

chicken with olives & preserved lemons

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 yellow onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves
salt and pepper
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
large pinch of saffron threads, toasted and crushed
1 chicken, weighing about 3½ pounds *OR PIECES*
3 cups chicken stock or water
¾ cup pinky-brown Moroccan olives, rinsed, and soaked, if liked
1 Preserved Lemon (see right), rinsed if liked, chopped
large bunch of cilantro, finely chopped
large bunch of parsley, finely chopped
parsley leaves and coarsely chopped parsley, to garnish

This is one of the best-known Moroccan dishes. It cannot be made with fresh lemons, or, if it is, it will be an entirely different dish.

- 1 Heat the oil, add the onion and fry fairly gently, stirring frequently until softened and a good golden color.
- 2 Meanwhile, in a mortar, crush the garlic with a pinch of salt, then work in the ginger, cinnamon, saffron and a little pepper. Stir into the onions, cook until fragrant, then remove from the pan and spread over the chicken.
- 3 Put the chicken into a heavy saucepan or Dutch oven that it just fits, add the stock or water and bring just to a simmer. Cover and simmer very gently for about 1½ hours, turning the chicken over 2 or 3 times.
- 4 Add the olives, Preserved Lemon, cilantro and parsley to the pan, cover and cook for 15 minutes or so until the chicken is very tender. Taste the sauce – if the flavor needs to be more concentrated, transfer the chicken to a warmed serving dish, cover and keep warm, then boil the cooking juices to a rich sauce. Tilt the pan and skim off any surplus fat, if liked, then pour over the chicken and garnish with parsley.

Serves 4

1½ times recipe for 6

preserved lemons

To preserve lemons: put 2 teaspoons coarse salt into a sterilized canning jar. Holding a lemon over a plate to catch the juice, cut it lengthwise as if about to quarter it, but do not cut quite through – leave the pieces joined. Ease out any seeds. Pack 1 tablespoon salt into the cuts, then close them and place the lemon in the jar. Repeat with more lemons, packing them tightly, and pressing each layer down hard before adding the next layer, until the jar is full. Squeeze another lemon and pour the juice over the fruit. Sprinkle with more coarse salt and top up with boiling water to cover the lemons. Close the jar tightly and keep in a warmish place for 3–4 weeks. Do not worry if, on longer storage, a lacy white film appears on top of the jar or on the lemons; it is quite harmless – simply rinse it off.