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Chicken-Vegetable Kadhi
with Chickpea Cakes and Yogurt-Mint Sauce

Serves 4

Kadhi just means yogurt-based curry. If you want a smooth, lovely sauce, follow the instructions for mixing the chickpea flour into the yogurt. The starch stabilizes the yogurt so that it won't curdle when you add it to the hot pan or heat it as you cook the chicken. The results should be a rich, spicy, smooth sauce and succulent chicken thighs.

There's a lot of cardamom in this recipe-green, brown, and black. The black cardamom (or so-called Nepali variety) is the strongest; the brown a close second; and the green much milder. If you have cardamom of many colors, don't worry-use what you have.

Chicken-Vegetable Kadhi

Marinade

1/2 head garlic, cloves peeled and crushed but left whole
Two 6-in/15 cm pieces fresh ginger, peeled, halved, and thinly sliced
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tbsp kosher salt
1 tbsp raw sugar
3 fresh hot chiles such as arbol, serrano, or sanaam, cut into thin rounds, with seeds intact
1 tbsp peanut oil

8 to 10 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
2 cups/480 ml whole plain yogurt
2 tbsp chickpea flour or 1 tbsp all-purpose flour
3 tbsp peanut oil
6 green cardamom pods
4 brown or black cardamom pods
1 tbsp coriander seeds
1 tbsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 tsp garam masala
2 yellow onions, coarsely chopped
2 tomatoes, chopped
1 head cauliflower, trimmed and cut into bite-size florets
1 red or orange bell pepper, seeded and coarsely chopped
Flaky salt for finishing

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To make the marinade: Stir together the garlic, ginger, lemon juice, salt, sugar, chiles, and peanut oil in a mixing bowl.

Add the chicken to the marinade and turn to coat on both sides. Marinate at room temperature for at least 1 hour and up to 2 hours, or cover and refrigerate up to 24 hours, turning occasionally. (If refrigerating, return the chicken to room temperature for 30 minutes or so to take the chill off before cooking.)

When you're ready to cook, remove the chicken from the marinade, reserving the marinade.

In a small bowl, work a little yogurt into the chickpea flour to form a loose paste, slowly adding more yogurt until the yogurt is integrated. Use a whisk to smooth out any lumps. Set aside.

In a 12-in/30 cm or larger cast-iron frying pan or a 5qt/5l or larger Dutch oven, heat 1 tbsp of the peanut oil over medium heat. Working in batches, lay the chicken thighs in the pan, skin-side down, and cook, turning frequently, for 8 to 10 minutes, or until nicely browned on both sides. Transfer the chicken to a plate and pour off any excess fat but don't wash the pan.

Add the remaining 2 tbsp peanut oil to the pan and heat over low heat. Add the green and brown cardamom, the coriander, fenugreek, cumin, turmeric, and garam masala. Cook the spices until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Use a rubber spatula to keep the spices from sticking and burning. Add the marinade [liquid only] from the chicken and cook for 30 seconds, then add the onions and sauté for about 10 minutes, or until they begin to brown and stick. Stir in the tomatoes and then immediately add the yogurt mixture, beginning with just a spoonful and then slowly but steadily whisking in the rest. Finally, add the chicken along with the cauliflower and bell pepper.

Cover and cook over medium-low heat until the vegetables are tender and the chicken is cooked through, 25 to 30 minutes. An instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a thigh should register 175°F/80°C. If you're unsure, cut into the thigh to take a peek. Look for clear, not red or pink, juices running from the spot where you pierced the meat and opaque, barely pink flesh at the bone.

Taste the sauce and adjust its flavor with a pinch of salt or extra chiles before serving.

Chickpea Cakes

I gobble up these little cakes the same way I do Jujufruits at the movies. Don't miss out.

1 tbsp butter or olive oil
1 tsp cumin seeds

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1 tsp coriander seeds, lightly crushed
1 tbsp mustard seeds
1 tsp minced dried dundicut or sanaam chile or 1 fresh habanero or Serrano chile, minced
2 cups/220g chickpea flour
1 1/4 cups/300ml boiling water
1 egg, beaten
1tsp kosher salt
2 tbsp peanut/ground nut oil
Flaky salt for finishing
Yogurt-Mint Sauce

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the cumin, coriander, mustard seeds, and chile and cook, stirring frequently with a rubber spatula, until the mustard seeds pop and you are hit by the wonderful smell of toasting cumin, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a small dish and set aside.

In a heat-proof bowl, combine the chickpea flour and boiling water. Whisk until the mixture is thoroughly combined and smooth. Add the toasted spice mixture, the egg, and kosher salt and stir to mix well. The batter should be a little thicker than pancake batter-soft, but not at all runny.

In a large frying pan or on a griddle, heat the peanut oil over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Do a quick test cake, dolloping a heaping spoonful of batter into the hot pan for a small pancake about the diameter of a lime. It should sizzle and brown on one side in 3 to 5 minutes; flip it and cook until nicely browned and the center is not at all gooeey, 2 to 3 minutes longer.

When you feel your pan is just hot enough, repeat to fry the remaining chickpea cakes, working in batches to avoid crowding the pan. Transfer the cooked cakes as they are finished to a wire rack or a plate lined with paper towels. Sprinkle with a pinch of flaky salt while they're still hot and serve with Yogurt Mint Sauce.

Yogurt-Mint Sauce

Sneaky spicy and cooling all at once-this sauce is supposed to trick your senses.

1 cup/240ml whole plain yogurt
2 tbsp chopped fresh mint
1 bird's-eye or serrano chile, minced
1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1/2 tsp kosher salt

Mix everything together in a small, colorful bowl. Leave the chile's seed out if you prefer a less spicy sauce.