

Pork and Chickpea Stew with North African Spices

Ingredients

Dried chickpeas	2 cups	Ground cinnamon	1 tsp.
Kosher salt (for soaking)	3 Tbsp.	Fennel seeds	1 tsp.
Pork shoulder, 1½" cubes	3 lbs.	Tomato paste	6 Tbsp.
Kosher salt (for pork)	1 Tbsp.	Ras el hanout	5 tsp.
Black pepper (for pork)	1 tsp.	Kosher salt (for stew)	1 Tbsp.
Vegetable oil	¼ cup	Chicken broth	3 cups
Onions, large	2	Diced tomatoes	28 oz. (2 cans)
Garlic cloves	8-10	Dried apricots	1½ cups
Fresh ginger	2 Tbsp.	Fresh cilantro	1 cup
Ground cumin	5 tsp.	Fresh lemon juice	½ cup
Ground coriander	5 tsp.	Honey	2 Tbsp.
Sweet paprika	3 tsp.	Cooked rice	for serving
Smoked paprika	1 Tbsp.	Harissa	for table
Ground turmeric	2 tsp.		

Directions

Night Before: Combine **chickpeas**, water, and 3 Tbsp. **salt** in a large bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight (*8-12 hours*). — Preheat oven to *300°F* — Drain and rinse soaked **chickpeas** — Pat dry **pork** and cut into 1½" cubes — Trim excess fat from **pork**, leaving some for flavor — Season **pork** with 1 Tbsp. **salt** and 1 tsp. **pepper** — Dice **onions** — Mince **garlic** — Grate **ginger** — Chop **apricots** into ¼" pieces — Measure all **spices** — Chop **cilantro**

1. Heat 6-quart enameled dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add 2 Tbsp. **oil**. Working in 3-4 batches to avoid crowding, brown **pork cubes** on multiple sides until deeply caramelized, about *8-10 minutes* per batch, adding more **oil** as needed. Transfer browned **pork** to a large bowl and set aside.
2. Carefully pour off all but 2 Tbsp. of rendered fat from pot (reserve excess for another use). Add diced **onions** and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden brown, about *8-10 minutes*. Add minced **garlic** and grated **ginger**; cook, stirring constantly, for *1-2 minutes* until fragrant.
3. Add **cumin**, **coriander**, **sweet paprika**, **smoked paprika**, **turmeric**, **cinnamon**, and **fennel seeds** to the pot. Stir constantly for *45-60 seconds* until spices are darkened and very fragrant. Add **tomato paste** and stir constantly, scraping to prevent scorching, for *2-3 minutes* until paste is brick-red and caramelized.

4. Add **ras el hanout** and 1 Tbsp. **salt**; stir to combine. Immediately add **chicken broth** and use a wooden spoon to scrape bottom of pot vigorously, releasing all browned bits. Add **diced tomatoes** with their juices. Bring to a simmer.
5. Return browned **pork** and any accumulated juices to pot. Add drained **chickpeas** and 1 cup chopped **apricots**. Stir to combine. The liquid should come about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up the solids; add additional **broth** if needed.
6. Bring to a full simmer on stovetop. Cover with tight-fitting lid and transfer to pre-heated 300°F oven.
7. Braise for $2\frac{1}{2}$ - 3 hours, checking at 2 hours. **Pork** should be pull-apart tender and **chickpeas** should be creamy. If liquid level seems low at the 2 hour check, add $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 cup hot **broth**. If stew seems too liquidy, crack lid slightly for final 30 - 45 minutes.
8. Remove from oven. Skim excess fat from surface—**pork** renders more fat than lamb, and removing excess prevents greasiness. If sauce needs reducing, place uncovered pot on stovetop over medium heat and simmer for 5 - 10 minutes until thickened to coat the back of a spoon.
9. Stir in remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped **apricots**, **fresh cilantro**, **lemon juice**, and **honey**. Taste and adjust seasoning with additional **salt** if needed. Let rest for 10 - 15 minutes before serving.
10. Serve over **cooked rice** with **harissa** on the side.

