

Dear fellow foodie,

I'm delighted that you've chosen to order my aromatic spice paste, and I'd love to share a bit of its background with you, along with some recipes to. The paste is my rendition of the historic spice blend known as Spetsieriko, traditionally used in Corfu for the beloved Sunday dish, Pastitsada.

Typically, this dish features cockerel simmered with pasta, both infused with a gentle blend of warming spices, imparting flavour without overwhelming heat. It is generally believed that every household on the island had their very own version of the spice blend.

Taking inspiration from this tradition, I ventured to craft a versatile paste, expertly and lovingly created by the Northumbrian Pantry.



Over time, I was thrilled to discover the paste's incredible adaptability, particularly for those who relish Mediterranean cuisine and aromatic seasoning. Just a teaspoon of this paste often proves sufficient to enhance soups, casseroles, roasts, marinades, and even dips.

I sincerely hope you enjoy exploring the myriad possibilities this paste offers, and Alice, David and I would be overjoyed to see your culinary creations shared on social media. Should you choose to tag us, it would be a delight to witness your own, unique interpretation.

With warm regards & Kali Orexi,

Irini

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Irini's Aromatic Spice Paste



Greek food is generally not spicy, it has generally clean flavours given mostly by our excellent extra virgin olive oil, lemon, lots of onions and fresh and or dried herbs.

However, the Venetians, occupiers of many parts of Greece including the Ionian islands, being excellent merchant navy state, introduced spices and the Corfiot Pastitsada is famous in Greece for its sweet aromas. Every household in Corfu is reported to have made its own 'Spetsieriko' the spice blend for the Pastitsada dish which is often eaten to this day as Sunday lunch; Cockerel or chicken cooked in an aromatic tomato sauce to which hilopites (a tagliatelle style pasta) is cooked at the end and the whole dish served with lots of grated cheese.

My love for this dish, inspired me to create my own Spetsieriko and this is used in two different recipe boxes of mine with www.cookaway.com

Here are a few more although you can use it easily to marinate meat or robust tasting fish or add flavour in casseroles, pasta sauces and even dips.

I hope you enjoy!

Irini x

Recipes with Irini's spice paste

Corfiot Manestra

Perfect for plant-based diets (just omit the cheese) this dish is full of goodness, energy and flavour!

In this recipe, flavour was added by adding to my stock a tbsp of dried foraged mushroom powder which I made in the Autumn and 1 tbsp spice paste which I have created for a couple of my Cookaway menus.

In Corfu where this dish is called 'Manestra Kalopimpiri' (from the Venetian Collu Pimpiri meaning with pepper) they use cinnamon, cloves and lots of paprika.



Ingredients (serves 4)

400g kritharaki (orzo)	1 Ltr vegetable stock (or vegan)
5 medium size carrots, peeled and thinly sliced	2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil and extra to drizzle
1 large onion, finely chopped	150ml dry white wine
3 celery sticks, thinly sliced	2-3 tbsp finely chopped mint and parsley
100g frozen peas	Zest of 1 lemon
A handful of baby tomatoes on the vine	2-3 tbsp lemon juice
1 tbsp Irini's Spice Paste	

Method

Start by roasting the tomatoes on the vine and the garlic. Preheat the oven to 180 C Fan.

Put the tomatoes on a baking tray and drizzle with a little oil. Season and roast for 30 minutes.

Put the stock in a pan and keep hot on the hob.

Bring a large sauteing pan to a medium heat and sweat the chopped onion for 4-5 minutes. Next add the carrots and celery, stir to coat with the olive oil, lower the heat and cook for 10 minutes stirring from time to time. Add the tbsp of Irini's Paste and the kritharaki and stir for a couple of minutes. Increase the heat and add the wine letting it evaporate.

Start adding the stock, a ladle at a time until the pasta is almost cooked. Add the peas and continue cooking until the kritharaki reaches the consistency of risotto, cooked but of a loose consistency. Just before the end, add the roasted tomatoes, herbs, lemon zest and juice. Season with sea salt and freshly grounded pepper and serve with lots of grated Cretan graviera or other good hard cheese.

