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CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

Chicken with Yogurt and Nuts

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Light, delicious, and easy to prepare, it does not require an elaborate list of ingredients or long hours of cooking. Rice pilau and Indian breads such as parathas or chapatis make great accompaniments.

Marinade:

- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1-inch piece ginger
- 4 cloves garlic
- freshly ground pepper
- 1 lb. chicken breast, skinned and cut into bite-size pieces
- 3 Tbsp. peanut oil
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 tsp. turmeric powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. chili powder
- 4 oz. heavy cream

Garnish:

- 1/4 cup roasted or slivered almonds
- 1/4 cup roasted cashews
- fresh coriander leaves
- 1 1/2 tsp. garam masala

Lightly whip the yogurt. Put ginger and garlic cloves in a blender and pulse until you obtain a coarse paste. Add ginger/garlic paste and pepper to yogurt; mix well. Add chicken and use a wooden spoon or your fingers to thoroughly coat each piece; marinate for an hour or two in the refrigerator.

Heat the oil in a skillet or shallow pan. Sauté the coriander and cumin seeds for 30 seconds, and then add the tomato paste. Keep stirring and add turmeric. Cook until the oil is visible on the sides and then add the marinated chicken, along with marinade. Stir constantly, being careful to prevent burning, reducing heat if necessary. Add salt and chili powder. Cook, covered, on moderate heat until the chicken juices run clear and the sauce has a creamy consistency.

Pour the cream over the cooking chicken, and simmer for a couple of minutes. Garnish with almonds, cashews, and coriander leaves and sprinkle with garam masala. Serves 4.

July 25, 2009: Food history update: Chicken Tikka Masala is so loved in the UK, that in 2009 a motion was introduced in the British Parliament seeking an EU "Designation of Origin" for the dish. EU, you ask? That's because India is not considered the home of this delicious curry, but rather Glasgow, (i.e., Scotland). The Labor Party member who introduced the motion before Parliament claimed that the dish was invented in the 1970s by Ali Ahmed Aslam, proprietor of the Shish Mahal restaurant in Glasgow's West End. Not surprisingly, the city has been named the Curry Capital of Britain three times.