Equipment Required

- 6-quart enameled dutch oven with tight-fitting lid
- Large mixing bowl (for soaking chickpeas)
- Large bowl or plate (for browned pork)
- Cutting board and sharp knife
- Wooden spoon or heatproof spatula
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Microplane or fine grater (for ginger)
- Ladle
- Fat separator or large spoon (for skimming)
- Timer

Mise en Place

- Soak **chickpeas** the night before in salted water
- Allow *45–60 minutes* total for prep work on day of cooking
- Trim excess fat from **pork shoulder** but leave some marbling—it adds flavor and moisture
- Cut **pork** into uniform $1\frac{1}{2}$ " cubes for even cooking
- Prep all aromatics and measure all spices before beginning—once you start browning, the process moves quickly
- Have **broth** ready and warm for easier deglazing
- Keep a heatproof container nearby for collecting rendered pork fat

Ingredient Tips

- Pork shoulder (also called pork butt or Boston butt) is ideal; avoid loin, which is too lean for braising
- Look for well-marbled **pork** with visible fat running through the meat
- Pereg or other quality **ras el hanout** blends work well; avoid dusty, stale spices

- Use whole **fennel seeds** rather than ground for better texture and flavor; they add aromatic sweetness that complements pork
- San Marzano or fire-roasted **diced tomatoes** add extra depth
- Turkish or California **apricots** are ideal; avoid overly sweet or sugared varieties
- Fresh **ginger** is essential; powdered won't provide the same brightness
- Reduced **honey** (compared to lamb version) accounts for pork's natural sweetness
- Increased **smoked paprika** balances pork's richness and adds depth

Preparation Tips

- Don't rush the browning—deep caramelization is the foundation of flavor
- Work in small batches; crowding the pot steams meat instead of browning it
- **Pork** renders significantly more fat than lamb; pour off excess after browning to prevent greasy stew
- The **tomato paste** will threaten to scorch; keep stirring and scraping constantly during step 3
- **Fennel seeds** add subtle licorice notes that pair beautifully with pork and apricots
- Vigorous deglazing in step 4 is critical—every bit of fond adds flavor
- Starting the braise at a full simmer on the stovetop ensures immediate cooking when transferred to oven
- If your dutch oven lid doesn't seal tightly, cover pot with foil before adding lid to minimize evaporation
- Check tenderness at *2 hours*; **pork** often reaches pull-apart texture faster than lamb
- Skimming fat in step 8 is more important with pork than lamb—be thorough

- The stew will continue to thicken as it rests; it should be slightly looser than desired final consistency when removed from oven

Make Ahead & Storage

- This stew improves with time; make up to 3 days ahead and refrigerate
- Pork fat will solidify into a thick layer when chilled, making it very easy to remove
- Remove solidified fat layer before reheating for best results
- Reheat gently on stovetop, adding **broth** if needed to restore consistency
- Add finishing ingredients (**cilantro**, **lemon juice**, **honey**) only when reheating to serve
- Freezes well for up to 3 months; thaw overnight in refrigerator
- If freezing, slightly undercook (reduce time by 30 minutes) as reheating continues cooking
- Leftover stew thickens significantly; thin with **broth** or water when reheating
- The rendered pork fat can be saved and used for sautéing vegetables or making cornbread

Serving Suggestions

- Serve over basmati rice, couscous, polenta, or with crusty bread
- Accompany with **harissa** for heat, plain yogurt or sour cream for cooling contrast

- Garnish with additional **fresh cilantro**, toasted sliced almonds, or toasted pine nuts
- A simple arugula salad with lemon vinaigrette provides refreshing contrast
- Pickled vegetables (turnips, carrots, or red onions) cut through the richness
- Pairs beautifully with medium-bodied red wines, amber ales, or spiced cider
- Consider topping with a poached or fried egg for brunch service
- Leftovers make excellent filling for tacos, empanadas, or savory hand pies
- Also delicious served over creamy polenta or mashed potatoes

Variation Notes

- This is a North African-*inspired* recipe adapted for pork; traditional North African cuisine does not use pork
- For a more traditional approach, substitute lamb or beef shoulder using the same technique
- For extra richness, add ½ cup golden raisins along with the **apricots**
- Orange zest (1 Tbsp.) added with finishing ingredients complements pork beautifully
- For a spicier version, add 1-2 tsp. cayenne pepper or Aleppo pepper with other spices
- Substitute bone-in pork shoulder for even more flavor; increase cooking time to 3-3½ hours