

Pastilla (Moroccan pigeon pie)

I have my friend Judy to thank for introducing me to this delicious dish and rather special dish. There is plenty of pigeon in any good butchers at this time of year. But chicken thighs are excellent too or you could also use pheasant breasts or any combination of these options.

200g (8 oz) unsalted butter	Handful of parsley, chopped
1 onion, finely chopped	Handful of coriander, chopped
The meat from 3 pigeons or a packet of pigeon breasts (about 500g g)	200g (8oz) blanched almonds or pistachios
4 egg yolks	2 tbsp icing sugar
Dessertspoon of ground cinnamon	Packet of filo pastry
	4 hard-boiled eggs, shelled and chopped

Preheat oven to 180°C/gas 4

Heat a tablespoon of butter in frying pan. Fry onion gently till translucent. Add diced pigeon and brown on all sides for a few minutes. Add enough water to barely cover the pigeon and simmer for 2 minutes. Stir in the egg yolks one at a time (I freeze the whites in a labelled jar for another time) Keep stirring until the sauce thickens.

Stir in half a teaspoon each of salt, pepper and cinnamon. Add herbs. Mix then set aside,

Fry the almonds in a knob of butter until golden brown, stirring all the time. Cool and grind coarsely. Add a teaspoon of cinnamon and a tablespoon of icing sugar.

Melt the rest of the butter. Layer 4 sheets of filo pastry in a greased, shallow pie tin buttering as you go and allowing pastry to hang over the sides.

Spoon pigeon mixture into tin, top with the almond mixture and then a layer of hardboiled eggs.

Fold over pastry edges and brush with butter. Lay another 2 or 3 layers of buttered fillo over the surface and tuck them in. Butter the top and pour on any remaining butter round the edges of the pie.

Bake for 30 minutes and carefully invert on to a baking sheet. Bake for a further 20 minutes before turning back over and bake for another 10 minutes until the top is crisp and golden brown.

Mix together the cinnamon and icing sugar and sprinkle over the surface. Meanwhile heat a skewer until it is red hot to brand a lattice pattern over the top. If this last bit is too scary don't bother but if you want to make the pattern my friend Judy just holds a latticed pie cutter over the pie when she scatters the spiced sugar.