

Chapter One

Eritre



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Kicha

(ERITREAN FLATBREADS)

These unleavened flatbreads are a great introduction to making bread at home, since the dough doesn't require any kneading or rising and you cook the breads quickly in a skillet—there's no oven involved. You can enjoy kicha warm, right out of the pan, as an accompaniment to any meal. For a full Ma Gehennet experience, serve the breads with her Zebhi Hamli (Stewed Spinach, page 44) and Shiro (Ground Chickpea Stew, page 45). You can use leftover kicha to make Kicha Fit Fit (page 43), a typical Eritrean breakfast of torn flatbreads mixed with butter, spices, and yogurt, or you can also make them specifically for that purpose. This recipe makes two large flatbreads that easily serve four, but feel free to use a small skillet to make smaller, individual flatbreads.

SERVES 4

1½ cups whole wheat flour
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1½ cups warm water
2 tablespoons canola oil

Place the whole wheat and all-purpose flours and salt in a large bowl and whisk well to combine. Using your hands, mix in the water. The batter will be like a very thick pancake batter.

Line a plate with paper towels and set aside. Set a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat and add 1 tablespoon of the oil, tilting the pan so the oil lightly greases the bottom of the pan. Once the oil is hot, add half the dough to the skillet and use wet fingertips to gently and carefully press the dough into a wide circle that covers the surface of the skillet. Cover the skillet and cook until the top of the dough is glossy and the underside is golden brown, about 3 minutes. Carefully flip the bread over, cover, and cook until the second side is browned, another 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer the flatbread to the prepared plate, adding the remaining 1 tablespoon oil to the pan, and repeat the process with the remaining dough. Serve immediately while the breads are warm, or let cool to room temperature to use for Kicha Fit Fit. Leftover breads can be stored in a plastic bag at room temperature for a day and rewarmed in a skillet over low heat.





Kicha Fit Fit

(TORN FLATBREADS WITH SPICED BUTTER AND YOGURT)

Fit fit, broken pieces of flatbread cooked with fat and spices, is a typical dish throughout East Africa and is made with either Ethiopian-style injera (a flatbread made from fermented teff flour) or Eritrean kicha, like the one Ma Gehennet taught us how to make. It's a wonderful way to use up leftover flatbread of any kind. You could even use leftover pita bread. The drier the bread, the more it soaks up the spices and butter. Serve with plain yogurt dolloped on top. This is wonderful for breakfast or as a snack.

SERVES 4

3 tablespoons unsalted butter or ghee

1 tablespoon Berbere Spice Mix (page 50) or store-bought berbere

1 batch Kicha (Eritrean Flatbreads, page 40), torn into bite-size pieces (about 6 cups)

½ teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup plain yogurt

Place the butter in a large nonstick skillet set over medium heat. Once the butter melts, add the berbere and cook, stirring, until the spices sizzle and smell fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the kicha pieces and sprinkle with the salt. Cook, stirring, until all the pieces of kicha are coated with the spiced butter and warmed through, about 3 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a serving platter or individual bowls, top with the yogurt, and serve immediately.

Zebhi Hamli

(STEWED SPINACH)

Ma Gehennet's simple stewed spinach is a wonderful, healthy side dish that can be served as part of a traditional Eritrean meal along with Ma Gehennet's Shiro (Ground Chickpea Stew, opposite) and Ma Gehennet's Kicha (Eritrean Flatbreads, page 40). It can also be served anywhere you would typically serve a cooked green—try it instead of creamed spinach with steak, under a grilled chicken breast or piece of fish, or with eggs in the morning. Toss it with cooked pasta and top with grated cheese. The dish is incredibly versatile and also can be made ahead—just cool it down, store it in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days, and reheat in a heavy pot set over low heat (stirring as it heats) before serving.

SERVES 4

- 3 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 large red onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 chicken or vegetable bouillon cube
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup tomato paste
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water
- Two 10-ounce packages frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
- Kosher salt
- 2 jalapeños, stemmed and thinly sliced (use less or leave out if you don't want things too spicy)

Warm the oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy pot set over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic. Crumble the bouillon cube and sprinkle it over the onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until just beginning to soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook, stirring, until the mixture concentrates and is nearly dry, about 3 minutes. Add the water and stir to combine, then stir in the spinach. Sprinkle with a large pinch of salt, reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook, uncovering the pot every few minutes to stir and then re-covering it, until the spinach is very tender and all the aromatics have had a chance to flavor the spinach, about 10 minutes. Stir in the jalapeños and season the spinach to taste with salt. Serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a heavy pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).

