

## Lamb and quince tagine

*If you possess a quince tree, or know someone who does, you are a lucky person. This year I joined that group of blessed souls when I discovered a man with a large fruit-laden specimen, or maybe he discovered me.*

*My wooden crate of beautiful yellow, fuzzy fruit, looking a bit like misshapen fat pears, is rapidly emptying as I work my way through the quince wish list I've been compiling for several years:*



*ayva tatlısı (a Turkish dessert of semi-candied, deeply crimson quince boats carrying thick buffalo clotted cream), quince dulceață (a Romanian preserve of the conserve family, that is to say bearing whole pieces of translucent fruit), membrillo (aka quince cheese, traditionally eaten with Manchego), spiced pickled quince, perfectly pink quince jelly, quince chutney, quince sauce, quince mostarda (if I can get hold of the head-blowingly hot mustard oil only sold in northern Italy), and perhaps a quince liqueur...*



*But first up is this delicious lamb and quince tagine, which we ate several times in Morocco last year. You can simply bung everything in together, adding the quince and raisins towards the end, and then serve it up as is, making this a very easy dish. Or, for a more refined finish, I suggest cooking and glazing the fruit separately, and also making the lamb a day ahead. As with all stews, the longer and slower the simmering, the better, and it will taste richer after a night in the fridge. The bonus is that the fat conveniently rises to the surface and solidifies, making degreasing a doddle.*

*Of course, if you have a large earthenware tagine, already seasoned and broken in, then use it. But any large heavy casserole dish will do, or even a pressure cooker – de rigueur in any urban Moroccan household. Thanks for the recipe have to be shared between the many home cooks and restaurant chefs who let me hover over their shoulder. Firm apples are a common substitute when quinces are not available.*

*Huge thanks also to J and A for my beautiful quinces – you know who you are. I'm protecting their identities, as any sensible quince junkie would.*

**Serves: 4**

**Time: around three hours of very light work.**

approx 1½ + kg lamb on the bone, in several large pieces (shoulder or leg)

salt

2 medium tomatoes, skinned and seeded if you can be bothered, diced

2 medium red onions, peeled and diced

1½ tsp ground black pepper

1½ tsp powdered ginger

1½ tsp powdered cinnamon

olive oil

bouquet garni of several parsley and coriander sprigs

3 medium quinces

approx 6 tbsps raisins

approx 30g butter

sugar

more cinnamon

coriander or parsley leaves to garnish, chopped if you wish

1. Cut any large chunks of fat off meat and season with salt all over.
2. In a large tagine or heavy-based casserole dish mix together meat, tomatoes, onions and spices with a slug of olive oil. Using your hands is best.
3. Cook, uncovered, over medium heat for approx 20 mins, stirring occasionally.
4. Add approx 500ml water and bouquet garni, cover and simmer very gently over low heat for approx 2 hours or until meat is meltingly tender. It may need 3.
5. Meanwhile, bring a saucepan of water to a simmer, lightly sweetened with a spoonful of sugar. Peel, quarter and core quinces and immediately drop into simmering water. Poach until tender but still holding their shape well. Lift quince pieces out and set aside. Pour some of the hot water over the raisins and leave to soak until plumped.
6. Heat butter in a frying pan, preferably non-stick. Add quince and generous sprinklings of sugar and cinnamon. Fry on both sides to glaze all over. Once starting to colour, add drained raisins and continue to glaze a few minutes more. Set aside.
7. To finish lamb, remove meat from sauce and pull large chunks of meat off bone. Discard bones and any nasty bits of fat, gristle or sinew. Skim fat off sauce if very fatty, then boil to reduce if still too thin. Taste and season as needed. Return meat to sauce and reheat gently.
8. To serve, arrange quince and raisins over meat, then sprinkle with herbs. Tagines are traditionally served with bread, to mop up the sauce, but this one is also good with couscous.

