



Baked Chicken Breast with Tomato, Cream and Indian Spices (Tested)

Serves 4 to 6

I've made this wonderfully easy dish several times over the years and it is always a crowd-pleaser! It can easily be doubled or tripled to serve a small or large group, and it can be prepared a day in advance, then baked just before you plan to serve it.

The flavors in this dish are so extraordinary that it is best served with a simple rice dish, such as Turmeric Rice, and a green vegetable, such as Green Beans with Garlic and Black Mustard Seed. These side dishes will not compete with the chicken flavors, and the colors on the plate are stunning together.

The recipe originally comes from "[Madhur Jaffrey's Quick and Easy Indian Cooking](#)." Jaffrey's recipe called for four chicken breasts weighing a total of 1¼ pounds, but I can't recall the last time I saw breasts that small in a grocery store. Breasts are gigantic these days, in case you haven't noticed. I have modified the recipe to call for 1½ pounds of chicken breast, which is cut into portion-size pieces before cooking.

Ingredients

Sauce

- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. garam masala
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1/8 to 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream

Chicken

- 1½ lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into portion-size pieces

3 tbsp. vegetable oil
One 2-inch stick cinnamon
6 cardamom pods
6 whole cloves
1 small onion (about 5 oz.), sliced vertically
One 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and cut into matchsticks
1 to 2 fresh, hot green chiles, cut into thin strips, seeds removed for less heat (I used one serrano chile weighing one-half ounce and left the seeds in)
1 clove garlic, chopped
½ tsp. black or brown mustard seeds
1 plum tomato (about 5 to 6 oz.), chopped

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees (unless you are preparing the dish a day in advance of serving).

To prepare the sauce, scoop the tomato paste into a small bowl along with 2 tablespoons of water; stir to dissolve the paste. Stir in the mustard, cumin, garam masala, lemon juice, salt, and cayenne pepper. Add the heavy cream in small doses stirring after each addition until everything is smooth. The sauce will be quite thick at this point. Set aside.

To prepare the chicken, lightly season both sides of the chicken pieces with salt and pepper. Pour 2 tablespoons of the oil into a frying pan and set over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the cinnamon, cardamom pods, and cloves. As soon as the spices start to sizzle, put in the chicken pieces and brown them lightly on both sides. The goal is to just brown the chicken, not completely cook it. Remove the chicken pieces as they brown and place them in a baking dish. (Be sure to remove any smaller pieces before larger ones so they do not become overdone in the oven.)

Once all the chicken pieces are removed, add the onion, ginger, and green chile to the frying pan; there will be some oil remaining in the pan. Stir-fry the onion, ginger, and chile until they are light brown in color, 3 to 4 minutes. Turn off the heat and scrape the contents of the pan over the chicken in the baking dish.

Pour the remaining tablespoon of oil into the same frying pan and add the garlic. When the garlic takes on just a bit of color, sprinkle in the mustard seeds. As soon as the seeds start to pop, stir in the tomato — that will stop the seeds from jumping out of the pan. Stir for one minute until the tomato starts to break down, then add the cream sauce you've already prepared and heat until it starts to bubble.

If you are preparing this dish a day in advance of serving it, once the sauce starts to bubble, remove it from the heat and let it cool, then pour the sauce over the chicken. When the contents of the baking dish are completely cooled, place in the refrigerator until one half hour before you follow the baking instructions below.

If you are serving the dish the same day that you prepare it, do not let the sauce cool after it starts bubbling; instead, immediately pour the sauce over the chicken.

Place the baking dish in the pre-heated oven, uncovered, and bake for 25 to 30 minutes. The sauce should be gently bubbling at the edges. If the dish has been in the refrigerator overnight, baking time may be at the high end of this range.

Before serving, try to fish out the whole spices, or just warn your guests to look out for whole cloves and cardamom in their food!

Recipe lightly adapted from "[Madhur Jaffrey's Quick and Easy Indian Cooking](#)"

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Mango Iced Tea (Tested)

Yield: 6 cups

Tea is an extremely popular beverage in India, and is more popular than coffee. Indians drink tea all year round, but in the summer iced is the way to go. If fresh mangoes aren't available, try using frozen mango chunks.

Ingredients

- 2 black tea bags (or 2 tsp. loose black tea)
- 2 cardamom pods, lightly crushed (optional)
- 4 cups boiling water
- 2 small mangos, peeled and diced (about 1 ½ cups)
- 3 tbsp. honey
- Mint sprigs
- Lime wheels

Directions

To make the tea, place the teabags in a pitcher, along with the cardamom pods, pour the boiling water over and steep for 3 minutes. Remove the teabags and cardamom (or strain the leaves) and let cool on the counter.