MA GEHENNET'S

Shiro

(GROUND CHICKPEA STEW)

A simple, nutritious, and completely vegan stew of ground chickpea flour and water, flavored with aromatics like onion, garlic, and chiles, shiro is one of the most, if not *the* most, popular dishes in Eritrea. According to Ma Gehennet, shiro is “the most favorite food in Eritrea. Children love it. Adults love it. We all love shiro.” It’s quick, affordable, and very filling. The recipe that follows is almost identical to Ma Gehennet’s, except that we use plain chickpea flour (see page 18 for more about chickpea flour) and add Berbere Spice Mix. Ma Gehennet uses a shiro mix, which already has spices in it, that she brings back from Eritrea every two years and stores in her freezer (this mix is not easy to find in the United States). She also likes to make hers in a traditional clay pot known as a sali, because she says “food tastes better in a clay pot and it stays warm a long time.” A regular Dutch oven or other heavy pot works well, too. Serve with Ma Gehennet’s Kicha (Eritrean Flatbreads, page 40) and vegetables like Ma Gehennet’s Zebhi Hamli (Stewed Spinach, opposite).

SERVES 4

- 1 large red onion, coarsely chopped
- 10 garlic cloves
- ½ cup canola oil
- 2 tablespoons Berbere Spice Mix (page 50) or store-bought berbere
- Kosher salt
- 3 medium vine-ripened tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup chickpea flour
- 2 cups water
- 2 jalapeños, stemmed and thinly sliced (use less or leave out if you don’t want things too spicy)

Place the onion and garlic in a food processor and pulse until very finely ground. Set aside.

Warm the oil in a large Dutch oven or other heavy pot set over medium-low heat. Stir in the onion mixture, the berbere, and a large pinch of salt. Cover the pot and let the aromatics cook gently while you prepare the tomatoes.

Place the tomatoes in the food processor and pulse until they’re finely ground. Add them to the onion mixture, increase the heat to high, and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and stir in the chickpea flour. The mixture will be quite thick, like peanut butter. While stirring, slowly pour in the water to loosen the mixture. The mixture will be quite thick at first and not quite integrated, but keep stirring and adding the water in one slow stream until it becomes quite smooth. Bring the shiro to a boil, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for about 5 minutes to cook off the raw taste of the chickpea flour and integrate all the flavors. Stir in the jalapeños and season to taste with salt. Serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).



Shahan Ful

(MASHED LIMAS WITH ONIONS, TOMATOES, AND CHILES)

This completely vegan dish of mashed lima beans flavored with garlic, Berbere Spice Mix, and lemon juice can be served for breakfast, lunch, or dinner alongside some rice or as part of a larger spread of dishes for a big Eritrean meal. If you're not vegan, try it with a soft-boiled or fried egg on top. Shahan ful is very similar to ful medames, a staple Egyptian dish of mashed fava beans. For this recipe, we use frozen lima beans, making it incredibly quick to prepare and fresher tasting, since you don't have to soak and cook dried beans. If you want to cook this ahead of time, let it cool, refrigerate in an airtight container for up to a week, and reheat gently in a saucepan over low heat (stirring as it heats) before serving.

SERVES 4

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ jalapeño, stemmed and minced, plus additional, thinly sliced, for serving (use less or leave out if you don't want things too spicy)
- 1 tablespoon Berbere Spice Mix (page 50) or store-bought berbere
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
- One 10-ounce package frozen lima beans, thawed
- 1 small tomato, finely diced
- ¼ cup water
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Warm the oil in a medium saucepan set over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and minced jalapeño and cook, stirring occasionally, until just beginning to soften, about 3 minutes. Stir in the berbere and salt and cook, stirring, until very aromatic, about 1 minute. Add the lima beans, tomato, and water and stir well to combine with the aromatics. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer until all of the flavors have a chance to get to know each other, about 10 minutes. Turn off the heat, stir in the lemon juice, and use a potato masher to crush the beans until they're the texture of mashed potatoes. Season the mixture to taste with salt and serve immediately, while hot, topped with the sliced jalapeños. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a heavy pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).

Firfir

(STEWED INJERA WITH MEAT, TOMATOES, AND ONIONS)

Very similar to the Kicha Fit Fit (Torn Flatbreads with Spiced Butter and Yogurt, page 43), this dish of torn bread mixed with a savory mixture of onions, beef, spices, and tomatoes gives new life to day-old bread and also stretches a little bit of meat to feed a lot of people. Ma Abeba calls for rosemary, which you don't see in any other recipe in this book, but its flavor complements the meat and tomatoes so well, bringing out the colonialist Italian influence that is so prevalent in East African cooking. The sour flavor of injera bread, made with teff flour that's slowly fermented like sourdough, adds a lot of dimension to this dish; injera can be purchased from any Ethiopian or Eritrean restaurant. It is also available in some African grocery stores. If you can't find it, feel free to make a batch of Kicha (Eritrean Flatbreads) and use it in place of injera. You won't have the same exact sour flavor, but it will still be very tasty. You could also use leftover sourdough bread, torn into cubes, almost like an Eritrean panzanella (an Italian bread salad).



