

Chicken Bhuna

Medium · Non-vegetarian · ± 4 people · 50 min

Bhuna is a way of frying: cooking spices and ingredients dry in oil until the moisture has evaporated and the oil comes back out around the edge of the pan. That is the sign the spices are done.

No water goes in. The salt draws moisture out of the chicken and it cooks in that, so the flavour stays on the chicken.

Want a sauce with it, to eat with naan? Add a splash of warm water after step 9 and let it simmer for 3 to 4 minutes.

Spiciness. This is the amount of chilli as it is used in India. For a milder dish, use half the Kashmiri chili powder. There are no green chillies in it. The rest of the recipe stays the same.

Tip. Keep a bowl of hot water to hand. If the spices stick to the pan, add a spoonful of hot water and carry on. Cold water stops the frying.

Ingredients

Whole spices

- 7 to 8 fresh curry leaves
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 green cardamom pods
- 1 black cardamom pod
- 2 to 3 cloves
- 4 cm cinnamon stick
- 1 Indian bay leaf (tej patta)

Also

- 4 tbsp mustard oil
- 4 medium red onions, cut into thin strips
- 2 tbsp ginger garlic paste (half ginger, half garlic)
- 800 g boneless chicken thigh
- 1 tbsp Kashmiri chili powder
- ½ tsp turmeric
- 2 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp chicken masala (or garam masala)
- ½ tsp salt
- hot water, within reach
- fresh coriander, lemon juice and a pinch of garam masala to finish

Method

1. Heat a deep pan with 4 tbsp mustard oil and let the oil get properly hot.
2. Turn the heat low and add all the whole spices: curry leaves, cumin seeds, green and black cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and the bay leaf. Stir straight away so they do not burn.
3. After about 10 to 20 seconds the onions go in. Turn the heat to medium-high and fry them for 10 to 15 minutes until translucent and lightly browned. Keep stirring and lower the heat if they stick.
4. Turn the heat low and add 2 tbsp ginger garlic paste. Stir for 3 to 4 minutes. Low heat matters here, because ginger garlic paste burns quickly and turns bitter when it does.
5. Set a bowl of hot water ready. Over low heat add the Kashmiri chili powder, turmeric, ground coriander and chicken masala and stir well. If it goes dry, add a spoonful of hot water. Turn the heat to medium and keep stirring: the spices need to fry through properly.
6. After 4 to 5 minutes of stirring you will see the oil come back around the edge. That is the sign the spices are done. If your onions held a lot of water it can take longer.
7. Add the chicken and mix until every piece is coated in spice. Turn the heat to medium-high and add ½ tsp salt. The pan looks dry now, but the salt draws moisture out of the chicken and it cooks in that. No extra water needed.
8. Stir every minute or so to make sure nothing catches. If the chicken does stick, lower the heat a little until more moisture appears, then raise it again.
9. After about 12 to 13 minutes the chicken is cooked and fully coated in spice. The oil has separated again and the onions have all but disappeared. If it is not done, keep going.
10. Turn off the heat and finish with fresh coriander, a squeeze of lemon and a pinch of garam masala. Good with roti or chapati.