

Djerba-Tanjir Vegan Cookbook

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Chapter 1

M'hamsa

M'hamsa

מחמסה

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Etymology & Heritage

Linguistic Roots

Root: ḥ-m-ṣ (ح-م-ص)

Origin: Arabic

Meaning: to toast/roast - referring to the toasted preparation method

Description: The name *M'hamsa* (محمصة) derives from the Arabic root meaning “to toast” or “to roast.” The noun form *mḥammaṣa* refers to something that has been toasted—perfectly describing the preparation method of this artisanal pasta.

*Traditional*

M'hamsa from the Silver family kitchen

Cultural Heritage

Originating in Tunisia, particularly in rural and inland regions, M'hamsa reflects a preservation technique born from necessity: turning durum wheat into a shelf-stable, nutrient-dense staple. Its production often took place communally, with women gathering to roll the semolina into irregular pearls and dry them under the sun. This recipe comes from the Silver family of Djerba (David Silver, paternal side), where unlike industrial couscous, m'hamsa is hand-rolled from semolina and water, then sun-dried or lightly toasted to preserve it. The grains are larger and more rustic than standard couscous, roughly the size of peppercorns, with a nutty, toasted flavor that embodies both craftsmanship and resilience in Tunisian food heritage.

Ingredients • מְכוֹנוֹת • רכיבים • Ingredientes

עברית • Hebrew

- בצל
- פתיתים
- פפריקה
- פ.שחור
- עגבניות
- ירקות שרוצים
- מלח
- מים

English

- 1 small onion
- M'hamsa semolina flakes
- Sweet paprika
- Black pepper
- Tomatoes
- Vegetables of choice
- Salt
- Water

عربي • Arabic

- بصلة صغيرة
- فتات السميد (محمصة)
- فلفل أحمر مرچי
- فلفل أكل
- طماطم
- خضرة حسب الرغبة
- ملح
- ماء

Español • Spanish

- 1 cebolla pequeña
- Granos de sémola m'hamsa
- Pimentón dulce
- Pimienta negra
- Tomates
- Verduras al gusto
- Sal
- Agua

Instructions • תעלימות • הוראות • Instrucciones

עברית • Hebrew

1. לטגן בצל קטן
2. להוסיף פתיתים ולאדות
3. להוסיף מים ולבשל
4. לכסות ולבשל עד רך

English

1. Sauté chopped onion until translucent
2. Add m'hamsa and toast lightly
3. Add water (1¼ cups per cup m'hamsa)
4. Cover and simmer until tender

عربي • Arabic

1. نقلي البصل حتى يذبل
2. نضيف المحمصة ونحمّرها
3. نصب الماء ونطبخ
4. نغطي حتى تطيب

Español • Spanish

1. Sofreír cebolla hasta transparente
2. Añadir m'hamsa y tostar
3. Agregar agua y cocinar
4. Tapar hasta que esté tierno

• בתאבון! • بالشفا والهناء! • Buen provecho! • Bon Appétit!

From the Silver family kitchen of Djerba, Tunisia

A symbol of Tunisian food heritage, embodying craftsmanship and resilience