

smitten kitchen
EVERY DAY

triumphant & unfussy new favorites



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chicken and rice, street cart style

makes 4 servings

Tourists may associate street food in New York City with dirty-water dogs and stale pretzels, but that's not all there is. The best halal street carts prepare chicken-and-rice or lamb-and-rice platters that, in my opinion, are not just a rite of passage, but one of the greatest meals to be had, regardless of price point. This doesn't mean I took quickly to them: I'd always more or less ignored them until about a decade ago, when my daily walk to work up Park Avenue South took me by a Rafiqi's cart each morning, and the aroma wafting off the griddle as the guy prepared for the lunch rush consumed me in a way that made me question everything: "Why can't I have spicy chicken and rice for breakfast instead of this overpriced coffee and mediocre muffin I'm carrying? Would that mean I'm not vegetarian anymore?" I could feel a dozen notions I had unraveling at once.

You're probably expecting me to tell you here that I'd built it up too much, that when I finally tried it, it was just okay. In fact, it was everything. Even now, I can be completely full from a meal and yet get hungry to the point of distraction all over again when that aroma sneaks up on me. Making it at home feels almost heretical: Where's the line and chaos? Where's the clank-clank of the giant spatulas chopping the meat on the griddle? Isn't it much easier to get the level of white sauce on top right (a lot, that is) when someone else is pouring it and you can pretend it was just a moderate dollop? But the truth is, our version might be even better, and since you cannot get it on Seamless anyway, it quickly became one of our favorite weeknight meals (and even more fun to scale up for a dinner party).

marinade and chicken

Juice of ½ lemon
 2 garlic cloves, minced
 1 teaspoon kosher salt
 1 teaspoon paprika, sweet, hot or smoked
 ¼ teaspoon ground coriander
 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
 Pinch of ground cloves
 1 teaspoon dried oregano
 2 pounds (roughly 1 kilogram) boneless, skinless chicken thighs (about 6)
 1 tablespoon (15 ml) olive oil,
 plus more to coat the pan

rice

1 tablespoon (15 ml) olive oil
 ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
 ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
 2 cups (360 grams) basmati or another long-grain white rice
 3½ cups (840 ml) chicken stock
 1 teaspoon kosher salt

sauce

1 cup minus 2 tablespoons (200 grams) plain yogurt
 2 tablespoons (25 grams) mayonnaise

(cont.)

soak dried beans Do you have to soak beans before you cook them? No, nope. But it will save a lot of cooking time, making this more of a 1-hour weeknight meal. So, if you can plan ahead, soak the pintos in an ample amount of water at room temperature for 24 hours. Don't have 24 hours? I soaked mine for 3. Using canned beans? Skip this step entirely.

prepare your beans Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Put the bacon in a large ovenproof pot or Dutch oven or a deep sauté pan, and place over medium heat. Cook, stirring, until the bacon is brown and crisp and the fat has rendered out, 5 to 7 minutes. Scoop the bacon bits onto paper towels to drain, spooning off all but 2 tablespoons bacon fat. Add the onion to the pan and cook (still over medium) until soft and lightly golden at the edges, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute more. Add the tomato paste, spices, and cayenne or chipotle, and cook for 1 minute. Add the salt and the canned or drained soaked beans. Then:

- For precooked or canned beans, add 1½ cups broth.
- For soaked dried beans, add 4 cups broth.
- For unsoaked dried beans, add 4 cups broth and 1 cup water to start.

Bring the mixture to a boil and cook for 1 full minute. Place a lid on the pot and transfer it carefully to the oven.

bake your beans Please keep in mind that cooking beans isn't a perfect science, and the amount of liquid absorbed if the beans are presoaked, the age and freshness of the beans, and even the softness of beans from a can are all

going to affect how much cooking time and liquid are needed. But these estimates are fairly solid in my experience.

- Already cooked or canned beans: Bake for 15 minutes.
- Soaked dried beans: Bake for 45 minutes (estimate for 24 hours or longer soaking) to 75 minutes (estimate for 2 to 3 hours soaking).
- Dried beans that have not been soaked: Bake for 1 hour 30 minutes, but after 50 minutes, start checking every 10 to 15 minutes to see if more liquid or cooking time will be needed.

The beans are done when they're firm-tender and moist, with most of the liquid absorbed.

about 30 minutes before the beans are done, bake the chips Brush the tortillas lightly with oil. Stack them and cut into 8 wedges. Spread the wedges in one snug layer on a large baking sheet or two (because the beans are baking, you may need to do this in two batches). Season lightly with fine salt. Bake for 10 minutes, check for color, and then add more baking time as needed until they're golden and crisp. Let them cool.

make the relish Combine the onion, jalapeño, and cilantro with the olive oil and lime juice. Season with salt to taste. This is easily tweaked with more of any of the three ingredients to your taste.

to serve Beans are served right in their cooking pan. Chips and each fixing go in their own bowls. Everyone assembles their bowls to their taste, and everyone wins.









