

AN
INVITATION
TO
INDIAN
COOKING

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Initials and decorative drawings by the author

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minutes or until paste turns a nice golden brown. Now put in the coriander, cumin, and turmeric and fry, stirring continuously; after another 2 minutes add yogurt, a teaspoon at a time; after 2 or 3 minutes, the tomato sauce, a tablespoon at a time, continuing to stir and fry. Finally, add salt, cinnamon, cloves, cayenne pepper, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of water. Bring to a boil. Cover, lower heat, and simmer gently for 10 minutes.

Cut the lemon into 4 or 5 slices, discarding the end pieces, and remove the seeds. Add lemon slices along with the chicken pieces, fried onions, sugar, and fresh ground pepper to the sauce, stir, and bring to a boil. Cover, lower heat, and simmer gently for 20 to 25 minutes or until chicken is tender, turning the pieces every now and then. If chicken sticks to bottom of pot, add a little more water. You should end up with a very thick sauce.

To serve: Empty contents of pot into shallow serving bowl. Arrange the cooked lemon slices on top of the chicken pieces. Serve with any rice dish or with *poori* or *chapatis*. Yogurt with Tiny Dumplings goes well with it. For vegetables you could serve Carrots and Peas with Ginger and Chinese Parsley or cauliflower or any other vegetable you like. Almost any kind of *dal* would also complement the dish.

Chicken with tomato sauce and butter

SERVES 6

- 4 chicken legs
- 2 chicken breasts
- 2 medium-sized onions, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped
- A piece of fresh ginger, about 2 inches long and 1 inch wide, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 1 stick of cinnamon, $2\frac{1}{2}$ –3 inches, broken up
- Seeds from 6 whole cardamom pods
- 8 whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 bay leaves, crumbled
- 1 hot dried red pepper (or more, as and if desired), crumbled
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 16 ounces (2 cups) canned tomato sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons lightly salted butter

Remove skin from all chicken pieces. Divide legs into drumstick and thigh, and quarter the breasts. Pat dry and put aside.

In the container of an electric blender, combine the onions, garlic, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom seeds, cloves, peppercorns, bay leaves, red pepper, and 3 tablespoons water. Blend until you have a smooth paste.

Heat the oil in a 10–12-inch casserole-type pot over a high flame. When hot, put in the chicken pieces, 4 or 5 at a time, and brown them quickly (about a minute on each side). Remove with a slotted spoon. You will need to brown the chicken in several batches.

Turn heat to medium and pour in the paste from the blender. (Keep face averted.) Stir and fry the paste for 5 minutes, scraping the bottom of the pot well as you do so. Now add the tomato sauce, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water, and the salt. Bring to a boil. Cover. Turn heat to very low and simmer gently for 30 minutes, stirring every 6 or 7 minutes.

Add the chicken pieces to the pot, as well as any juices that may have collected. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer over low heat for 25 to 30 minutes. Stir gently every 5 or 6 minutes to avoid sticking and burning. Be careful not to break the chicken pieces as you stir. (This much of the recipe can be made up to a day in advance and refrigerated.)

Cut the butter into 4 pats. Take the chicken off the heat. Drop in the pats of butter and stir them in gently. Serve immediately.

To serve: Place contents of pot in a warm dish and serve with Rice with Frozen Black-eyed Peas or *naan*. For vegetables, you could have Eggplant *Bharta* or Fresh

The original version of this dish is to be had at the Moti Mahal restaurant in Delhi. There, the *Tandoori* Chicken (page 139) is cut into small serving sections and put into a rich sauce of creamed tomatoes, butter, and spices.

My very inventive sister, Kamal, has worked out her own version, slightly different, but equally good. The Indian chicken being as tough as it is, what she does is to combine all ingredients—tomatoes, onions, ginger, garlic, butter, whole spices, and chicken sections—in a covered pot and cook them until the chicken is three-quarters done. By this time the meat has absorbed all the necessary flavors. Then she lifts the cover and over a high flame stirs and fries the chicken and sauce until almost all the water evaporates and the chicken and pastelike sauce are a dark reddish brown.

