



ANNIE EVANS,
THE DIG COOK

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RECIPES FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS

There's more art to cooking for field projects than you might expect. Sure, it's a challenge to work in the kind of basic kitchens that make most good cooks cringe but there are other issues to be considered.

With the usual blended workforces of people from many parts of the world, fieldwork cooking also requires a degree of culinary tact. You have to deal with and satisfy people whose taste runs from bland to hot and spicy, as well as the carnivores and the vegetarians. And let's not forget the project director with a sharp eye on the budget.

Finding the Right Ingredients

Above and beyond all of these issues there are questions of supply. Finding the right ingredients in village shops, markets or supermarkets where cultural differences mean that ingredients you normally pick up really easily are simply not to be found poses a problem that sometimes requires a little imaginative ad-libbing. A determined search for hokkien noodles for a popular Asian dish in a Nicosia supermarket a few years ago came up with no result. This store was totally noodle-less. The work-around was to substitute thick spaghetti and the resulting dish - chicken with 'hokkien' noodles - was a great success.

A less obvious issue for the field cook is the fact that most projects run for around six weeks. At the start, after a colossal clean-up of the dodgy old kitchen which is the usual run of things at most sites, there's a big shopping expedition. Here's where you stock up on all of the basics,

as well as the fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and/or fish needed for the first day or two. About halfway through the season you need to start winding down on your food stock – and without doing any damage to the quality of the food produced. The goal of any good field cook is to leave the site with very little of the provisions still unused. The last thing you want on the closing day of a project is a fridge stuffed with perishables and unused packages of flour, herbs, or anything else.



Best of Both Worlds

I hope in future editions of this column to explore some of the other issues that I've experienced in ten years of cooking for archaeologists but for my entrée piece here's a dish that exists in two worlds:

that of the carnivores and the vegetarians. By keeping the meat component separate, both in the cooking and on the table, people can please themselves which version to eat.

The recipe that follows is composed for thirty to thirty-five people but quantities can easily be bulked up for larger numbers. It can be adapted to local produce anywhere in the world.

This is a hearty, healthy and tasty dish that all of my dig families love.

Annie Evans

Dig Cook's website (click to view):
<http://www.digcook.com/>





MIDDLE EASTERN VEGETABLE STEW ON COUSCOUS WITH CHICKPEAS AND (OPTIONAL) LOCAL SAUSAGE

Ingredients

2 kg (4lb) couscous grains (very fine wheat pasta)
 1 & 1/2 kg (3lb) dried chickpeas, soaked overnight
 125ml (4ozs) peanut oil (ground nut oil)
 1kg (2lb) sliced onions
 10 cloves garlic (crushed)
 2 small hot red chillies or 4 mild long red chillies
 1kg chopped green capsicum (bell peppers)
 1/2 kg chopped red capsicum (bell peppers)
 1kg carrots, sliced into rounds
 1kg courgettes (zucchini) sliced into rounds
 2kg (4lb) potatoes, cubed
 1kg (2lb) pumpkin, cubed (optional), or sweet potato
 5 litres (8 pints) water
 500g (1lb) sultanas
 2kg (4lb) broad beans, okra or green beans
 4tspn cayenne pepper
 8tspn ground cumin
 4tspn paprika
 200gms (7ozs) butter
 4kg (9lb) local sausages, such as chorizo, loukaniko or similar, cut into rounds

Method

Drain and wash soaked chickpeas, cover with salted water. Bring to the boil and simmer until tender. Drain and set aside.

Place couscous grains in a large bowl and pour over 1 & 1/2 litres (3 pints) boiling water. Season with salt and pepper. Allow to stand for 30 minutes, then stir through with a fork to separate the grains. Add more boiling water if necessary and stand again. Couscous should be plump and separate, not sticky.

In a very large, deep, thick-based saucepan heat peanut oil. Add onions, garlic, chilli, peppers and carrots and fry gently until onions are soft. Stir in the diced potatoes and pumpkin or sweet potato and pour over the water. Bring to the boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for twenty minutes.

Add sliced courgettes, okra or beans and cook another fifteen minutes. Stir in reserved chickpeas, sultanas, cayenne pepper, cumin, paprika and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a gentle simmer again. Put couscous in a muslin-lined colander, set on top of vegetable stew saucepan and allow to heat through. Add butter to the couscous and stir through. Taste and adjust seasonings. Test vegetables for tenderness.

While the couscous is heating through and the stew is finishing off grill or oven bake the sliced sausage and have crisp and ready.

Serve vegetable stew on a bed of couscous, topped with sausage for the carnivores, or just as it stands for the vegetarians.