When the tea has cooled, pour into a blender and add the mango chunks and honey. You may have to do this in batches if your blender is small. Blend until very smooth.

Can be made one day ahead of time.

To serve, fill glasses with ice and add tea. Garnish with a mint sprig and a lime wheel.

Adapted from: <http://www.vegrecipesofindia.com/mango-iced-tea/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy

**Turmeric Rice (Tested)**

Serves 8

Ingredients

2 cups basmati rice

2 tbsp. vegetable oil

4 whole cloves

1 bay leaf

4 cardamom pods

One 2-inch cinnamon stick

¼ tsp. ground turmeric

1 tsp. salt

Fresh herbs for garnish, slivered (such as parsley, cilantro, or chives)

Directions

Rinse the rice in a strainer until the water runs clear, then place the strainer over a bowl to drain completely.

Warm up the oil in a heavy saucepan and add the cloves, bay leaf, cardamom pods, and cinnamon stick. Let these sizzle for a few moments, then add the rice along with the turmeric and salt. Stir to combine the spices and add 3 cups water; bring to a boil. Cover the pot and turn the heat down to the lowest simmer. Let the rice cook for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat, remove the lid, and you will see that the whole spices are sitting right on top of the rice, making it easy for you to pluck them out of the pot and discard. Fluff the rice with a fork, place the lid back on the pot, and let the rice continue to steam for 10 more minutes before transferring to a serving bowl.

Garnish with slivered fresh herbs.

Recipe adapted from: "[Madhur Jaffrey's Quick & Easy Indian Cooking](#)"

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Green Beans with Garlic and Black Mustard Seed (Tested)

Serves 6

An easy recipe that impresses everybody! The green beans go through a quick blanch, which can be done a day ahead of time, then all that's left to do is sauté the garlic and spices and add the beans. The beans are ready in minutes.

Ingredients

1 lb. fresh green beans, trimmed, sliced on the diagonal into 2-inch pieces

2 tbsp. vegetable oil or ghee

4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced into matchsticks

1 tbsp. whole black or brown mustard seed
1 tsp. salt
Pinch crushed red chiles

Directions

To blanch the beans, set a large pot with plenty of water in it on the stove to boil. (The reason you need lots of water is that the green beans will cool the boiling water when they are added and you want the water to come back to a boil as rapidly as possible.)

When the water has come to a boil, drop the beans into the pot and set the timer for 3 minutes. Check to see if the beans are done; if they are not done, leave them in the boiling water for another minute. The beans should be crisp-tender, just how you want to eat them, because they won't be cooked much further beyond this.

While the beans are cooking, fill a bowl with very cold water, maybe add a couple of ice cubes if your tap water isn't that cold.

As soon as the beans are done, drain them and dump them into your bowl of cold water so they will cool down quickly. Drain the beans again and leave them in the strainer to dry out, or roll them in a dishtowel to dry thoroughly. This can be done up to a day ahead of time.

To finish the beans, heat a large sauté pan over medium heat and add the oil or ghee. Once the oil is hot, add the garlic and quickly stir. As soon as the garlic colors, add the mustard seeds. They will begin to pop almost immediately. Once they start popping, get those green beans in the pan so you don't have mustard seeds all over your kitchen! Add the salt and pinch of red chiles and continue to stir-fry until completely warmed through.

Recipe adapted from: "[Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cooking](#)"

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Customs and Cuisine

Food of India is characterized by strong aroma and bold tastes where spices are of the utmost importance. The spices determine the flavor, appearance and taste of every meal. However, in India measurements are not used while cooking. A cook relies on his or her senses while sprinkling the spices on preparations because it is believed that it is the love of the cook that brings taste to the food rather than the spices themselves.

Customs

Dining etiquette in India is quite different than Western countries. It is considered proper Indian etiquette to eat with your hands. It is tradition and part of the Indian culture. Indian etiquette and good manners do vary from region to region, as does the type of cuisine. For instance, in North India it is impolite to dirty more than the first two segments of your fingers. In the South, where rice and wet curries are more common, it is permitted to use your whole hand. If you are not sure what to do, just observe or ask.

Part of the traditional Indian etiquette and culture is to share food, whether on long train journeys or dining in a restaurant. While sharing is an important part of Indian etiquette, it is considered impolite to share a fork or spoon or drinking glass, to bite from someone else's food or to double dip.

The left hand is not used for eating, even if you are left-handed. To do so is considered unclean. Wait to be served before eating, since you will be eating with your right hand and would otherwise get food on the serving spoon. Never offer food from your thali, even if it has not been touched. The same basic rules of Western etiquette still apply, such as washing your hands before and after a meal.

Source materials:

Cuisine: Wikipedia Customs: <http://www.a-to-z-of-manners-and-etiquette.com/indian-etiquette.html>