Recipes with Irini's spice paste

Aromatic spaghetti with Calamari

Ingredients (serves 4)

4-5 squid, approx. 450-500g
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp Irini's Spice Paste
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil and extra for drizzling
100ml dry white wine
150ml passata or a couple of skinned and chopped tomatoes
1tsp vegetable bouillon
1 bay leaf
A small bunch of parsley
200g spaghetti



Method

Clean the calamari by pulling out the tentacles from the main body. Cut just below the eye and discard the innards. Discard the beak and then trim the long tentacles level with the rest. Pull the fins away from the body together with the membrane and discard. Pull out the quill and remove the innards. Scrape the inside to clean with the back of a knife and wash. Cut the calamari in rings of approx. 0.5cm wide.

Bring a large saucepan to a medium heat and add the oil. Sautee the onion until translucent, 4-5 minutes. Add the spice paste and toss for a couple of minutes. Add the calamari, stir to coat well and add the wine. Let it evaporate and add the passata and 200ml of hot water from the kettle with the bouillon and bay leaf. Bring to the boil, lower the heat, cover the pan and cook until the calamari is tender and the sauce has thickened, approx. 45 minutes. When the calamari is cooked, season with some salt and freshly ground black pepper and add half the parsley. Discard the bay leaf before serving.

Bring a large saucepan with 2 litres of water and a generous pinch of salt to the boil. Add the spaghetti and cook for 9-12 minutes. Drain the spaghetti, reserving some of the water. Add the spaghetti to the calamari and toss well to coat. Add some of the pasta water to thicken the sauce if you wish and serve sprinkled with more parsley and drizzled with some extra virgin olive oil.

Recipes with Irini's spice paste

Vegan spiced butternut squash soup

This is not a hot spicy soup but rather aromatic using Irini's Spice Paste inspired by the Spetsieriko spice used in Corfu.

Roast the butternut squash with some thyme sprigs, with a couple of cloves of garlic and drizzled with extra virgin olive oil after you cut it in slices and removed the seeds.

Ingredients (serves 2)

- 400g cooked butternut squash
- 1 banana shallot, finely chopped
- 3 celery sticks, finely sliced
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1cm long piece of ginger, grated
- 1 tsp Irini's Spice Paste
- 1 tsp vegan bouillon
- 400ml almond milk
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Method

Bring a pan with the olive oil to a medium heat. Add the chopped shallot and cook for a few minutes until translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 1 more minute. Add the celery and the spice paste and cook for 3-4 more minutes stirring continuously.

Add the almond milk, bouillon and 200ml of water. Bring to the boil, cover the pan, lower the heat and cook for 15 minutes. Add the butternut squash and cook for a further 15 minutes.

Blitz the soup with a stick blender and season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Serve drizzled with a little lime juice, coriander leaves or coriander oil and a few pepper croutons.



Recipes with Irini's spice paste

Giouvetsi - Aromatic chicken with orzo and cheese topping

Ingredients (serves 4)

6 chicken thighs, skinned, boned and sliced in 5 strips each
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 red pepper, cored and cut in small dice
1 tbsp Irini's Aromatic Paste
A small handful of baby plum tomatoes, quartered
250g orzo
4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
100ml dry white wine
750ml chicken or vegetable stock
1 tsp fresh mint finely chopped

For the cheese topping

100g feta cheese, crumbled
100g Cretan Graviera or other hard cheese grated
250g mozzarella (net weight) chopped
½ tsp dried mint
½ tsp dried oregano



Method

Preheat the oven to 180 C fan.

In a bowl, mix all the cheese with the dried mint and oregano. Bring a large sauteing pan to a high heat and add half the olive oil. Brown the chicken thighs all round and remove onto a dish. Keep to the side.

Add the remaining olive oil and the chopped onion and pepper. Sweat for a few minutes and add the aromatic spice paste and chopped tomatoes. Cook for a 3 more minutes stirring continuously. Add the orzo and stir well to coat. Add the wine and let it evaporate and start adding the stock. Use all the stock up by adding more as soon as the previous amount has been absorbed. Add a little hot water if you have run out of stock and the orzo is not fully cooked. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

When the orzo is cooked, remove from the heat and transfer into an oven proof dish.

