

Hünkâr Begendi (Lamb Stew on Smoky Eggplant Purée)

Turkish · Main Course · Hard · 130 min total · Serves 4

Hünkâr begendi means 'the sultan's delight': tender lamb stew served over a silky purée of smoky, charred eggplant folded into a kasar béchamel. A special-occasion dish that rewards patience.

Ingredients

- 1.5 lb boneless lamb shoulder (trimmed of large pieces of fat, cut into 1-inch (2.5 cm) cubes)
- 3 tbsp butter (divided)
- 1 medium onion (thinly sliced)
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 medium tomato (chopped)
- 1.5 cup beef or lamb stock (or hot water)
- 1.5 tsp salt (divided: 1 tsp for the stew, 0.5 tsp for the purée)
- 0.5 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 large eggplant (about 1.25 lb (560 g) total)
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole milk (warmed)
- 2 oz kasar cheese (finely grated; or Parmesan or Gruyère)
- 0.125 tsp ground nutmeg

Method

1. Melt 1 tbsp of the butter in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat and brown the lamb in batches for 6 to 8 minutes per batch until deep brown on all sides, transferring each batch to a plate.
2. Lower the heat to medium and cook the sliced onion for 6 minutes until soft, stir in the tomato paste for 1 minute until brick-red, then add the chopped tomato, return the lamb, pour in the stock and add 1 tsp salt, the black pepper and the bay leaf.
3. Bring to a simmer, cover and cook over low heat for 75 to 90 minutes, stirring now and then, until the lamb is fork-tender and the juices have turned thick and glossy.
4. Meanwhile, char the eggplants over a gas flame or under a 500°F (260°C) broiler, turning every few minutes for 20 to 25 minutes until the skins are blackened and the flesh has collapsed; cool, peel, drain in a colander for 10 minutes and chop finely.
5. Melt the remaining 1 tbsp butter in a saucepan over medium heat, whisk in the flour for 1 minute, then slowly whisk in the warm milk and cook 3 to 4 minutes until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
6. Fold the chopped eggplant into the béchamel with the grated kasar, the last 1 tbsp butter, nutmeg and 0.5 tsp salt until the purée is silky, thick and holds its shape like mashed potatoes.
7. Remove the lid from the stew, discard the bay leaf and simmer uncovered for 10 minutes until the sauce is glossy and clings to a spoon, then taste and adjust the pepper.
8. Spoon the purée into shallow bowls, make a hollow in the middle and spoon the lamb and its sauce over the top to serve hot.