make sure you source a fresh, authentic blend from a reputable dealer. In my opinion, this blend of spices is a critical component. It doesn't really add a lot of heat that many people may associate with North African foods (if you

want more heat on your portion, you can certainly add another traditional North African blend, [harissa paste](#)), but it adds a floral sensuality which is the epitome of what cooking with spices is all about. It also adds its own unique signature. Not Indian, not quite Middle Eastern, but something that is reminiscent of both at the same time that it is exceptionally individual.

Finally, feel free to experiment with variations of this dish. I mentioned the phenomenal lamb tagine I had Luca's Mediterranean Café. I certainly can imagine a fragrant fall dish made with butternut or other winter squash in place of the chicken. To make this completely vegetarian, just replace the chicken stock with a vegetable equivalent. If you want to spice up your life, you simply can't do better than this!

### ***Ingredients:***

- 1 whole chicken, cut into pieces (quartered)
- 1 large preserved lemon (sold in specialty food shops or on-line if you have not made your own)
- 3 medium onions, sliced thin
- 5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 1 tablespoon *ras el hanout*
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon turmeric
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{2}$  freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon saffron threads, pulverized
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

- 1 cinnamon stick
- 8 kalamata olives, pitted, and halved
- 8 green olives, pitted, and halved
- 1 cup chicken stock
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- Parsley, fresh flat-leaf, chopped for garnish

***Directions:***

Remove the flesh from the preserved lemons and chop the finely. Reserve rind for cooking. Add the lemon flesh to a bowl along with the chicken, onion, garlic, cilantro, parsley, cilantro, paprika, salt, ginger, turmeric, cumin, and pepper. If using, add the saffron and *ras el hanout*. Mix well. Rub chicken with mixture, cover, refrigerate and marinate overnight (best) or at least 4 hours.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in heavy skillet. Remove chicken and onions from marinade. Add the chicken to the skillet, skin side down. Brown on all sides. Remove and set aside. Remove the crisped skin and reserve (you can brown the flesh under the removed skin, if desired). Add onions to skillet, and cook over medium-low heat about 15 minutes, until lightly browned (add a little more oil to the pan if needed). Cut the skin into strips. Add a little more oil to the pan and finish crisping the skin. Reserve. While the skin crisps, use the remaining oil on the bottom of the tagine. Transfer onions to tagine if you are using one. If not, transfer to a large oven proof dish. Add cinnamon stick.



Put chicken on onions. Scatter with olives. Add the reserved rind of the lemons, cut into small strips. Scatter over chicken. Mix stock and lemon juice. Pour over chicken.

Cover tagine. If using a baking dish, place in an oven preheated to 425<sup>0</sup> F for 45min to 1 hour. If using a tagine, place over low heat. Allow the stock to come to a simmer. If you don't hear the tagine simmering within 20 minutes, slightly increase the heat, and then use the lowest heat setting required for maintaining a gentle simmer and cook for about 60 minutes, until the chicken is done. Remove the tagine top as infrequently as possible.

Cut the reserved crisped skin into thin strips and scatter on top. Garnish with chopped parsley, and serve.



Chicken tagine served over spiced couscous and peas