INDONESIA / WILL'S GOURMET RECIPES

ACEHNESE OCTOPUS RENDANG

Rendang does not have to be beef. Here Will cooks octopus Acehnese style: simmer it until tender, then reduce it in a spiced paste and coconut milk until thick, dark and rich.



SERVES	PREP	COOK	TOTAL	DIFFICULTY	SPICE
4	30 min	2 h 30 min	3 h	Medium	Hot

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE OCTOPUS

1.2 kg octopus, cleaned

FOR THE RENDANG PASTE

30 g galangal
80 g shallots
30 g garlic
4 red chillies
1 tsp coriander seeds
1/2 tsp fennel seeds
3 white cardamom pods
2 star anise
1 cinnamon stick

FOR THE RENDANG

2 tbsp neutral oil
2 lemongrass stalks, bruised
3 salam leaves
3 kaffir lime leaves, torn
1 turmeric leaf, half tied in a knot, half finely shredded
2 star anise
2 cinnamon sticks
1 tsp coriander powder
1 tsp fennel powder
3 white cardamom pods, cracked
2 tbsp palm sugar, grated
400 ml thin coconut milk (second press)
200 ml thick coconut milk (first press)
Salt, to taste

TO FINISH

Fresh red chilli, sliced
Kaffir lime leaf, finely shredded
Fried shallots

METHOD

COOK THE OCTOPUS

1. Put the octopus in a pot over low heat with no extra water, as it releases plenty of its own. Simmer gently for 1 to 1.5 hours, depending on size, until tender. Cool, then cut into large pieces.

MAKE THE PASTE

2. Dry-roast the coriander, fennel, cardamom, star anise and cinnamon until fragrant, then grind. Blend with the galangal, shallots, garlic and chillies into a smooth paste.

COOK THE PASTE

3. Heat the oil in a wide pot over medium heat. Fry the paste for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring, until the oil starts to separate and it smells sweet and spicy.

BUILD THE RENDANG

4. Add the lemongrass, salam, lime leaves, whole spices, coriander and fennel powder, cardamom and the octopus. Stir until every piece is coated.

ADD THE COCONUT MILK

5. Add the palm sugar, salt and the thin coconut milk. Simmer gently for 30 to 45 minutes, stirring now and then, until reduced and thick.

FINISH

6. Pour in the thick coconut milk and cook for 10 to 15 minutes more, until the coconut breaks down and the sauce turns dark brown and clings. Fold in the shredded turmeric leaf.

SERVE

7. Garnish with sliced chilli, lime leaf and fried shallots. Serve with steamed rice.

USEFUL SHORTCUTS FOR HOME COOKS

Frozen octopus works well and is often more tender. Defrost it fully before cooking.

If you cannot find turmeric leaf, leave it out and add a pinch of ground turmeric to the paste.

Rendang keeps well. Make it a day ahead, chill, and reheat gently.

Add more chilli at the end if you like it hot. Will does.

Will is on the balcony at Nihiwatu, in Sumba, with the Indian Ocean rolling in behind him. He wants to cook octopus, because a lot of people are scared of it and it is actually easy.The octopus is simmered first in its own juices, which takes an hour to an hour and a half, and it shrinks dramatically. Then it…