

Berbere Lamb and Chickpea Stew

Ingredients

Dried chickpeas	2 cups	Tomato paste	6 Tbsp.
Kosher salt (for soaking)	3 Tbsp.	Kosher salt (for stew)	1 Tbsp.
Lamb shoulder*	3 lbs.	Chicken broth or lamb stock	3 cups
Kosher salt (for lamb)	1 Tbsp.	Diced tomatoes	28 oz. (2 cans)
Black pepper (for lamb)	1 tsp.	Dried apricots	1½ cups
Vegetable oil	¼ cup	Fresh cilantro	1 cup
Onions, large	2	Fresh lemon juice	½ cup
Garlic cloves	8-10	Honey	3 Tbsp.
Berbere spice blend	3½ Tbsp.	Harissa	for table

Beef chuck shoulder may substitute for lamb (same method and timing)

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 **lamb** and cut into 1½" cubes — Season **lamb** with 1 Tbsp. **salt** and 1 tsp. **pepper** — Dice **onions** — Mince **garlic** — 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 **lamb cubes** on multiple sides until deeply caramelized, about 8-10 minutes per batch, adding more **oil** as needed. Transfer browned **lamb** to a large bowl and set aside.
2. Reduce heat to medium. If pot is dry, add final portion of **oil**. Add diced **onions** and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden brown, about 8-10 minutes. Add minced **garlic** and cook, stirring constantly, for 1-2 minutes until fragrant.
3. Add 3 Tbsp. **berbere** to the pot. Stir constantly for 45-60 seconds until spice is 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 remaining ½ Tbsp. **berbere** 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 **lamb** 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 $300^{\circ}F$ oven.
7. Braise for $3-3\frac{1}{2}$ hours, checking at $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours. **Lamb** should be pull-apart tender and **chickpeas** should be creamy. If liquid level seems low at the $2\frac{1}{2}$ 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. 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. If desired, skim excess fat from surface.
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 **couscous** or **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 lamb)
- Cutting board and sharp knife
- Wooden spoon or heatproof spatula
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Ladle
- Timer

Mise en Place

- Soak **chickpeas** the night before in salted water
- Allow *45–60 minutes* total for prep work on day of cooking
- If using whole lamb shoulder, trim excess fat but leave some for flavor
- Cut **lamb** 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

Ingredient Tips

- Lamb shoulder is ideal for braising due to marbling and connective tissue; leg meat is leaner and won't be as tender
- Quality **berbere** blends vary significantly in heat level and complexity; taste yours to gauge intensity
- Ethiopian berbere typically contains fenugreek, cardamom, black pepper, coriander, cumin, chiles, ginger, and warm spices
- San Marzano or fire-roasted diced **tomatoes** add extra depth
- Turkish or California **apricots** are ideal; avoid overly sweet or sugared varieties
- If making homemade **lamb stock**, this elevates the dish significantly

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
- The **tomato paste** will threaten to scorch; keep stirring and scraping constantly during step 3
- 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 liquid level at $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours; ovens and pots vary, so adjustment may be needed
- **Lamb** texture varies by cut quality; check tenderness and extend cooking if needed
- 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 benefits from sitting; make up to 3 days ahead and refrigerate
- Fat will solidify on surface when chilled, making it easy to remove if desired
- 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

Serving Suggestions

- Serve over basmati rice, couscous, or with crusty bread
- Accompany with **harissa** for heat, plain yogurt for cooling contrast
- Garnish with additional **fresh cilantro**, toasted sliced almonds, or sesame seeds
- A simple cucumber-tomato salad provides refreshing contrast
- Pairs beautifully with full-bodied red wines or Moroccan mint tea
- Consider topping with a poached or fried egg for brunch service
- Leftovers make excellent filling for savory hand pies or empanadas