

## Recipe 9: Kabsa (Traditional Saudi Arabian National Dish)

### Ingredients:

For the Meat & Rice:

- 1 whole chicken, cut into pieces (or 1 kg lamb)
- 3 cups basmati rice, rinsed and soaked for 30 minutes
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 large tomatoes, chopped
- 1 large carrot, grated
- 1/2 cup raisins (optional)
- 1/4 cup slivered almonds or pine nuts, for garnish
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil or ghee
- 4 cups chicken broth or water
- Salt to taste

Kabsa Spice Mix:

- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

### Preparation:

1. Cook the Chicken: Heat oil or ghee in a large heavy pot. Add onions and saut until soft and golden. Add garlic and saut for 1 more minute. Add the chicken pieces and brown them on all sides.
2. Add Spices & Vegetables: Stir in all the Kabsa spices and cook for 2 minutes. Add chopped tomatoes and grated carrot; cook until tomatoes soften.
3. Simmer: Pour in the broth or water. Add salt. Cover and simmer on medium heat for about 30 minutes, until the chicken is tender.
4. Add Rice: Remove the chicken and set aside. Stir soaked and drained rice into the broth and vegetables.

Cook on medium heat until most liquid is absorbed (about 10 minutes).

5. Steam: Return the chicken on top of the rice. Cover tightly and cook on very low heat for another 20 minutes, until the rice is fully cooked.

6. Garnish & Serve: Fluff rice gently with a fork. Top with raisins and toasted nuts. Serve hot with fresh salad or yogurt on the side.

### **History & How It Reached the Region:**

Kabsa has deep roots in Saudi Arabian Bedouin culture. The word 'kabsa' means 'pressed' or 'squeezed' in Arabic, referring to the way the rice is cooked with meat and spices in a single pot.

Historically, Kabsa evolved as a nomadic, all-in-one dish that could feed many from communal platters. Its complex spices reflect the ancient spice trade routes that passed through the Arabian Peninsula.

Today, Kabsa remains a central dish in Saudi households, often enjoyed at Friday family gatherings, weddings, and festivals.

### **Personal Significance Story:**

My first taste of Kabsa came during a visit to Riyadh, when I was invited to a Saudi friend's home for a traditional meal.

As we sat on floor cushions around a large shared platter, I was struck by the aroma of saffron, cinnamon, and cardamom filling the room. The rice was rich, tender, and perfectly spiced, with the chicken falling off the bone.

My host explained how every Saudi family has their unique spice blend, often passed down through generations.

It wasn't just a meal-it was a window into Saudi hospitality, culture, and connection.