Tapp’s tasteful task to promote produce

FROM a young age, food has been about family for me. I started cooking when I was about 10 because my mother worked as a teacher in our home town of Gonbad, a small city in the north of Iran. She taught me how to cook so that I could prepare lunch for my brother and sister while she was working. Gonbad actually has a similar tropical climate to Darwin. After living in Tehran for about six years, we moved to Adelaide about two years ago for my husband’s work before shifting to Darwin earlier this year. We often get together with other Iranian families in Darwin for a weekend picnic. Many Iranian dishes are based around rice. We like to have rice with everything. My father, for example, is happy to just eat rice, while my mother likes to have something accompanying her rice. Iranian dishes are sometimes divided into Persian and Turkmen. The latter dishes are similar to Turkish dishes, as is the lifestyle and language.

While I speak Turkmen, I have done English courses in Tehran and Adelaide. My son, who goes to school in Darwin, tends to only speak English.

Zereshk polow is one of the most popular dishes in Iranian cuisine, and it can be made with chicken or lamb, rice and barberries. Barberries are rich in vitamin C and have a slightly acidic taste. Zereshk polow goes well with a leafy salad, and is ideal for lunch or dinner.

Celebrity chef Lynton Tapp is teaming up with Tourism NT to promote the produce of the Territory, which he says has its own wonderfully distinct flavours.

“Tapp is happily teaming up with Tourism NT to promote Territory produce and producers. The MasterChef 2013 runner-up has been in the Top End visiting everyone from farmers to fishos to meet the people responsible for some of the Territory’s best produce. On Tuesday, he caught some fresh NT mud crab and cooked them up with Territory chef Jimmy Shu, then yesterday he started his day by making mango ice cream with Karen from Crazy Acres, a mango farm and farm shop in Berry Springs. ‘Karen was telling about how much ice cream they produce each year and how it’s growing,’ Tapp said.

“They had 25,000 tubs printed up and they’ve already gone through those. ‘That’s a huge amount to come from such a quaint dwelling.’ After leaving the Crazy Acres, Tapp spent the afternoon at the Territory’s only buffalo dairy run by Geoff and Sharon in Batchelor.

“This is the only buffalo dairy in a semi-arid environment in Australia and maybe even the world,” the Territorian said. ‘I think that’s an amazing effort of their behalf.’ Tapp said because of its Territory location, the dairy products have their own distinctive taste.

‘The grass the buffalo feed on up here flavours the milk which means it’s completely different from anything any other dairy in Australia produces,’ he said. ‘And that makes the cheese and yoghurt from the dairy unique as well.’ The chef said that’s the same for much of the produce that come from the NT.

“Our grapefruit in the NT is much sweeter because of where it is grown and the pristine waters up here mean the live-caught seafood is amazing – the farmed barramundi isn’t anywhere near as good as our wild-caught barram.’ Tapp will collect stories from each producer he visits and 15 to 20 will feature in an NT cookbook he is writing. The information he gathers will also be used as part of the Tourism NT’s contribution to Tourism Australia’s Restaurant Australia campaign. ‘In the NT we’re known for some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world,’ he said. ‘We’re not as known for our food but we have some of the best food available in Australia.’

And the Territory boy is doing his bit to promote the NT by taking wild-caught seafood and buffalo mozzarella back to Pei Modern, the Melbourne restaurant he works at, to showcase what the Territory has to offer.

INGREDIENTS

400g basmati rice
50g barberries
2 tbsp sugar
4 tbsp cooking oil
6 tbsp butter
4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
1 tbsp tomato paste
2 onions, thinly sliced
1 tsp turmeric
2 tsp lemon juice
2 tsp saffron

METHOD

1. Wash rice several times and soak in cold salted water for at least two hours.
2. Garnish the chicken with salt, pepper, lemon juice and one tsp of saffron and let stand for one hour.
3. Fry the chicken in cooking oil until both sides are browned, then remove chicken from pan, add the turmeric and tomato paste and fry the onions before adding the chicken again with one cup of water. Simmer for about 20 minutes until the chicken is tender.
4. Wash barberries, drain and then cook on low heat in a pan with sugar for two minutes.
5. Gently ground one tsp saffron and mix with two tsp of hot water.
6. Drain the soaked rice then boil with six cups of water and two tsp of salt for about five minutes. Drain and rinse the rice with cold water.
7. Add three tsp of butter to the pot before adding the rice again. Shape the rice into a pyramid and make four or five in it. Put a towel over the lid of the pot and steam on medium-low for one hour.
8. Spoon the saffron mixture and barberries over the rice. Serve with chicken.