

Kashmiri Lamb Yakhni (BRAISED LEG OF LAMB)

Slow-cooked yakhni is traditionally served at celebrations and on feast days in Kashmir, but the preparation is so simple and the flavors so deep and rich, it's a nice everyday dish, too, especially on cool fall or winter evenings when something comforting is required. Street and train vendors in Kashmir prepare huge batches of yakhni in the early morning, spooning single-portion servings into tin bowls that hungry passengers devour on their way to the train. It's one of those dishes that can be prepared ahead of time, kept warm, and served later, its flavor growing more complex and enticing the longer it's given to develop. Feel free to swap in beef or goat for the lamb cubes. The key is to simmer it slowly over low heat to enable the flavors to mingle and the meat to become exceptionally tender. The yogurt adds a tanginess and the ghee adds richness.

SERVES 6

PREPARATION TIME: 1 hour

15 minutes, plus one hour to salt the goat

Kosher salt

2½ pounds boneless lamb leg, trimmed of fat and sinew and cut into 1-inch cubes

1 cup mustard oil

¼ teaspoon hing (asafoetida)

3 tablespoons ground fennel

2 tablespoons ground ginger

6 green cardamom pods

6 black cardamom pods

4-inch cinnamon stick

2 bay leaves

¼ cup cumin seeds, toasted

6 whole cloves

4 cups whole-milk yogurt

1 tablespoon red chile paste

8 tablespoons ghee, store-bought or homemade (page 67)

Finely chopped cilantro, for garnish

Basmati Rice, for serving

Generously salt the lamb and set aside in a covered bowl for 1 hour.

In a heavy-bottomed pot, heat ½ cup of the mustard oil over high

heat until the oil is nearly smoking, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the hing and then immediately add the lamb and sear until it develops a golden brown crust all over, about 5 minutes.

Add enough water to cover the lamb by 1 inch and use a wooden spoon to scrape up any browned bits sticking to the bottom of the pot. Stir the fennel, ginger, cardamom pods, cinnamon, and bay leaves into the liquid in the pot, reduce the heat to medium-low, half-cover the pot with a lid, and simmer until the lamb is cooked through, about 45 minutes. Stir occasionally to prevent scorching. Remove from the heat and discard the bay leaves.

In a sauté pan, heat the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil over high heat. Add the cumin and cloves and cook until aromatic, about 1 minute, stirring while toasting to prevent scorching. Add the yogurt and chile paste and whisk constantly until the yogurt starts to simmer. Do not let it boil. Stir the ghee into the yogurt mixture and then pour it over the lamb. Set the pot over low heat and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes to warm it through. Remove from the heat and garnish with cilantro. Serve with rice.