



GUIDE

Best Dates for Cooking: Savory Dishes, Stuffing, and Paste

Author · Hassen Moumen **Updated** · September 26, 2026 **Read time** · ~5 min

IN THIS GUIDE

- 01 The version I keep coming back to
- 02 Braises: Halawi survives, Medjool doesn't
- 03 Chutney: the balsamic experiment
- 04 Date paste in ten minutes
- 05 Stuffed dates and the cheese board
- 06 Four mistakes I'd undo
- 07 Where I steal ideas
- 08 Frequently asked questions

By **Hassen Moumen** · Founder & Editor · Reviewed September 2026

I made a lamb tagine for eight people once, following the general logic of Paula Wolfert's *The Food of Morocco* – meat, ras el hanout, saffron, dried fruit. I dropped in twelve whole [Medjool](#) at hour one, the way you would with prunes.

By hour three the Medjool had ceased to exist. Not softened – vanished. Their skins floated in the sauce like deflated balloons, and the flesh had melted into a sweetness that tasted fine, honestly. But the dish was supposed to have dates in it, visible ones. I was serving sweet meat soup with balloons.

Lesson one, learned expensively: cook with the cheapest date that holds its shape. Save Medjool for dishes where its texture is the point.

QUICK ANSWER

For savory cooking, use Deglet Noor when you want to blend Medjool into pastes and sauces when you want texture.

The version I keep coming back to

Dish	What I use now	Why	What I stopped using
Lamb tagine, long braises	Halawi or Deglet Noor , added in the last hour	Holds shape past 90 minutes	Medjool – collapses
Chutney	Deglet Noor	Cheap, tart enough to let vinegar through	Medjool – tastes like BBQ sauce
Date paste	Any soft Medjool, even bruised ones	Blends to deep caramel	Deglet Noor without a long soak
Stuffed dates	Medjool	The cavity, the size	–
Cheese board, bite-size	Deglet Noor	Two-bite scale, doesn't smear	–
Smoothies	Whatever's on sale	You can't taste the difference once blended	–

Braises: Halawi survives, Medjool doesn't

The retest: same tagine, same meat, but Halawi added in hour two instead of Medjool at hour one. They came out whole, jammy at the edges, still recognizably dates. Halawi and Deglet Noor carry denser flesh and thicker skins –

that's the entire secret.

One honest note: Moroccan cooking leans on prunes in long tagines for a reason. If the fruit needs to stay photogenic for three hours, prunes are more reliable. Dates earn their place in faster dishes.

Chutney: the balsamic experiment

The classic template is tamarind-date chutney – imli chutney, covered well in Madhur Jaffrey's books. One night I had no tamarind, so I tried balsamic and a dried chili with Deglet Noor, spooned over roast chicken. The Deglet's lower sugar let the vinegar stay sharp. A week later I tested the same thing with Medjool: glossy, sweet, good on a burger, wrong on chicken. Chutney is a blended product – buy the cheap, tart fruit and let the acid do the talking.

Date paste in ten minutes

My method: 2 cups pitted Medjool, 1 cup just-boiled water, 10-minute soak, blend. Yields about 1½ cups, keeps roughly two weeks in the fridge. My batch cost about \$7 in dates off a Costco bag versus \$9 and up for the same weight of jarred paste. For the full sugar-substitution ratios, I've written it up separately in our [date sweetener guide](#).

Two warnings from the field: cheap blenders and pits do not mix – I killed a \$25 blender blade on an unpitted date in 2023. Buy pitted or pit them yourself and check each one; my sister bit into a pit fragment in my chutney and has forgiven me only partially.

Stuffed dates and the cheese board

Stuffed dates are the easiest crowd-pleaser I know: goat cheese, a walnut half, a thread of thyme honey. Our [stuffed dates recipe](#) walks through the basic build. Bacon-wrapped dates for game days convert date skeptics at a rate I genuinely can't explain.

Cheese, from my table: blue cheese + Medjool is the loud, famous pairing. Manchego + Deglet Noor is the quiet one I actually prefer. Goat cheese + Halawi is the budget version nobody clocks as budget.

Four mistakes I'd undo

1. Medjool in a three-hour braise. Covered above. It haunts me.
 2. Medjool in chutney – double the price, double the sweetness, worse result.
 3. Unpitted dates anywhere near a blender.
 4. Assuming "pitted" meant pitted. Read the bag. My dinner guests now chew carefully at my house, which is not the reputation I wanted.
-

Where I steal ideas

[NYT Cooking's date recipes](#) are my first stop when I'm out of ideas. Sticky toffee pudding is the one place I'll still deliberately use Medjool – the texture disappears into the sauce on purpose there (full breakdown in our [best dates for baking guide](#)). And Ottolenghi's spinach salad with dates and almonds, from [O t t o l e n g h i : T h e C o o k b o o k](#), is my go-to proof that dates belong in savory food at all: chopped Deglet Noor, fried pita, sumac. It converts people every time.

Frequently asked questions

Which variety survives the longest braise?

Halawi and Deglet Noor, reliably. Both have denser flesh and thicker skins than Medjool, so they stay whole past the 90-minute mark. Medjool collapses into the sauce by hour two – fine if you want sweet meat soup, wrong if the recipe says "twelve dates."

Can I use the same dates for chutney as for a cheese board?

Not if you want the chutney to taste right. Chutney wants a firmer, less sweet date like Deglet Noor so the vinegar stays sharp. Medjool in chutney eats like BBQ sauce – fine on a burger, wrong next to roast chicken.

What is the fastest way to make date paste at home?

Two cups of pitted Medjool, one cup of just-boiled water, ten-minute soak, blend. Yields about 1½ cups and keeps roughly two weeks in the fridge. My batch cost around \$7 in dates off a Costco bag versus \$9 and up for the same weight of jarred paste.

Tell the Finder what you're cooking

It narrows the varieties and current prices based on the dish – not the shelf.

[Start the Cooking Date Finder](#)

Scan to read this article online



Find DatesOracle on social media

[IG · Instagram](#)

[TU · Tumblr](#)

[TH · Threads](#)

[FB · Facebook](#)

[TW · Twitter](#)

[PI · Pinterest](#)

© 2026 Dates Oracle. All rights reserved.