KitchenBooQ

Achari Chicken (Pickle-Spiced Chicken Curry)

Serves: 4 | Cooking Time 1 hour 5 minutes | Level: Capable



INGREDIENTS

1.5 lbs (680 g) boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 2-inch pieces
1/2 cup (120 ml) plain whole-milk yogurt
1 tbsp (15 g) pickle spice (achar masala)
1 tsp (5 g) black mustard powder
1 tsp (3 g) ground fenugreek leaves (kasuri methi), crushed
1/2 tsp (2.5 ml) asafoetida (hing) powder
1/2 tsp (3 g) dried ginger powder (sonth)
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1 tbsp (15 ml) pickle juice or tamarind paste mixed with 1 tbsp water
2 tbsp (30 ml) vegetable oil
1 tsp (4 g) whole black mustard seeds
1 tsp (3 g) fennel seeds, lightly crushed
1/2 tsp (1 g) nigella seeds (kalonji)
1 large onion, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tbsp (14 g) fresh ginger, grated
2 medium tomatoes, pureed
1/2 tsp (1 g) red chili powder (adjust to taste)
1/2 tsp (3 g) ground cumin
1/2 tsp (2.5 g) turmeric powder
3/4 cup (180 ml) warm water
1 tsp (6 g) kosher salt, or to taste
2 tbsp (30 ml) fresh cilantro, chopped
1 lime, cut into wedges

PREPARATION

1. In a large bowl, combine chicken pieces, yogurt, pickle spice, mustard powder, crushed fenugreek leaves, asafoetida, dried ginger, beaten egg, and pickle juice. Mix well to coat, cover, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes (or up to 4 hours) to allow the flavors to penetrate.

2. Heat vegetable oil in a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Once hot, add black mustard seeds, fennel seeds, and nigella seeds. Fry until the mustard seeds begin to pop and the aromatics release their fragrance, about 1-2 minutes.

3. Add chopped onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden brown, approximately 8-10 minutes. Stir in minced garlic and grated ginger, cooking for another minute until fragrant.

4. Pour in the pureed tomatoes, red chili powder, ground cumin, turmeric, and salt. Cook the mixture, stirring frequently to prevent sticking, until the oil begins to separate from the masala at the edges of the pot, about 6-8 minutes.

5. Carefully add the marinated chicken along with all remaining marinade to the pot. Stir well to combine with the tomato-onion base. Cover and simmer over medium-low heat for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

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6. Uncover, pour in warm water, and bring to a gentle simmer. Continue cooking until the chicken is tender and cooked through, and the sauce has thickened to your preferred consistency, about 10-15 minutes. Adjust salt if needed.

7. Remove from heat and let it rest for 5 minutes to allow the pickle spices to meld. Garnish with fresh cilantro. Serve immediately with steamed basmati rice or warm naan, accompanied by lime wedges on the side.

Notes
Pickle spice (achar masala) is the star; if unavailable, blend equal parts mustard seeds, fennel seeds, fenugreek seeds, nigella seeds, and dried mango powder, then dry-roast and grind. For a milder curry, reduce red chili powder to 1/4 tsp or use Kashmiri chili powder for color without intense heat. Marinating overnight deepens the tangy, pickle-like flavor profile significantly. Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator within 2 hours of cooking; consume within 3-4 days. Reheat gently on the stovetop with a splash of water to restore consistency. Freezes well for up to 3 months. Never store this dish at room temperature due to the chicken and dairy components.