SERVES 4

2 large tomatoes
3 tablespoons canola oil
1 large yellow onion, finely chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
2 garlic cloves, minced
One 2-inch piece ginger, peeled and minced
Leaves from one 6-inch sprig of rosemary, minced
1 tablespoon Berbere Spice Mix (page 50) or store-bought berbere
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 cup water
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pound boneless beef chuck or other stew meat, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
1 large piece store-bought injera, or 1 recipe Kicha (Eritrean Flatbreads, page 40), torn into bite-sized pieces (about 6 cups total)
1 jalapeño, stemmed and thinly sliced, for serving (use less or leave out if you don't want things too spicy)

Cut off and discard a thin slice from the stem end of each tomato and then coarsely grate the tomatoes on a box grater directly into a bowl. Discard the skins. Set aside.

Warm the oil in a large Dutch oven or other heavy pot set over medium heat. Stir in the onion, sprinkle with the salt, and cook, stirring, until softened, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger, rosemary, berbere, and tomato paste and cook, stirring occasionally, until everything smells wonderfully fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes and cook until they've nearly evaporated, about 5 minutes (this will help concentrate their flavor). Add the water and meat, reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and cook until the meat is very tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in the injera and cook, stirring gently, until the bread absorbs all of the liquid, about 2 minutes. Season the firfir to taste with salt. Transfer to a serving platter, top with the jalapeño, and serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for a couple of days.

Berbere Spice Mix

Berbere is *the* spice mix of Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's centered on dried chiles, both spicy ones and sweet paprika, and spices like fenugreek and coriander seeds. The mix we use also features warm flavors including cardamom, allspice, cinnamon, and ginger. It's at once spicy and a tiny bit sweet and full of layers. Like Xawaash Spice Mix (page 74) in Somalia and dry rubs for barbecue in the American South, berbere differs from region to region, family to family, even neighbor to neighbor. Which is to say, feel free to add a little bit more of one spice or less of another if you'd like, or try swapping one for something else. Try it in Ma Gehennet's Shiro (Ground Chickpea Stew, page 45), Doro Wat (Stewed Chicken Legs with Berbere and Eggs, page 53), or Shahan Ful (Mashed Limas with Onions, Tomatoes, and Chiles, page 47). You can also add it to any stew or braise (start with about 1 tablespoon berbere for every four servings) or try rubbing a light coating on shrimp or chicken thighs before grilling (you can let them sit overnight in the refrigerator after seasoning or just season right before grilling).

MAKES ABOUT $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

- One 1-inch piece cinnamon stick
- 1 tablespoon coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 6 cardamom pods
- 3 allspice berries
- 4 dried chiles de árbol, stemmed and seeded
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried onion flakes
- 3 tablespoons sweet paprika
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

Place the cinnamon, coriander, fenugreek, peppercorns, cardamom, and allspice in a small heavy skillet set over medium heat. Cook, stirring constantly, until the smell is very aromatic and the spices are lightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Let cool. Transfer the mixture to a clean coffee grinder, add the chiles and onion flakes, and grind to a fine powder (or use a mortar and pestle and some elbow grease). Transfer the ground spices to a fine-mesh sieve set over a bowl and sift. Regrind whatever large pieces remain in the sieve and add them to the bowl with the ground spices. Add the paprika, ginger, and nutmeg. Whisk well to combine and transfer the mixture to an airtight jar. Store in a cool, dark place for up to 3 months.





Doro Wat

(STEWED CHICKEN LEGS WITH BERBERE AND EGGS)

This stew is a testament to the benefit of having Berbere Spice Mix in your cupboard—it takes a simple braised chicken that you can make any night of the week from basic to really special. Serve with cooked rice or flatbread such as Ma Gehennet's Kicha (Eritrean Flatbreads, page 40).

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter or ghee
- 2 large red onions, finely diced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons minced ginger
- 3 tablespoons Berbere Spice Mix (page 50) or store-bought berbere
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
- 2 medium vine-ripened tomatoes, finely diced
- 1 cup water
- 8 chicken drumsticks
- 6 large eggs, hard-boiled and peeled

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan set over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and ginger and cook, stirring occasionally, until just beginning to soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the berbere and salt and cook, stirring, until very aromatic, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes and cook, stirring until they've reduced down and the mixture is almost dry, about 10 minutes. Add the water, increase the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to maintain a simmer. Season the chicken pieces all over with salt and then nestle them into the pot. Cover and cook, uncovering the pot every so often to stir, until the chicken is very tender, about 1 hour. Add the eggs and cook, stirring every so often, until the eggs are heated through and nicely coated with the sauce, about 10 minutes.

Use a slotted spoon to transfer the chicken legs and eggs to a serving dish. Increase the heat to high, return the sauce to a boil, and cook until slightly reduced and thickened, about 5 minutes. Spoon the sauce over the chicken and eggs. Serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a heavy pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).



