Algerian Fish Tagine Dinner

A Planning Guide for Four Guests

in a Casual, Relaxed

and Welcoming Environment

An Algerian Spiced Fish Tagine offers a relaxed, aromatic dinner for four, typically requiring about 2 hours and 45 minutes from prep to plate. The dish centers on fresh fish fillets marinated in a blend of cilantro, garlic, ginger, cumin, coriander, anise, and cayenne, served alongside slow-baked tomatoes, eggplant, and Moroccan black olives.

To prepare, blend the spice mixture with olive oil and lemon juice, then marinate the 2 pounds of fish for 2 hours to infuse deep flavor. While the fish rests, bake halved plum tomatoes at 300°F for 1.5 hours until soft and concentrated.

Serve the dish by layering the marinated fish and chopped vegetables in a tagine or baking dish, then bake or simmer for 20–30 minutes until the fish is cooked through. This Mediterranean-style meal is naturally gluten-free and pairs beautifully with saffron maftoul or couscous for a wholesome, low-effort family dinner.

Menu at a Glance

- **Appetizers**: bourek pastries, zaalouk, shlada, citrous salad, olives & preserved lemons
- **Main**: Algerian-style fish tagine (grouper, monkfish, or dorade)
- **Sides**: vegetable couscous, *ras el hanout* roasted vegetables, fennel & orange salad
- **Beverages**: mint tea, orange blossom lemonade, Provençal rosé, cardamom coffee
- **Dessert**: makroudh, chebakia, or dates from African Market Nice

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Fish Notes

- **Traditional choice**: grouper (mérou), firm and classic for Maghrebi tagines.
- **Easiest to work with**: monkfish (lotte) — very firm, forgiving, freezes and thaws well. Widely available:
  - **sea bream** (dorade), hake (merlu), or cod (cabillaud).
  - **Picard** is a perfectly good source for monkfish or cod fillets if you want a stress-free, pre-portioned option.
- For a more special-occasion presentation, buy grouper or dorade fresh from a fishmonger at Marché Provençal.

Ambiance

- **Music**: Algerian raï (Cheb Khaled, Cheb Mami, Rachid Taha) for arrival and after dinner; chaâbi or Andalusian-influenced malouf as a mellower backdrop during the meal.
- **Decor**: low warm lighting (candles, lanterns), a patterned kilim-style table runner, brass or copper serving pieces, fresh mint and citrus as a simple centerpiece, incense or bakhoor lit before guests arrive.
- **Don't forget**: a bread basket, a small bowl for olive pits, a lemon or rose-petal water bowl for rinsing fingers, and harissa served on the side rather than mixed in.

Shopping List

Organized by where to buy each item.

African Market Nice

— 37 Route de Turin, 06300 Nice Open Tue–Sat 10h–19h30 (Fri closed 13h–15h), Mon 12h–19h30, Sun 10h–16h30.

- Ras el hanout, cumin, sweet & smoked paprika, ground coriander
- Harissa (jar or tube)
- Preserved lemonsDried dates (dessert fallback)
- Makroudh, chebakia, or other pastries — call ahead to check stock
- Orange blossom water
- Mint tea (gunpowder green tea)
- Feuilles de brick (bourek/brik pastry sheets), if in stock

Marché Provençal

– Cours Saleya (mornings, closed Monday)

- Fresh fish — grouper or dorade, from a fishmonger stall (if not using Picard)
- Fresh mint, large bunch
- Vegetables: carrots, zucchini, turnips, fennel, tomatoes, onions
- Oranges, for the fennel-orange salad
- Olives and marinated vegetablesCrusty bread or semoule bread
- Monday only: browse the antiques/flea market for a secondhand tagine dish

Picard

(if buying fish frozen)

- Frozen monkfish or cod fillets, portioned for 4
- Regular Grocery (Casino, Carrefour, etc.)
- Couscous (semoule)Roasted almonds
- Olive oil, extra lemons
- Dry Provençal rosé
- Sparkling water or a non-alcoholic option
- Ground coffee and cardamom pods, for after dinner

Preparation Timeline

Worked backward from serving time, so the day of the party stays calm.

1–2 Days Before

- Buy dry goods and spices from the African Market Nice
- Buy rosé and non-perishables from the regular grocery store
- If going the flea-market route, this is the window for a Monday Cours Saleya visit
- Make the zaalouk / chtitha (eggplant dip) — improves after a day in the fridge
- Make the Citrous salad — also holds well
- If using frozen fish, buy it now and keep it in the freezer

Day Before

- Move frozen fish from freezer to fridge to thaw slowly overnight (skip if buying fresh)
- Prep fennel & orange salad components; store separately, dress just before serving
- Make the shlada (tomato-cucumber salad) — best made a few hours to a day ahead
- Chop vegetables for the tagine and the roasted vegetable side
- Mix the chermoula marinade; marinate the fish overnight if the recipe allows
- Set the table and put out decor — runner, candles, brass pieces

Day Of — Morning

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  • If buying fish fresh, go to Marché Provençal early
  • Assemble bourek/brik rolls (don't fry yet); keep covered in the fridge
  • Roast the vegetables for the side — reheat later
  • Prep the couscous base — reheat with a splash of water/oil before
serving
  • Make the mint tea concentrate or have everything ready to brew fresh
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Afternoon (3–4 Hours Before Guests Arrive)

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  • Light prep only — nothing that needs full attention
  • Set out olives, almonds, preserved lemons in serving dishes
  • Chill the rosé
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- Confirm harissa is in its own small serving bowl

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- If going the flea-market route, this is the window for a Monday Cours Saleya visit
- Make the zaalouk / chtitha (eggplant dip) — improves after a day in the fridge
- Make the carrot salad — also holds well
- If using frozen fish, buy it now and keep it in the freezer

Afternoon (3–4 Hours Before Guests Arrive)

- Light prep only — nothing that needs full attention
- Set out olives, almonds, preserved lemons in serving dishes
- Chill the rosé
- Confirm harissa is in its own small serving bowl

1.5–2 Hours Before Guests Arrive

- Start the tagine — gives it time to braise gently without rushing
- While it simmers: shower, change, take a breath

When Guests Arrive

- Bourek and olives out immediately as they settle in
- Brew and pour mint tea or lemonade
- Tagine finishes on low heat in the background — check once, then let it be

After the Meal

- Cardamom coffee or a second round of mint tea
- Dessert plated — no cooking required if bought at African Market Nice

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