

Chermoula: a "flavour bomb" of Maghreb cuisine

Chermoula is a marinade that originates from the Maghreb region of North Africa, specifically from Morocco. It is often referred to as the "emblematic marinade of Maghreb cuisine" and its name comes from the Arabic verb *cherme*, which means "to rub or marinate something with a spice mix". The three main ingredients of chermoula are garlic, olive oil, and fresh herbs, making it similar to an Italian salsa verde but with a distinct North African flavor profile.

The herbs

The most important ingredient in chermoula is a combination of coriander and flat-leaf parsley, which are used in equal proportions. The herbs add a unique flavor and depth to the marinade, and can be adjusted to taste. Some recipes call for more coriander, while others use more parsley.

The flavorings

Garlic is a key ingredient in chermoula and can be adjusted to taste, with some recipes calling for just one clove and others using up to a dozen. Cumin is also commonly used and enhances the flavor of the herbs without competing with them. Saffron, on the other hand, is often included but can be difficult to detect in the presence of strong flavors such as garlic and red pepper.

The acid

Not all chermoula recipes include acid, but it can be added for flavor and to help melt the bones of a whole fish when marinating. Fresh lemon juice is the preferred acid, as it provides a cleaner and more refreshing flavor compared to vinegar.

The method

Chermoula can be made by finely chopping the ingredients or using a pestle and mortar to release the oils. The texture of the chermoula can be adjusted based on its intended use, with a coarser texture preferred for a condiment or salsa and a smoother texture preferred for a marinade or rub.

The fish

Chermoula can be used with a variety of fish, including sardines, tuna, and mackerel. It can be used as a marinade for whole or filleted fish, or as a condiment for grilled or fried fish. It pairs well with lemon and can be used to make a small-scale fish tagine.

Perfect chermoula fish recipe

Ingredients

- 3 plump garlic cloves
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp sweet paprika
- ½ tsp hot paprika
- 75g fresh coriander
- 25g flat-leaf parsley
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 preserved lemon (optional)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 white fish fillets, scaled and cleaned

Instructions

1. Make a paste with the garlic and salt in a mortar, then stir in the cumin and paprikas.
 2. Finely chop the herbs and add them to the mortar, pounding them to a chunky paste.
 3. Stir in the lemon juice and olive oil (or use a food processor).
 4. If using the preserved lemon, chop it finely and stir it into the chermoula. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.
 5. Brush the fish with chermoula and marinate for at least one hour (up to eight hours if possible).
 6. Grill the fish for two to four minutes on each side until cooked through.
 7. Serve with the remaining chermoula and lemon wedges.
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