

Içli Köfte (Stuffed Bulgur Shells)

Turkish · Appetizer · Hard · 70 min total · Serves 4

Içli köfte are oval shells of fine bulgur kneaded with tomato paste, wrapped around a spiced lamb and walnut filling, then fried until crisp. The name means 'filled köfte'; eat them warm with lemon.

Ingredients

- 1.5 cup fine bulgur (#1 fine bulgur (köftelik), not coarse)
- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 tbsp tomato paste (for the dough)
- 1 tsp salt (for the dough and filling)
- 0.5 lb ground lamb (ground beef also works)
- 1 medium onion (finely chopped)
- 0.25 cup walnuts (finely chopped)
- 1 tsp pul biber (Aleppo pepper or sweet paprika, for the filling)
- 0.5 tsp ground allspice (for the filling)
- 0.25 tsp ground black pepper (for the filling)
- 1 tbsp olive oil (for cooking the filling)
- 0.25 cup flat-leaf parsley (finely chopped)
- 2 cup vegetable oil (for deep frying)
- 1 lemon (cut into wedges to serve)

Method

1. Put the fine bulgur in a bowl, add the tomato paste and salt, pour over the boiling water, stir well, cover with a towel and let it rest for 20 minutes until the bulgur has absorbed the water and softened.
2. Knead the bulgur with wet hands for about 10 minutes until it forms a smooth, pliable dough that does not stick to your hands; add a teaspoon of water at a time if it cracks, then cover and set it aside.
3. Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat, cook the onion 6 minutes until soft, add the lamb, break it up and cook 8 to 10 minutes until browned and dry, then stir in the pul biber, allspice, black pepper and walnuts for 2 minutes and finish with the parsley; cool to room temperature (about 70°F / 21°C).
4. With wet hands, take a walnut-sized ball of dough (about 2 tbsp), press it into a cup in your palm, add about 1 tsp of filling, close it up and roll it between your palms into a smooth oval with pointed ends about 2.5 inches (6 cm) long.
5. Keep the shaped pieces covered with a damp towel while you work, and chill them for 20 minutes if the shells feel soft so they hold their shape in the oil.
6. Heat the vegetable oil in a heavy pot to 350°F (175°C), then fry 4 to 6 pieces at a time for 3 to 4 minutes, turning, until deep golden and crisp, and drain on a wire rack.
7. Serve the köfte warm or at room temperature with lemon wedges and a green salad.