



The Algerian ambassador's wife, Houda Belramoul, at home.

Photo: Melissa Adams

On my visits to Belramoul's home, the kitchen was a hive of activity, with several friends there. It is the custom for the women to be surrounded by family and friends.

There was much friendly chatter in French, Arabic and English. Embassy secretary Veronique Dal Bon was there to translate for us.

I marvelled at Belramoul's ability to prepare and cook so many dishes with so much going on around her.

Belramoul does the cooking for her family and also cooks all the traditional food for entertaining at the embassy. She prepared couscous for 300 for the Algerian National Day

on November 1 last year with help from the wife of a colleague diplomat.

She enjoys cooking other styles of food as well, particularly French.

She can buy all the Algerian ingredients she needs at Cedars of Lebanon, the Middle Eastern grocer in Southlands Centre, Mawson (closed on Mondays).

All the dishes were made in generous proportions and we left with containers and plates of food. Many more dishes were prepared than there is space for in these pages. Other recipes will appear in my Vegetarian Kitchen column over the coming weeks.

Tamina

Tamina is a traditional sweet that is made to celebrate the birth of a new baby or at weddings. It is very easy to make and much loved by children. Make it with leatherwood honey and macadamias for an Australian touch.

- 1 cup coarse semolina, toasted**
- 4 tbsp butter (80g) or olive oil spread**
- 4 tbsp (100g) honey**
- ½ cup of lightly toasted nuts of your choice: walnuts, macadamias, almonds, pistachios or hazelnuts (optional)**
- cinnamon to sprinkle**

Toast the semolina in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir and shake the pan until golden brown. This could be done in the oven, but keep an eye on it and stir often. Tip into a bowl and set aside. Melt the butter in a sauce-



Photo: Karleen Williams

pan, take off the heat and stir in the honey. When the honey has melted, add the semolina to the saucepan and mix together. Fold in most of the nuts (if using), saving a few for decoration. Turn the mixture out on to a pretty plate and press down. Decorate with remaining nuts and sprinkle with cinnamon. Serve with a small spoon for each person.

This is really yummy eaten straight from the saucepan while still warm.



Making mahdjouba pastries.

Photos: Diana Lampe/Karleen Williams

Mahdjouba

Makes 18 pastries
Filling

- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1kg red onions, sliced**
- 3 tomatoes, chopped**
- 1 tsp ras el hanout (see below)**
- 1 tsp sweet paprika**
- 1 tbsp tomato paste**
- sea salt and freshly ground pepper**

Dough

- 1kg fine semolina**
- 1 tsp salt**
- 1 free-range egg, lightly beaten**
- olive oil**

Combine the filling ingredients in a saucepan and cook gently until the onions are soft. If you like, add harissa or hot pepper paste.

Place the semolina and salt in a bowl. Make a well in the centre and add the egg and warm water a little at a time. Knead the dough vigorously for about 15 minutes, adding more water if needed. It should be softer than bread dough. Break off small balls the size of a mandarin and coat them with olive oil. Rest them for one hour. Rub olive oil over the work bench. Take a ball of dough and working with the fingers shape it into a disc, then keep stretching it around the edge into a circle about 40cm across. (See pictures.) It should be as thin as possible without tearing. Spread a little olive oil over the surface of the pastry. Fold one side of the pastry in over two thirds of the circle, then fold the opposite side in the same way to the straight edge. Spread two tablespoons of filling over the folded centre, not too thickly. Fold in one end and then the other, making a rectangle. Set the filled pastry aside on an oiled bench while you make the others.

Preheat a ridged or non-stick pan over medium heat. Pat each pastry between the hands to flatten it out. Cook a few minutes on each side. Serve hot.

Ras el hanout

Ras el hanout is a spice blend used in many Algerian dishes (available at Essential Ingredient). Use this recipe as a guide. You could include aniseed, caraway, rose buds, mace, cumin, bay leaves or saffron. Freshly grinding whole spices is better.

- 1 tsp each ground ginger, coriander, black pepper, paprika**
- ½ tsp each of ground cinnamon, turmeric, nutmeg, allspice, cardamom**
- ¼ tsp ground cloves**

Combine the spices in a jar and store in a cool dark place.

Chorba frik

The word chorba means soup and frik is wheat. Chorba frik is eaten every

day to break the fast during Ramadan, accompanied by bourak.

Serves 6

- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil**
- 250g cubed shoulder of lamb**
- 1 large red onion, chopped**
- 1 stalk celery**
- 1 tbsp paprika**
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 100g chickpeas, soaked overnight and cooked, or 1 can chickpeas**
- 5 tomatoes, chopped or 1 can of tomatoes**
- 1 tbsp tomato paste**
- 1-2 low-salt stock cubes**
- ½ cup coarse bulgur wheat or cracked green-wheat freekeh**
- 1 bunch coriander, chopped**

Cook the chickpeas in fresh water (no salt) for about 40 minutes until tender. Fry the olive oil, lamb and onion for a few minutes. Add the celery, paprika, stock cubes, pepper and two cups of water. Cook partly covered for 30 minutes. Add the chopped tomatoes, tomato paste, cooked chickpeas, and one litre of water. Cook another 30 minutes. Rinse the bulgur or freekeh and add to the pot. Cook a further 15 minutes. Add more water if necessary. Season again if needed. At serving time, stir in coriander.

Green-wheat freekeh is available at the Essential Ingredient and some supermarkets.

Bouraks

Bouraks are deep-fried, cigar-shaped pastries made with a paper-thin pastry called dioule. Chinese spring-roll wrappers make a good substitute. The pastries could be made with filo pastry, brushed with olive oil and baked in the oven.

- 3 red onions, finely chopped**
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil**
- 250g minced lamb**
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- freshly grated nutmeg**
- 1 packet of spring roll wrappers, defrosted**
- 2 tsp plain flour and water to make a paste**
- sunflower or peanut oil for frying**

Fry the onions in olive oil until soft. Add the minced lamb and break up with a fork. Season the meat well with salt, pepper and nutmeg and cook for about 15 minutes. Set aside to cool. Place a spring-roll wrapper diagonally on a plate in front of you. Put a generous tablespoon of meat filling on the point nearest you. Roll the pastry around the filling, folding in the ends. Brush the end point with paste to seal the package.

Pour sunflower or peanut oil into a deep frying pan to a depth of three centimetres. Heat to 180C. Fry the rolls on each side until golden brown. Serve at once with lemon wedges.