Tunis

Mloukheya

AfriFOODlinks

FOODChronicles

Recipe Series

AfriFOODChronicles

Welcome to the first edition of the AfriFOODChronicles Recipes!

In the recipe series, we explore **one cherished dish from each of the five AfriFOODLinks hub cities** as a lens to understand the realities of these cities.

In this first edition of the recipe series, Adel Azouni shares his favourite local dish, Mloukheya with us. This is one of Tunisia's most iconic traditional dishes.

He generously welcomes us to learn about how his favourite recipe reflects how Tunisian food connects different regions, local producers, and family traditions in a single delicious dish.

Read on to see what Mloukheya can teach us about Adel's city of Tunis...

We hope you enjoy your journey with us,
AfriFOODChronicles Editorial Team



“For me, Mloukheya is a reminder that food can transmit symbols, traditions, and wishes of happiness from generation to generation”

Welcome to Tunis

The city of Tunis has one of the oldest and most complex food systems in North Africa.

Tunis' food story is shaped by empires, power, culture and flavour.

The food culture of Tunis is not a simple mix of cultures. It is a **layered, rich dish of centuries of trade, migration and colonisation**, each bringing specific ingredients to the table.

Tunis' food environment reflects broader patterns of **economic inequality and uneven urban development** in the city. It is diverse but deeply unequal.

Some neighbourhoods have easy access to multiple markets, bakeries and food vendors, while others rely heavily on informal traders. **Ageing infrastructure and waste management**, particularly in older markets, affect the food safety and cleanliness of these markets.

Food insecurity in Tunis heavily shaped by **national economic pressures and global market dependencies**.

To learn more about the history, urban realities and food systems of the city, see our *FOODChronicle on Tunis*.




Shyll.dz





“Most of the time, Mloukheya is prepared by my mother or my grandmother, who learned the recipe from the generations before them. Today, I also prepare it myself, following the same traditional method they taught me. Thanks to my mother, I learned that every step of cooking this dish, from choosing the ingredients to patiently stirring the pot, holds knowledge passed down through generations. This dish taught me that cooking isn’t just about food, but also about love, patience, and preserving traditions.”

The dish of Mloukheya

Mloukheya is an iconic dish of Tunis, **reflecting the city's rich culinary heritage and the diversity of Tunisian agricultural traditions**.

"For my family, preparing Mloukheya is more than cooking a meal. It is a ritual of patience, sharing, and preserving a tradition that has been passed down through generations"



While enjoyed throughout the country, it holds a special place in homes in Tunis city, where recipes and cooking techniques are passed down from generation to generation.

Traditional Tunisian Mloukheya Recipe



Ingredients

Serves: 6–8 people

- **100 g Tunisian Mloukheya powder**
  "The Mloukheya powder is usually purchased from Gabès, a region renowned for producing some of the country's finest Mloukheya. Its quality and flavour make it the preferred choice for many Tunisian families"
- **200 ml extra virgin olive oil**
  "Olive oil often comes from family producers or local farmers"
- **750 g beef**, cut into large pieces
  "We buy fresh beef from our neighbourhood butcher"
- **4 garlic cloves**, crushed
- **1 small onion**, finely chopped
- **½ tablespoon tomato paste**
- **1 teaspoon homemade harissa** (or more, to taste)
  "Some ingredients are prepared at home. Every summer, my family makes **homemade harissa** using **locally grown** peppers, garlic, and spices, a **tradition** that has been passed down through generations"
- **1 teaspoon ground coriander** (or tabel in Tunisia)
- **1 teaspoon ground caraway**
- **2 bay leaves**
- **Salt and black pepper**
- **About 3 litres of hot water**

“Most of the ingredients for this dish come from different regions of Tunisia”





Preparation

Begin by pouring the olive oil into a large heavy-bottomed pot. Add the Mloukheya powder gradually and mix thoroughly while the oil is still cold until a smooth paste forms.

Place the pot over low heat and stir continuously with a wooden spoon for several minutes. This step is essential, as it develops the flavour and removes the bitterness of the powder.

Slowly pour in the hot water while stirring constantly to avoid lumps. Once the mixture becomes smooth and reaches the consistency of a light soup, bring it gently to a boil.

Season the beef with the crushed garlic, tomato paste, harissa, coriander, caraway, salt, and pepper. Add the meat and bay leaves to the pot. Reduce the heat to very low and let the Mloukheya simmer slowly for 6 to 8 hours, stirring occasionally and adding a little hot water if necessary.

The dish is ready when the sauce has become thick, smooth, and velvety, the meat is meltingly tender, and a thin layer of olive oil rises naturally to the surface.

Serving

Mloukheya is traditionally served hot with fresh homemade bread.

It is also believed to taste even better the following day, after the flavours have had time to deepen.

“One of my earliest memories of Mloukheya is my fascination with its deep green colour.

In Tunisia, green is much more than just a colour: it symbolises hope, prosperity, abundance, and good fortune. Growing up, I learned that this is why many Tunisian families prepare Mloukheya for weddings, New Year’s celebrations, and other joyous occasions. It is said to bring good luck and ensure a prosperous future for those who share it.”



Changes in the city means changes in what people eat

Despite its cultural significance, over the years, **preparing Mloukheya has become more difficult for many families in the city**. What can this change teach us about the urban realities of Tunis?

One of the main changes is the rising price of beef, an essential ingredient in the traditional recipe. As a result, some households prepare it less often, or use smaller quantities of meat. This points to **general increases in the cost of living in the city**.

Climate change shocks and national dependence on imported staples (like wheat) create vulnerabilities in the national economy. Added to this, **unemployment, rising inflation and currency devaluation** have placed growing strain on households in Tunis.

One of the ways that families experience these systemic urban, national and global trends is through **food price increases**. In this way, these systemic changes that may seem far away from a family's dinner table in Tunis, actually shape what food they can afford.

> "Preparing Mloukheya is a ritual that isn't rushed, and that's what makes it so special"

Time is another obstacle. Authentic Mloukheya requires several hours of slow cooking and constant attention. In the fast-paced rhythm of modern urban life, many no longer have the time to prepare it as previous generations did. In the city, families find their time and wallets squeezed.

Despite these changes, Mloukheya remains a cherished dish, still associated with celebration, tradition, and family.

“As someone passionate about food systems and sustainable development, I see **Mloukheya as a celebration of local agriculture and Tunisian biodiversity**.

This dish connects people to the land, to seasonal produce and to a shared cultural heritage that deserves to be preserved and celebrated.

For me, Mloukheya is much more than a favourite dish: it’s a **living memory**. It reminds me of family gatherings, where the aroma of the gently simmering dish filled the house, and everyone patiently waited to share this moment.”


بيع ملابس
الحج و العم
و المظهور



“It is not a dish that is usually cooked for one person; Mloukheya is meant to be shared. We gather around the table, take our time, and enjoy the meal together.”

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