This is very hard to do in America, because, as I mentioned earlier, the chicken is very tender and cooks too fast to allow all the flavors to be absorbed and the final frying to be accomplished without disintegration. So I have worked out a third version! Here it is.

Peas with Ginger and Chinese Parsley. You could, if you like, also serve Onion Pickled in Vinegar as they do at the Moti Mahal Restaurant in Delhi.

Chicken cutlets

SERVES 2

Breaded chops and cutlets were brought to India by its conquerors, the French and the British. They passed along the delicacy to the Indian upper classes, who were only too eager to ape and copy. But while these upper classes ate chops and cutlets as a status symbol, they were secretly very bored by the blandness of these foods. So they began to spice them up. Soon a whole new class of cooks developed. Under the distinguished titles of *bhatisama* ("lord of the pot") and *babarchi*, they cooked for the rich and specialized in Westernized foods adapted to the Indian palate, or, very often, Indian foods adapted to the Western palate. They could cook a treacle pudding just as easily as they could a roast duck stuffed with Indian herbs and spices, and a jam tart just as easily as a delicate *pillau*.

It is from this line of cooks that we get the recipe for chicken cutlets. Our family cook had not only inherited the recipe for an Indianized version of the cutlet, but he had also been taught a different name for it. As he said it, it sounded more like "cutliss" than anything else. So every Friday, which was the day off for all Muslim butchers (and most butchers were Muslim), we had either fish or chicken. And when it was chicken, it was frequently "chicken cutliss." The "cutliss" were very often served with boiled beans and potatoes as a first course for dinner. Then, as a second course, we had *chapatis* with the usual Indian lentils and vegetables. For dessert, we switched again to a sponge roll or lemon tarts, both of which were very popular. These sudden changes of cuisine at the same meal struck no one as peculiar.

I use chicken breasts for the cutlets. One breast (two cutlets) serves one person generously, two people skimpily. If you are having cutlets as a first course, you could serve four people easily with two breasts. The chicken breasts are boned and skinned (your butcher will do this on request, but it is easy to do yourself), and marinated overnight in a paste of onions, garlic, ginger, Chinese parsley, lemon juice, salt, and pepper. They are then dipped in a beaten egg, breaded, and fried. Very simple, and very mild.

- 2 whole chicken breasts, boned, skin removed, and each breast split into 2 sections (about 1 pound of meat)
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and coarsely chopped
- A piece of fresh ginger, 1 inch long and 1 inch wide, peeled and coarsely chopped
- ½ medium-sized onion, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 1 fresh hot green chili, finely sliced (this will make your chicken only very mildly hot; use 2 or 3 if you want it hotter)
- 2 tablespoons chopped Chinese parsley (coriander greens or cilantro), or Italian parsley as a second-best substitute
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 egg
- Bread crumbs (homemade bread crumbs are best; leave 6 slices of white bread exposed for 24 hours, or until they harden; then crush with rolling pin or spin in the blender)
- Vegetable oil, enough for at least ¼ inch in skillet

GARNISH

- Lemon juice and wedges
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- A few sprigs Chinese or Italian parsley

Four to 24 hours before cooking, marinate chicken.

Place the garlic, ginger, onion, green chili, parsley, lemon juice, salt, and pepper in the container of an electric blender. Add a tablespoon of water and blend at high speed until you have a smooth paste. (You may need to stop the blender and scrape down the paste a few times.)

Place the 4 boned and skinned chicken pieces in a bowl. Prick all over with a fork. Pour the marinade paste over chicken and rub into the pieces. Cover, and leave refrigerated 4 to 24 hours. (It will taste better if you can marinate it 24 hours.)

30 minutes before serving:

Beat the egg in a bowl.

Spread out the bread crumbs on a flat plate.

Lift out chicken pieces, one at a time, leaving marinade sticking to them. Dip first in beaten egg and then in bread crumbs. Coat both sides generously with bread crumbs and set aside. Prepare all chicken pieces this way, and let them sit, breaded, for 10 minutes.

15 minutes before serving:

Heat oil in a 10-12-inch skillet over medium-low flame. When the oil is hot,