

Marinated Chicken

WITH AN
ONION-PEPPER-ALMOND SAUCE

Chicken Tikka Masala

I contemplated giving this dish a Hindi title (especially the “chicken” part) but decided against it because Chicken Tikka Masala is, after all, the proclaimed national dish (drum roll, please) of Britain, a testimony to that country’s love affair with curry. With over eight thousand curry houses in the United Kingdom, this particular fusion dish appears on diners’ plates in many variations. I find this version particularly pleasing because the mellow heat from the Kashmiri chiles does not compete with the sauce’s delicate, nutty, creamy flavors. **SERVES 4**

For the chicken tikkas:

Bamboo or metal skewers

½ cup plain yogurt

2 tablespoons Ginger Paste (page 15)

2 tablespoons Garlic Paste (page 15)

2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh
cilantro leaves and tender stems

2 teaspoons coriander seeds, ground

1 teaspoon cumin seeds, ground

2 teaspoons ground Kashmiri chiles; or

½ teaspoon cayenne (ground red pepper)
mixed with 1½ teaspoons sweet paprika

1½ teaspoons coarse kosher or sea salt

½ teaspoon Punjabi garam masala
(page 25)

½ teaspoon ground turmeric

1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts,
cut lengthwise into 1-inch-wide strips

For the sauce:

2 tablespoons Ghee (page 21) or canola oil

1 small red onion, coarsely chopped

1 small red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and
cut into ½-inch pieces

¼ cup slivered blanched almonds

¼ cup golden raisins

1 cup diced tomatoes, fresh or canned
(no need to drain)

¼ cup heavy (whipping) cream or half-and-half

½ teaspoon coarse kosher or sea salt

¼ teaspoon cayenne (ground red pepper)

¼ teaspoon Punjabi garam masala (page 25)

Vegetable cooking spray

2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro leaves
and tender stems for garnishing

1. If you are using bamboo skewers, place them in a flat dish filled with water and let them soak for an hour (see Tip, page 84).

2. While the skewers are soaking, make the marinade: Combine the yogurt, Ginger Paste, Garlic Paste, cilantro, coriander, cumin, Kashmiri chiles, salt, garam masala, and turmeric in a small bowl. Whisk to blend.

3. Put the chicken strips in a large bowl and pour this full-flavored, red-hot-looking marinade over them. Toss to thoroughly coat the meat. Refrigerate, covered, for at least 30 minutes or up to 6 hours.

4. When you are ready to cook the chicken, make the sauce: Heat the ghee in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onion, bell pepper, almonds, and raisins, and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables soften and then acquire honey-brown patches, 10 to 12 minutes.

The nuts and raisins will turn reddish brown, and a thin film of brown will coat the bottom of the pan. (Forcing the vegetables into a small pan allows them to sweat a little, creating moisture that prevents burning.)

5. Stir the tomatoes into the pan and scrape the bottom to deglaze it. Pour this chunky sauce into a blender jar, and add the cream, salt, cayenne, and garam masala. Puree, scraping the inside of the jar as needed, to make a thick, nutty-gritty, reddish-brown sauce.
6. Pour the sauce into a medium-size saucepan and simmer it over low heat, stirring it occasionally, while you grill the chicken.
7. Preheat a gas or charcoal grill, or the broiler, to high.
8. While the grill is heating, thread the chicken strips, covered with the marinade, onto the skewers, accordion-style. *If you are grilling*, lightly spray the grill grate with cooking spray. Grill the chicken, covered, turning the skewers occasionally, until the pieces are light brown, the insides are no longer pink, and the juices run clear, 6 to 8 minutes. *If you are broiling*, position an oven rack so the top of the chicken will be 2 to 3 inches from the heat. Lightly spray the rack of a broiler pan with cooking spray, place the skewers on the rack, and broil, turning the skewers occasionally, until the chicken is light brown, the meat is no longer pink inside, and the juices run clear, 6 to 8 minutes.
9. Slide the chicken off the skewers into the sauce. Stir once or twice to make sure the sauce drenches the tender, juicy meat, and then serve, sprinkled with the cilantro.

1 tablespoon coriander seeds
2 teaspoons cumin seeds
1 teaspoon black or yellow mustard seeds
½ teaspoon whole cloves
½ teaspoon fenugreek seeds
½ teaspoon black peppercorns
5 to 7 dried red Thai or cayenne chiles, to taste,
stems removed
1 teaspoon ground turmeric

1. Place all the ingredients except the turmeric in a spice grinder or coffee grinder, and grind until the texture resembles that of finely ground black pepper. Stir in the turmeric (which will give the mixture its characteristic yellow hue).

2. Store the blend in a tightly sealed container, away from excess light, heat, and humidity, for up to 2 months. (In my opinion, refrigerating the blend adversely affects its flavors.)

This recipe is from Raghaven Iyer's 2008 book, 660 Curries. (Workman Publishing Co., New York.)