



B'STILLA

By **Mark Hix**



I don't shoot as much these days as I'd rather be on the water fishing, but I shoot occasionally and tend to break down and joint the birds for various dishes like Escalope Holstein and curry and this unusual dish, which is a must try dish.

If you've done the same you can use the thighs for this and the drumsticks for the stock, as the thighs will be moister than the breasts in the B'stilla—but up to you.

If you've been to Morocco you may have come across b'stilla. It's usually made with pigeon and is a sort of sweet and savoury pie with sugar and almonds that were probably originally used to disguise the gaminess of the birds.

As pheasants are cheap and plentiful, I thought they'd make a good alternative to pigeon, and this helps get round the potential dryness of pheasant meat. Chermoula is a classic Moroccan spice mix often rubbed on fish. I've used it to flavour the pie filling. Warka pastry—the thin stuff they make in north Africa—is tricky to buy and to make so you may be better off looking for filo.

INGREDIENTS

- About 20-24 warka pastry leaves or sheets of filo measuring about 18cm square
- 60g melted butter

For the game filling

- 1 pheasant with the breast and thigh meat removed from the carcass and cut into rough 3cm chunks. Bones and drumsticks from the pheasant carcass for the stock
- 1 litre chicken stock (can be made with a good quality cube)
- 6tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed
- A good pinch of saffron
- 1tsp powdered ginger
- 1tbsp chopped parsley
- 1tbsp chopped coriander
- 1tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1tsp salt
- 1tbsp icing sugar
- 100g butter
- 5 hard boiled eggs, chopped

For the sugared-almond mixture

- 350g ground almonds
- 5tbsp icing sugar
- 3tbsp orange-flower water or 4tbsp water
- 1/2tsp ground cinnamon

To serve

- Icing sugar
- Ground cinnamon

Serves 4

DIRECTIONS

- Pre-heat the oven to 200°C/gas mark 6. Chop the pheasant bones and simmer them gently in the chicken stock for 45 minutes. Strain the stock through a fine-meshed sieve and discard the bones.
- Heat the olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pan, and fry the pieces of pheasant until nicely coloured, stirring every so often. Add the following chermoula ingredients - onion, garlic, saffron, ginger, parsley, coriander, pepper and salt, and stir well. Add the strained stock, bring to the boil and simmer very gently for 30 minutes.
- Add the tablespoon of icing sugar and the 100g of butter and simmer for another 20 minutes. The meat should be tender now and the cooking liquid quite rich and flavoursome, reduced to a few tablespoons, just coating the meat. If not, simmer a little longer. Break the meat up a little into the sauce with a spoon, and leave to cool.
- To assemble the b'stilla, first take a straight-sided tart or cake tin with a removable bottom (or a bottomless flan ring on a baking tray) measuring 18cm to 20cm across by 5cm or 6cm or more deep. Brush the bottom and sides with some of the 60g of melted butter. Lay a square of filo on the base. Then lay on another 5 sheets all round the tin, overlapping the central sheet on the base, then going up the sides of the tin so half the sheet overhangs the edge ready to be folded over later. Repeat this with another 5 filo sheets.
- Mix together all the ingredients for the sugared-almond mixture and spread half of it on the base of the pastry, leaving about 1cm around the edges.
- Place 2 more sheets of pastry over the sugared almond mixture. Mix the chopped eggs with the pheasant mixture and spoon all the pheasant and egg filling over the pastry. Cover with 2 more leaves of pastry. Spoon the rest of the almond mixture over the pastry then cover with a couple more leaves. Brush with more butter and fold the overhanging sides up and towards the middle then cover with one more sheet and firm down the top with your hands.
- Bake the b'stilla in the pre-heated oven for about 20 minutes until golden brown. Carefully run a knife around the edge of the b'stilla to loosen the sides and place a serving dish or flat plate upside down over the tin. Carefully invert the b'stilla on to the plate and then slide on to a baking tray or the base of the tart tin without the sides. Brush all over with melted butter and return to the oven and cook for a further 15 minutes. If the b'stilla is browning too much then cover with foil and turn the oven down.
- Remove the b'stilla from the oven and leave to cool a little. Using a fish slice, carefully transfer to a serving dish. Cut some long strips of paper about 1cm wide. Dust the top, preferably with a dredger or fine sieve with some icing sugar then lay strips a couple of centimetres apart and dredge with the cinnamon to create a lattice pattern or stripes.