Top the orzo with the pieces of chicken. Spoon over the cheese mix and bake in the oven for 20 minutes uncovered to finish cooking.

Sprinkle with the shredded mint and serve.

Recipes with Irini's spice paste

Keftedes (aromatic lamb meatballs with feta)

A great family sharing dish which can be made with left over roast lamb too with a minor adjustment to cooking time. Perfect served with chips or just crusty bread and a green leaf salad. When using cooked meat to make keftedes, I use cold meat and sautee the onion and garlic before adding to the mix.



Ingredients (serves 6)

For the meatballs

500g lamb mince
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
150g fresh breadcrumbs
2 eggs
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tbsp dried oregano

For the tomato sauce

1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp Irini's Spice Paste
300ml passata
1 tin of chopped tomatoes, 400g
1 tbsp soft brown sugar

Also,

200g Dodoni feta
Extra virgin oil for frying
A few basil leaves

Method

To make the tomato sauce, bring a sauteing pan to a medium heat and add 2-3 tbsp of olive oil. Sweat the chopped onions for 4-5 minutes until translucent. Add the spice paste and stir for a minute before adding the passata, tomato, brown sugar and thyme leaves. Stir, bring to the boil and reduce the heat immediately. Cover the pan and cook the sauce slowly for about 20 minutes, stirring from time to time, lifting the lid partially to protect yourself from the sauce splattering. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

While the tomato sauce is cooking, make the meatballs.

In a bowl, mix together the mince, the chopped onion and garlic, breadcrumbs, eggs, coriander and oregano. Season with salt and pepper and mix well. Use your hands to make small balls. Bring a large frying pan to a medium heat and add a couple of centimetres of olive oil. When the oil starts smoking, add the balls (you may need to cook them in stages to avoid overcrowding the pan) reduce the heat to medium intensity and cook the meatballs for a few minutes ensuring that they are brown all over without burning. Drain on kitchen paper.

When both the sauce and the balls are cooked, transfer the sauce to a baking dish, spoon the meatballs over the sauce and break the feta all around them. Cook in a preheated oven at 180 °C for 30 minutes. Sprinkle with some fresh basil leaves and serve.

Beef meatballs (keftedes) in an aromatic spicy tomato sauce.

Ingredients (serves 4 - makes 34 x 20g meatballs)

For the meatballs

500g beef mince
1 large onion, grated
50g panko crumbs
1 egg
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp dried oregano
1 tsp dried mint
1 tbsp fresh, finely chopped parsley
1 tsp sea salt
A good pinch of black pepper
2 tbsp flour for dusting
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

For the aromatic spicy tomato sauce

1 large onion, finely chopped
2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
1 large carrot, peeled and grated
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp Irini's spice paste
700g passata
250ml beef or vegetable stock
1 tsp brown sugar

Method

Put the flour in a ball and leave to the side.

Put the mince, onion, panko crumbs, egg and herbs in a large bowl. Season with the salt and ground black pepper and use your hands to massage the mix very well for 5 minutes and ensure that all the flavours are given a chance to develop.

Preheat the oven to 200 C. Fan.

Take small amounts of mince in your hands and roll between your palms to make small balls. Place the meatballs on a flat dish. Next, Sprinkle the flour onto the meatballs and take each one in your hands to roll again and ensure a light dusting of flour on all of them, shaking any excess.

Beef meatballs (keftedes) in an aromatic spicy tomato sauce. Cont....

When you have finished with all the meatballs, put the olive oil in a baking tin and place the baking tin in the oven for 5 minutes. Take out the tray and empty the meatballs onto the hot oil. Use a spoon to stir so that they are coated with the olive oil and place back in the oven. Bake for 15-17 minutes until golden.

To cook the sauce, bring a large saucepan with the oil to a medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and sweat for 5-6 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for a further couple of minutes. Add the paste, stir for a minute and add the passata, stock, sugar, season with some salt, pepper and stir. Give it a good stir, lower the heat and cook for 25-30 minutes for the sauce to thicken.

Taste, adjust seasoning and add the meatballs to the sauce, reheating if necessary before serving.