

Salt and Serenity

Spiced Lamb Meatball Pita Pockets

Recipe adapted from Bon Appetit Magazine (November 2016 issue).

Serves 4

Romesco sauce:

- 1 large or 2 medium tomatoes (8 ounces in total) cored
- 1 dried ancho or New Mexican chile pepper
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons hazelnuts, toasted and loose skins rubbed off with a kitchen towel while warm
- 2 tablespoons blanched almonds
- 1 slice firm white bread, cut into ½ inch cubes
- 1 large garlic clove, peeled and sliced
- ⅛ teaspoon dried hot red pepper flakes
- ¼ cup drained bottled red pepper, rinsed
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon red-wine vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon salt, or to taste

Meatballs:

- ½ teaspoon coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- ½ medium onion, chopped
- 1 cup (firmly packed) cilantro leaves with tender stems
- 1 cup (firmly packed) parsley leaves with tender stems
- 2½ teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1½ teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 pound ground lamb
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Assembly:

- 4 pitas, with pockets, warmed up in oven, cut in half
- ½ cup hummus
- 1 avocado, peeled and sliced
- 2 dill pickles, thinly sliced
- ¼ purple onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup grape tomatoes, cut in half

¼ cup cilantro leaves

1. Make Romesco sauce: Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 400°F. Line a small baking pan with foil. Roast tomato in pan until tender and skin peels off easily, about 15 minutes.
2. While tomato is roasting, slit chile open lengthwise and discard stem and seeds, then tear chile into small pieces. Heat oil in 10-inch heavy skillet over moderate heat until hot but not smoking, then add chile and cook, stirring, until fragrant and chile turns a brighter red, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Transfer chile with a slotted spoon to a heatproof bowl. Add hazelnuts to skillet along with almonds, bread, garlic, and red pepper flakes and cook, stirring, until bread and garlic are golden, 2 to 3 minutes. Add mixture (including oil) to chile in bowl and cool slightly.
3. Peel tomato, then coarsely chop and transfer (with juices) to a food processor. Add bread and chile mixture, pimientos, water, vinegar, and 1/4 teaspoon salt and purée until smooth. Thin with water if desired and season with salt. (Sauce can be made 1 day ahead and chilled, covered. Bring to room temperature before serving.)
4. Make meatballs: Toast coriander seeds in a dry small skillet over medium heat, swirling pan often and adding cumin seeds during the last 30 seconds, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Let cool, then finely grind in spice mill.
5. Pulse onion, cilantro, parsley, and 1½ tsp. salt in a food processor until finely chopped. Transfer to a large kitchen towel. Gather ends of towel in each hand and twist over sink, wringing out as much liquid as possible.
6. Mix onion mixture, spice mixture, egg yolk, paprika, black pepper, cayenne, and remaining 1 tsp. salt in a large bowl to combine. Gently fold lamb into spice mixture to evenly distribute (be careful not to overmix). Using a 1-oz. ice cream scoop or wet hands, form meat mixture into 1½" balls (you should have 16).
7. Heat oil in a large skillet, preferably cast iron, over medium-high. Working in 2 batches, cook meatballs, turning occasionally, until browned all over and cooked through, 5–8 minutes.
8. Assemble Pita Sandwiches: Open pita pockets and spread inside with a spoonful of romesco sauce hummus. Stuff with a few meatballs, avocado, pickles, onion, tomatoes and a few cilantro leaves.