



Paula Wolfert's Bisteeya

Equipment

- 5 1/2-quart cast-iron enameled casserole with cover
- 12-inch skillet
- Paper towels
- Rolling pin or nut grinder
- Mixing bowls
- Whisk
- Colander
- Small saucepan
- 13-inch cake pan, pizza pan, or paella pan
- Large baking sheet (at least 12 inches wide)
- Spatula
- Serving plate

Ingredients

- 4 squabs or 1 1/2 frying chickens (4 pounds), quartered, with giblets
- 5 cloves of garlic, peeled
- Salt
- 1 cup chopped parsley, mixed with a little chopped fresh green coriander
- 1 Spanish onion, grated
- Pinch of pulverized saffron
- 1/4 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 scant teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 1 cup butter
- 1/4 cup salad oil
- 3/4 pound whole blanched almonds
- Confectioners' sugar
- Ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 10 eggs
- 1/2 to 3/4 pound *phyllo* pastry or 40 *warka* leaves (Chinese spring roll skins)

Recipe

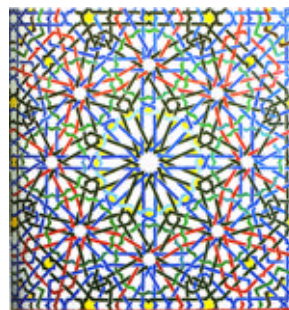
Working time: 1 1/2 hours

Cooking time: 1 hour 20 minutes

Baking time: 30-40 minutes

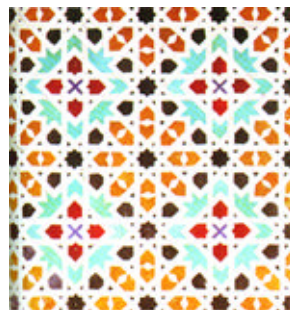
Serves: 12 (as part of Moroccan dinner)

1. Wash poultry well and pull out as much fat as possible from cavities. Crush garlic and make a paste of it with 2 tablespoons salt. Rub the poultry with the paste, then rinse well and drain. Put the squabs or chickens in the casserole with giblets, herbs, onion, spices, half the butter, a little salt, and 3 cups water. Bring to a boil, then lower heat, cover, and simmer for 1 hour.
2. Meanwhile, heat the vegetable oil in the skillet and brown the almonds lightly. Drain on paper towels. When cool, crush them with a rolling pin until coarsely ground, or run through nut grinder. Combine almonds with 1/3 cup confectioners' sugar and 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon. Set aside.
3. Remove poultry, giblets, cinnamon sticks and any loose bones from the casserole and set aside. Rapidly, uncovered, reduce the sauce in the casserole to approximately 1 3/4 cups, then add the lemon juice. Beat the eggs until frothy, then pour into the simmering sauce and stir continuously until the eggs cook and congeal. (They should become curdly, stiff and dry.) Transfer the egg mixture to a colander and let drain (this will insure against a soggy *bisteeya*). Taste for salt and set aside.
4. Remove all the bones from the poultry. Shred into 1 1/2- inch pieces and chop the giblets coarsely.
5. Heat the remaining butter. When the foam subsides, clarify it by pouring off the clear liquid butter into a small bowl and discarding the milky solids.



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7. Unroll the pastry leaves, keeping them under a damp towel to prevent them from drying out. Brush some of the clarified butter over the bottom and sides of the cake pan, then cover the bottom with a pastry leaf. Arrange 6 more leaves so that they half cover the bottom of the pan and half extend over the sides. (The entire pan should be covered.) Brush the extended leaves with butter so they do not dry out. (If using *warka*, arrange about 15 to 18 leaves around the bottom and sides; there is no need to butter extended leaves.)
8. Fold 4 leaves in half and bake in the oven for 30 seconds, or until crisp but not too browned, or fry the leaves on an oiled skillet. (This is unnecessary if using *warka*.)
9. Place chunks of poultry and giblets around the inner edges of the pan, then work toward the center so that the pastry is covered with a layer of shredded poultry. Cover this layer with the well-drained egg mixture from step 3, and the four baked or fried pastry leaves (or *warka* leaves).
10. Sprinkle the almond-sugar mixture over the pastry. Cover with all but 2 of the remaining pastry leaves, brushing each very lightly with butter.
11. Fold the overlapping leaves in over the top to cover the pie. Brush lightly with butter. Put the remaining 2 leaves over the top, lightly buttering each, and fold these neatly under the pie (like tucking in sheets). Brush the entire pie again with butter and pour any remaining butter around the edge. (Use the same procedure for *warka*.)
12. Bake the pie in 425-degree oven until the top pastry leaves are golden brown, about 20 minutes. Shake the pan to loosen the pie and run a spatula around the edges. If necessary, tilt the pan to pour off excess butter (which should be reserved). Invert the pie onto a large, buttered baking dish. Brush the pie with reserved butter and return to oven to continue baking another 10 to 15 minutes, or until golden brown.
13. Remove the *bisteeya* from the oven. Tilt to pour off any excess butter. Put a serving plate over the pie and, holding it firmly, invert. (The traditional upper filling is always the almond layer.) Dust the top of the pie with confectioners' sugar and run crisscrossing lines of cinnamon over the top. (Make sure your sugar and cinnamon design is abstract; no recognizable images are allowed in Muslin practice.)
14. Serve very hot. To eat the traditional way, plunge thumb and first two fingers of right hand into burning pastry and tear out as large a piece as you desire.



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— From [Couscous and other Good Food from Morocco](#), Harper Collins, 1987. Paperback, 368 pages, \$18.00.

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