

Couscous can also be eaten for breakfast or dessert, depending on how you flavor it.

Breakfast is usually a light meal. Tea and a roll or piece of bread or couscous sweetened with milk and honey are enough to start the day.

The main meal is served between one o'clock and three o'clock in the afternoon. Shops, businesses and schools usually close down so that families can rest and spend time together.

Couscous and herbal tea for dessert might be steamed and flavored with sugar, mint, cinnamon, honey, raisins, dried fruits or nuts.

Lunch in Downtown Cairo, Egypt



Legumes are plants with seed pods that split along both sides when ripe.

- peanuts
- peas
- soybeans
- green beans
- black eyed peas
- chickpeas
- lentils
- kidney beans
- mung beans
- navy beans
- black beans
- rice beans

Vegetables are edible plants that are either bulbs, stems, roots, or leaves.

Leaves (greens)

- lettuce
- cabbage
- swiss chard
- dandelion greens
- spinach
- bok choy
- nettle
- kale
- grape leaves

Stems

- artichokes
- bamboo shoots
- celery
- asparagus
- fennel

Bulbs

- onions
- leeks
- garlic
- shallots

Roots

- daikon radish
- turnips
- beets
- carrots
- yams
- potatoes



# The Cultural Cuisine Courier

A Newsletter for Children and their Parents

## NORTH AFRICA



North Africa is made up of five countries that border the Mediterranean Sea. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt share a common national dish, called couscous. Couscous is a type of pasta, usually cooked and served with a stew on top.

Each country has a special way of making couscous and the predominant spice varies from country to country.

The stews which top couscous also vary by country, with vegetables such as tomatoes, carrots, onions, beans and peas being the main ingredients.

In Morocco, saffron is the spice of choice. In Libya, chopped lamb, chicken or beef is sometimes added to the stew and topped with an egg. Algerians use tomatoes to flavor their couscous. A hot sauce, called harissa, is a specialty of Tunisia, while Egyptians use a native spice called cumin in their daily cooking.

## EVERYONE LIKES COUSCOUS



<http://geoimages.berkeley.edu/GeoImages/Miller/millerone.html>

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# HOW TO EAT COUSCOUS

Can you imagine eating dinner with your hands?

Well, in North African countries where couscous is a national food, eating with your hands is not only acceptable, but it's considered impolite and disrespectful if you don't!

Steamed couscous is placed on a large tray and a stew is arranged on top of the cooked pasta. Diners sit on the floor and share from a common serving dish. Couscous is eaten with the thumb, pointer and middle finger of the right hand. The left hand is considered unclean and is not used. The hands are first cleaned and rinsed in a bath of rose water or orange blossom water. The fragrant water makes the hands smell sweet and adds delicate flavor to the food.

North Africans have an enormous respect for their food, which is why they eat with their hands. They believe eating with metal utensils is a harsh interaction with their food as it jabs the food. By picking up their food with their hands, they create a close and reverent relationship to their food. After the meal, the hands are again washed in rose water.

In Morocco, saffron is used to flavor couscous. Food cooked in saffron turns golden yellow. Saffron is the most expensive spice in the world. Why? Because it comes from the dried stigmas of a crocus flower. Each crocus flower only produces three stigmas, and it takes more than 14,000 stigmas to produce one ounce of saffron spice. That's a lot of hand-picking! Saffron collecting is very labor-intensive, and that drives the cost up. A modern meal-time Moroccan favorite? Cola. Soda is readily available in Morocco.

Algerians use tomatoes for their flavoring. North African food is heavily influenced by the Mediterranean and France, so it is unlike the rest of Africa. It is usually colorful and exotic.

How about some hot sauce? In Tunisia, a spicy tomato paste sauce, called harissa, is served as a side dish. Harissa sauce contains any or all of the following: garlic, hot chili peppers, olive oil, cumin, coriander, caraway and lemon juice. Its hotness can be adjusted by the type and amount of chili peppers used.



Camels at the Giza Pyramids, Egypt

Egyptians today follow in the footsteps of their ancestors when it comes to their native and ethnic foods. Their use of grains, as discovered by historians, dates back to around 1494 BC - a practice that marked the beginning of agriculture. Couscous is made from wheat and has been a staple in the Egyptian diet for centuries. Remains found in the Pyramids have contained a variety of breads, grains, beans, and spices. Cumin is an Egyptian native annual plant related to parsley. Its seeds are amber, white or black. Amber cumin is the one most commonly used in cooking. Chickpeas are also frequently part of the meal. As part of the legume family easily cultivated in North Africa, they are another staple food.

In Libya, popular dishes include beans, nuts, dried apricots, figs and unleavened bread. *Shakshouka* (chopped lamb and vegetables in tomato sauce, topped with an egg) is served over couscous.



## Couscous

2 cups whole wheat couscous  
2 cups water

Bring water to a boil. Add the couscous. Stir and let sit, covered for at least 5 minutes.

## African Stew (served on top of couscous)

2 cups tomatoes  
2 cups chick peas  
2 cups carrots - frozen  
2 cups peas - frozen  
2 cups beans  
2 cups sweet potatoes  
2 cups raisins  
1 chopped onion  
1 chopped green pepper  
2 tablespoons cumin  
2 tablespoons paprika  
1 tablespoon cinnamon  
1 tablespoon oil

Cook the onions and peppers in the oil. Add tomatoes. Add spices. Add remaining ingredients and simmer for at least five minutes. Serve on couscous with harissa sauce, if desired.

## Harissa

1 cup tomato paste  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
2 cloves crushed garlic  
1 tablespoon crushed hot pepper

Crush the garlic and the pepper in a mortar & pestle. Combine tomato paste and lemon juice. Add spice mixture and mix well. Serve on couscous, if desired.

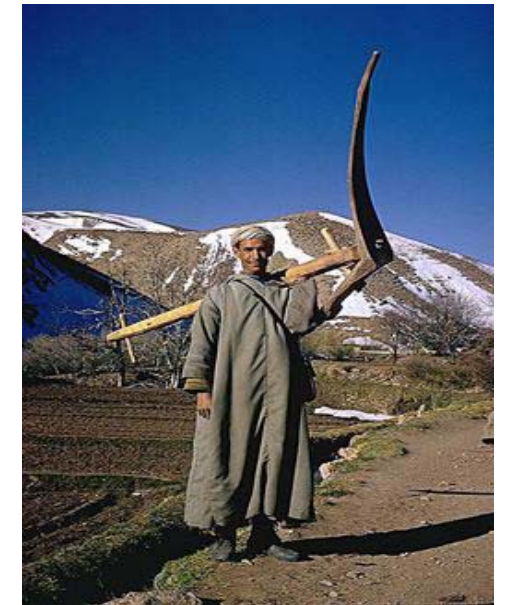
Get Your Garlic Here - A typical day at the market



<http://www.geoimages.berkeley.edu/GeoImages/Miller/millerone.html>

# Recipe of The Day

Wooden plow for plowing barley in the Mgoun Valley, High Atlas Mountains, Province of Ouarzazate



<http://www.geoimages.berkeley.edu/GeoImages/Miller/millerone.html>

## Hummus

*Chickpeas are legumes also known as garbanzo beans. They are very popular in the Mediterranean and in India.*

4 cans (15 ounces) chickpeas  
1/2 cup tahini paste (sesame paste)  
1/8 cup olive oil  
2 lemons  
2 cloves crushed garlic  
salt to taste  
1/2 cup chopped parsley

Drain chickpeas. Place in a bowl and mash with a fork. Add the remaining ingredients and mix well. Serve with pita bread.

Source: *Food is Elementary* © 2001  
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