

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

Chef Vikram Vij's Chicken Curry Pulao

Laura Leyshon for The Globe and Mail

Chef Vikram Vij's Chicken Curry Pulao

vikram vij

From Saturday's Globe and Mail

Published Friday, Aug. 26, 2011 6:00AM EDT

If you do a lot of cooking at home, you know how terrible it feels to throw away uneaten leftovers. My paternal grandmother's solution was to use up the vegetable curries by adding potatoes, spicing them up and turning them into paranthas (stuffed Indian bread). My mother, too, often prepared a dish with a similar function: She would mix the leftover meat curries with plain basmati rice, raisins and cashews. That was usually our Sunday lunch, with yogurt on the side to quell the heat.

This recipe for chicken curry pulao – the Indian term for a dish of rice with meat or fish – is an adaptation of the one I used to watch my mother make. I often prepare it for friends, as it's perfect from the host's perspective: I assemble it in advance, then pop it in the oven and heat it up slowly.

Chef Vikram Vij is the owner of Vij's in Vancouver.

Preparation time: 40 to 45 minutes

Cooking time: 50 to 60 minutes

Ready in: 1½ to 1¾ hours

Ingredients

Curry

2 teaspoons ground coriander

1 teaspoon chili powder

1 teaspoon ground turmeric

4 tablespoons water

5 tablespoons ghee (clarified butter

or good-quality salted butter)

5 cloves

4 green cardamom pods

10 black peppercorns

2 bay leaves

2 blades mace

2 to 3 medium onions, finely chopped

2 1/2 tablespoons garlic paste or finely chopped garlic

5 teaspoons ginger paste or finely chopped ginger

2 tablespoons cashew paste

750 grams skinless, boneless chicken

meat (mostly breast with some dark

meat for flavour)

2 tablespoons thick cream

250 millilitres natural plain yogurt, whisked

Salt to taste

4 or 5 sprigs cilantro

Rice

1 1/2 cups basmati rice

Water

1 teaspoon butter

Method

To make the curry, put the ground coriander, chili powder and turmeric in a small bowl, add 4 tablespoons water and mix together. Heat the ghee in a large, heavy pan over medium heat, add the cloves, cardamom pods, peppercorns, bay leaves and mace and stir-fry for about 1 minute or until cardamom changes colour. Add the onions and stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes until brown. Add the garlic and ginger and stir-fry until golden. Add the ground spice mix and stir-fry until specks of oil appear on the surface. (If anything sticks to the pan, add a little water to deglaze it.) Once the mixture has browned, add the cashew paste. Then add the chicken, follow with the cream and stir-fry on slow to medium heat for 5 to 7 minutes. You can add water at this point (up to a cup or two), depending on how rich you want the gravy to be. Once the chicken is cooked through, remove it from the heat and stir in the yogurt. Reduce the heat to low, then cover and simmer, stirring occasionally for 10 to 15 minutes. Depending on the consistency of the sauce, you can cook it down more or leave it the way it is. Add salt and stir.

To make the rice, soak 1½ cups basmati rice for 10 minutes in cold water. Transfer the rice and the water you soaked it in to a large pan. Add a teaspoon of butter to the pot and enough additional water so that it sits a ½ inch above the rice. Cover and cook on medium heat until the rice comes to a boil, then switch off the heat and let the steam cook the rice (about 10 minutes).

Just before serving, stir the rice into the chicken curry and serve on a platter. You can also transfer it to a deep dish and keep it warm in the oven until ready to serve. Add the cilantro at the very end for colour and aroma.

Wine Pairings

Like Chef Vij, I hate to waste leftovers, including wine. If you've got a half bottle lying around in the fridge, consider dispatching it in support of this meal. A white is especially apt, notably gewürztraminer but also muscat or Argentine torrontes. – Beppi Crosariol

© 2011 The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.