

Moroccan Style Chickpea Stew with Baby Carrots, Carrot Top Chermoula & Feta

Chickpea stew is a wonderfully satisfying meal, and here I simmer the chickpeas in a rich tomato gravy with carrots, warming spices and dates.

A spicy carrot top chermoula – which is a North African sauce or marinade – adds to the Moroccan vibe and is a twist on the more conventional coriander chermoula. You are more than welcome to use a combination of fresh coriander and carrot tops, or if you are unable to source carrot tops you could use straight fresh coriander instead, or even Italian parsley. The pan-fried carrots and feta are an optional topping, but worth the trouble if you have time, as they really are a lovely accompaniment to the stew.

Note: this recipe calls for dried chickpeas that have been soaked overnight, then cooked in fresh water until tender. The time chickpeas take to cook can vary, but I find it usually takes about 30-40 minutes if using a large pot, and if using a pressure cooker this time will be reduced to 25 minutes or so. If you only have tinned chickpeas available and you want to crack on and make this dish you can use them instead, just keep in mind the flavour won't quite be the same and use 1 cup of water instead of the stock in the recipe.

Serves 4 – 6

Ingredients

For the chickpeas

- 1 cup dried chickpeas, soaked overnight OR 2 ½ cups precooked chickpeas (*see note above*)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 2 teaspoons whole cumin seeds
- 2 large cloves garlic, crushed
- 3 cups fresh tomatoes, chopped OR 2 tins whole peeled tomatoes, chopped
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 c chickpea stock OR water
- ½ cup dates, roughly chopped

For the chermoula

- 2 large handfuls of finely chopped carrot tops OR fresh coriander OR a mix of both
- 1 – 2 cloves garlic, skinned
- 2 teaspoons hot chili flakes

- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 – 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

To top the chickpeas

- 500 grams baby carrots
- 1 block/200 grams feta
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- *Optional:* Sprig of rosemary

Method

1. Drain the chickpeas, rinse well, and cook in a large pot of boiling water until soft. Drain, reserving 1 cup of the cooking stock.
2. Heat the olive oil and gently sauté the onion, carrot, cumin seeds and crushed garlic together with a good pinch of salt for a few minutes until the onions are translucent. Add the tomatoes, paprika, cinnamon, cooked chickpeas, stock or water and dates, and cook together for 25 - 30 minutes or so, stirring often, until the flavours come together, and the stew thickens. Taste and add salt and cracked black pepper as needed.
3. While the stew is cooking prepare the baby carrots and feta and make the chermoula.
4. Wash the carrots and remove the tops, setting them aside for the chermoula. Slice any large carrots in half lengthways. Bring some lightly salted water to the boil in a large wide pan and cook the carrots until just tender. Drain the carrots in a colander and return the pan to the heat. Add the carrots back to the pan with the olive oil and a good seasoning of salt and pepper. Fry for 5 – 7 minutes - turning with tongs as needed - until the carrots begin to get brown and crispy.
5. Clear a space in the pan and add the piece of feta. Top with the sprig of rosemary if using and pour an extra glug of olive oil over the top. Lightly heat the feta through and colour the underneath while the carrots continue to cook. After a couple of minutes turn it to colour the other side. You want to infuse the rosemary flavour into the feta and allow the cheese to caramelise on the bottom.
6. To make the chermoula, finely chop the carrot tops or fresh coriander until you have two large handfuls worth and place into a large mortar and pestle with the garlic, salt and chili flakes. Pound until nice and mushy, then slowly pour in the olive oil while mixing with the pestle until desired consistency is achieved – if you would like it thinner just add a bit more oil. Alternatively, you could use a food processor to make the chermoula, pouring the oil in at the end with the motor running.
7. To complete the dish, I like to serve it with some couscous or bulgur wheat on the side. You could also serve with a crusty loaf of fresh white bread, or another variation would be to heat some halved pita breads up and place everything on the table mezze style, leaving people to fill their own with the stew and sides as desired.