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Smokin' Chicken Chili

Serves 6

Some people don't believe that anything containing chicken can actually be chili. But this recipe offers an alternative to heavier beef flavors, while still packing a lot of taste. Chipotles are smoked jalapeños. Look for the canned ones, in adobo sauce, in the Mexican food aisle of most supermarkets. Smoked paprika has a wonderful, woody aroma and taste that matches the chipotles; do not use regular paprika. Also, try Mexican oregano, if you can find it, to add authentic Mexican flavor to this dish. Finally, add more chipotles if you like to turn up the heat.

One 15-ounce can diced tomatoes, undrained
2 canned chipotle chiles in adobo sauce, plus 2 teaspoons adobo sauce from the can
4 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 pounds boneless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes
1 cup chopped green bell peppers
1 cup chopped onions
1 teaspoon chopped garlic
One 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
1 teaspoon dried oregano (Mexican, if available)
1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. Place the tomatoes with their juice, the chipotles, and the adobo sauce in a food processor. Puree until mixture forms a smooth paste. Set aside.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of the vegetable oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat, add the chicken, and sauté until the chicken is cooked throughout. Remove the chicken from the pan and set aside. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil in the pan, add the green peppers, onions, and garlic, and cook until soft, about 5 minutes.
3. Return the chicken to the pan. Add the chipotle paste, black beans, oregano, paprika, and enough water to cover the ingredients. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Add salt and pepper. Serve hot.

EXTRA POINTS: You can prepare the chili the night before and reheat it, or you can chop the chicken and vegetables the night before, refrigerate them in separate zipper-top plastic bags, and make the chili on site over a gas grill.