

LOCAL FLAVOUR

For ebullient Melbourne chef Shane Delia, premium Australian produce, such as vine-ripened, Goulburn Valley-grown Ardmoma tomatoes, has helped shape his 'unrestricted' Middle Eastern cooking.

"Strength in hospitality", Shane Delia's family motto, is tattooed on his right arm and they're words this genial chef and restaurateur applies to the dominating aspects of his life – family and work. Growing up in a tight-knit family in Melbourne's north-west, a huge part of his life revolved around sharing and eating good, natural food. "I spent a lot of time with my grandparents," he says. "They were off-the-boat Maltese and their house was like an orchard as they were very active in the garden with fruit and vegies.

That, along with their happiness there, is something I took a lot from." It's an influence found in Shane's approach to cooking at home and at his restaurant, Maha, particularly with his preference for using Australian produce.

homegrown heroes

Many of Shane's favourite dishes to cook have roots in Middle Eastern and North African cuisine, but their hero ingredients are almost always sourced locally – case in point, Ardmoma Diced Tomatoes for his tomato-braised lamb kefta dish (recipe opposite). For more than 90 years, Ardmoma products have been the ultimate cook's companion. The brand is 100 per cent committed to supporting local growers by only choosing Australian-grown, vine-ripened tomatoes – in this instance from Victoria's Goulburn Valley. "Good tinned tomatoes like these have the consistently rich, sweet flavour you want," says Shane. "I think it's stupid to even consider buying an inferior product that has no positive impact at all on Australia. Why bother?"

middle east meets west

In Australia, there seems to be a common belief that for real flavour and quality, only Italian tomatoes make the grade. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, as this country boasts perfect conditions for growing tomatoes, including rich, fertile soil. There is also a limited perception when it comes to the red fruit and world cuisine. "Italian seems to be just about the only go-to when people think about cooking with tomatoes," says Shane, "but there can be so much more. They play a massive role in the 'unrestricted', widely influenced Middle Eastern food I cook, and in the food I grew up eating. The Ardmoma tomatoes in this lamb kefta add a whole level of flavour and really beautifully complement the spices of the dish."



CLOCKWISE (from top): Shane chops parsley for his lamb kefta mix; adding Ardmoma Diced Tomatoes; slicing garlic for the sauce; rolling the kefta mix into meatballs: "You need to roll them firmly and tightly so they don't fall apart," says Shane.



tomato-braised lamb kefta with chickpeas and fregola

Begin this recipe 1 day ahead

- ¾ cup (150g) dried chickpeas (see note)
- 150g fregola pasta
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, sliced
- 2 sticks cinnamon
- 1 tbs ground cumin
- 2 tsp Aleppo chilli flakes
- 2 x 410g cans Ardmoma Diced Tomatoes
- 3 cups (750ml) beef stock
- ½ pomegranate, seeds removed
- ⅓ cup (50g) pine nuts, toasted
- Finely chopped flat-leaf parsley, flatbread and lemon wedges, to serve

Kefta

- 600g lamb mince
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1½ tbs ground cumin
- 1 tbs ground coriander
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

Place the chickpeas in a saucepan, cover with cold water and set aside to soak overnight.

Place the saucepan over medium heat and bring to the boil. Cook for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until chickpeas are tender. Drain and rinse under cold water, then set aside.

Meanwhile, place a separate saucepan of water over high heat and bring to the boil. Add the fregola and cook for 7 minutes or until tender. Drain and rinse under cold water. Toss the fregola in 1 tbs oil and set aside.

For the kefta, place all the ingredients in a bowl and mix well to combine. Season. Working with 1½ tbs mixture at a time, shape into firm meatballs.

Heat the remaining oil in a large flameproof casserole over high heat. Add the meatballs and cook, turning frequently, for 4-5 minutes or until browned all over. Remove from the pan and set aside. Add the onion, garlic, cinnamon, cumin and chilli flakes to pan and cook, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon, for 3 minutes or

until onion has softened. Add the chickpeas and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes or until coated in the spices. Add the tomatoes, bring to the boil and cook for 10 minutes. Add the stock and cook for further 8 minutes or until reduced by half. Return the meatballs and fregola to the pan and cook for 8 minutes or until the sauce has thickened. Season.

Divide among bowls and top with pomegranate seeds and pine nuts. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with flatbread and lemon wedges. Serves 4. *Note: To save time, you could also use a 400g can of chickpeas. Rinse and drain before adding to the pan after the onion is softened.*

grown in golden soil

Ardmoma's vine-ripened tomatoes range includes: Diced, Crushed, Whole Peeled and its Rich & Thick varieties: Classic, Mixed Herbs, Basil and Garlic, and Onion and Garlic. For more recipes, visit: facebook.com/ardmoma

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