



Persian Koftah (Beef and Rice Meatballs)



A friend of mine who is passionate about Middle Eastern cooking introduced me to this simple dish and it has all the elements of comfort food that I love. The rice and split peas in this meatball and tomato dish will stretch a small amount of mince into a meal that could feed ten people. However, it needs to be planned ahead, since the split peas and rice have to be soaked for several hours before using.

Ingredients

- ♦ 1 cup split peas, soaked in water for 5–6 hours
- ♦ 1 cup basmati or long-grain rice, soaked with the peas
- ♦ 500 g/1 lb minced beef
- ♦ 1 large onion, peeled and finely chopped
- ♦ 4 eggs, beaten
- ♦ 2 tablespoons fresh tarragon, finely chopped
- ♦ 1 tablespoon mint, finely chopped
- ♦ 1 tablespoon parsley, finely chopped
- ♦ salt and pepper
- ♦ sunflower oil for frying
- ♦ 2 x 220 g/8 oz cans chopped tomatoes
- ♦ 2 tablespoons tomato paste

Serves 6

To Cook

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Drain the peas and rice. In a large bowl combine them with the meat, onion, half the beaten egg, herbs and seasoning. Mix well and form into meatballs. Use the remaining egg mixture to coat each meatball. Heat the oil in a large pan and add the balls in batches and cook until golden, but not necessarily cooked through. Combine the tomatoes and the tomato paste. Place the koftah (meatballs) into a casserole dish and cover with the tomato mixture. Cook in the oven for 1½ hours or so, until the tomato sauce has been absorbed. It may be necessary to add a little more liquid during cooking.