WILL MEYRICK

SRI LANKA / SRI LANKA: RESPLENDENT ISLE

SRI LANKAN CHICKEN BIRYANI

Sri Lankan biryani is spicier than most Indian versions. South Indian Muslim traders brought it to the island in the early 1900s. This is a family home version: a marinated chicken curry layered with fragrant rice and finished in the pot.



SERVES	PREP	COOK	TOTAL	DIFFICULTY	SPICE
4	45 min	1 h	1 h 45 min	Involved	Hot

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE CHICKEN CURRY

600 g boneless chicken thigh, cut into large pieces
2 onions, thinly sliced
40 g ginger garlic paste
50 g tomato puree
50 g plain yoghurt
1 tsp red chilli powder
1 tbsp coriander powder
1/2 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp salt
2 green chillies, slit
4 dried red chillies
1 sprig curry leaves
1/2 tsp cumin powder
1/2 tsp garam masala
1 cinnamon stick
4 green cardamom pods
4 cloves
4 tbsp neutral oil or ghee

FOR THE RICE

300 g basmati rice
2 bay leaves
1 cinnamon stick
4 green cardamom pods
4 cloves
Salt, for the water

FOR LAYERING THE DUM

20 g coriander leaves, chopped
20 g mint leaves
10 g ginger, cut into thin strips
30 g brown fried onions
30 g butter
1 tsp rose water

TO SERVE

Sliced red onion
Fresh mint
Raita

METHOD

MARINATE THE CHICKEN

1. Mix the chicken with the yoghurt, ginger garlic paste, chilli powder, coriander powder, turmeric, salt and half the garam masala. Cover and leave for 3 hours in the fridge.

PREPARE THE RICE

2. Soak the basmati in cold water for 30 minutes. Boil in plenty of salted water with the bay leaves, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves until 70 percent cooked, about 5 minutes. Drain.

COOK THE CHICKEN CURRY

3. Heat the oil in a heavy pot. Add the cinnamon stick, cardamom, cloves, dried chillies and curry leaves and cook until they crackle.
4. Add the sliced onions and cook over medium heat until well browned, about 12 minutes.
5. Add the tomato puree and the cumin powder and stir for 1 minute. Add the marinated chicken and green chillies and cook on a low heat until the chicken is almost cooked, about 15 minutes. Check the seasoning.

LAYER THE BIRYANI

6. Spread half the chicken curry in a wide heavy pot. Cover with half the rice. Scatter over half the coriander, mint, ginger, fried onions and butter.
7. Repeat with the remaining curry, rice and herbs. Sprinkle over the rose water and the rest of the garam masala.

FINISH ON DUM

8. Seal the pot with foil and a tight lid. Cook on the lowest heat, on a hot plate or a flame tamer, for 20 minutes.
9. Open the pot and gently mix the rice through. Serve hot with sliced red onion, mint and raita.

USEFUL SHORTCUTS FOR HOME COOKS

The curry can be made a day ahead. Layer and steam just before serving.

Seal the pot well. The steam does the cooking in the last stage.

Boneless thigh stays juicy. Breast dries out in the dum.

Will is in Galle, in the home of the man who owns the spice shop beside the market. His wife cooks in a small kitchen with a gas ring, and Will cooks next to her. He has been invited to a family dinner and cannot wait to eat.The main dish is chicken biryani. Will points out how it differs from...