Orange-Fennel Couscous Onion Cups

24 small double-petal onion cups, each with about 17-18 g filling; not a whole meal | Active 40 min | Cook 35 min | Total 150 min

Ingredients

• About 6 medium onions, 1.2 kg/2 2/3 lb before trimming; select 48 quarter-petal pieces in 24 matching pairs, 4-5 cm/1 1/2-2 in wide, 480 g/17 oz selected total; reserve centers and excess separately

• 15 ml olive oil (1 tablespoon), for onion cups

• 200 g/7 oz fully cooked plain couscous, cooled; prepare about 80 g dry grain with its full packet-directed water and method, then weigh 200 g finished

• 100 g/3 1/2 oz peeled orange segments, pith and seeds removed, chopped and well drained

• 60 g/2 oz trimmed fennel, finely diced

• 30 g/1 oz pitted olives, finely chopped

• 15 ml lemon juice (1 tablespoon)

• 10 ml olive oil (2 teaspoons), for filling

• 4 g washed fresh parsley, finely chopped

• 1 g fine salt (about 1/6 teaspoon)

Set out

Oven, Two 12-well standard muffin tins, each well about 90-120 ml and at least 5 cm/2 in wide at the top, Saucepan or heatproof couscous bowl with lid as packet requires, Knife and board, Scale, Colander, Two shallow cooling containers, Bowl and spoons, Small spatula, 24 piece rigid serving tray and cover, Refrigerator and iced cooler

Allergens

Wheat. Check labels and substitutions.

Make it

1. Heat the oven to 375°F/190°C. Peel onions and quarter through the root. Separate broad outer petals, trim away tough root fibers, and choose 48 pieces that nest in pairs. Weigh 480 g selected petals; reserve all other onion for another dish. Place two overlapping petals in each of 24 muffin wells to form a small cup.

2. Brush all the selected onion with 15 ml oil, dividing it among the 24 cups. Roast 20-25 minutes until tender enough to bite but still able to support a spoonful. Cool in the tins 15 minutes, then transfer carefully to a shallow covered container and refrigerate.

3. Prepare the couscous by its complete packet method, including its specified water and standing/cooking time. Weigh 200 g cooked couscous, spread in a shallow container and refrigerate promptly; reserve any excess separately. Allow at least 1 hour for onion and grain to chill fully to 40°F/4°C or below.

4. Mix all 200 g chilled couscous with the drained orange, fennel, olives, lemon juice, 10 ml oil, parsley and salt. Divide the entire filling among 24 cold cups, roughly 17-18 g per cup. Set cups snugly in a rigid tray so they cannot roll.

5. Keep covered and chilled until serving. Put out small batches from the cooler and supply small forks; soft roasted onion is an edible cup, not a crisp cracker.

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Bring it

Carry the 24 cups flat in a rigid covered tray inside a cooler at 40°F/4°C or below. Keep the grain and onions cold during assembly. Uncontrolled assembly, travel and display share a 2-hour allowance, or 1 hour above 90°F/32°C.

Finish at the gathering

No host oven is needed. Ask for refrigerator or ice-tray space, and place 12 cups out at a time while the rest stay cold. Bring small forks and a thin spatula for lifting the soft cups.

Make it yours

Arrange the 24 cups in an oval as the centerpiece of a winter small-plate table, or use 4 rows of 6 for an easy serving line. The leftover onion centers are useful for a separate soup, but are not hidden in these portions.

Ingredient labels

Couscous is usually wheat semolina. Check the actual grain, olives and pickles for additional ingredients. This is not a gluten-free or certified traditional dish.

A useful detail

The 150-minute schedule allows onion selection and preparation, up to 25 minutes roasting, 15 minutes initial cooling, at least 1 hour chilling and final assembly. Couscous cooking overlaps onion roasting. Longer packet cooking or chilling extends the clock.

Another way

Replace olives with 30 g finely chopped drained pickled cucumber for a different salty accent.

Use 100 g well-drained chopped grapefruit instead of orange; remove seeds and tough membranes.

Keep it well

Keep components or filled cups at 40°F/4°C or below and use within 2 days, retaining an earlier original couscous cooking date. Filled cups soften, so assemble the day of service. Do not freeze the assembled cups. The Bring it limit includes earlier unchilled assembly; refrigeration does not reset it.