

from the finished dish. There is no messy measuring of powders, and the flavor is generally brighter than that of ground spices (which often sit on the shelf too long).

Raita is traditionally served as a garnish to mellow and brighten biryani's assertive flavors. For our version, tasters favored a simple combination of yogurt, cilantro, and a small amount of garlic.

Skillet Chicken Biryani

SERVES 4 TO 6 AS A MAIN COURSE

TIME: 55 MINUTES (INCLUDES 20 MINUTES BAKING TIME)

The cardamom pods rise to the surface by the time the dish finishes baking, so they are easy to remove. Do try to remove them all prior to serving, as biting into a pod can be unpleasant. Leftover yogurt sauce may be used as a dip or sandwich spread.

- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 1¾ pounds), trimmed of excess fat and skin
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 1 medium onion, sliced thin
- 3 large jalapeño chiles, stemmed and sliced thin (with seeds for maximum flavor and heat)
- 8 green cardamom pods, lightly crushed with the flat side of a knife
- 1 (1½-inch) piece fresh ginger, cut into 4 coins
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1½ cups basmati or long-grain rice, well rinsed and drained
- Pinch saffron threads, crumbled with fingertips
- 4 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 4 teaspoons)
- 1 cup plain yogurt, preferably whole-milk
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 375 degrees. Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed 12-inch oven-proof skillet over medium-high heat until almost smoking. Meanwhile, thoroughly dry the chicken with paper towels and season liberally with salt and pepper. Swirl the skillet to coat with the oil and add the chicken, skin-side down. Cook until deep golden, about 5 minutes; turn the chicken pieces over and brown until golden on the second side, about 4 minutes longer. Using tongs, transfer the chicken to a plate and cover with aluminum foil to keep warm.

2. Add the onion, jalapeños, cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, 1 teaspoon salt, and 2 tablespoons water to deglaze the pan. Cook, stirring frequently and scraping the bottom of the pan to release any browned bits, until the onion softens and begins to brown, about 4 minutes. Add the rice, saffron, and 1 tablespoon garlic and cook, continuing to stir frequently, until the grains of rice are coated with fat, about 1½ minutes.

3. Off the heat, add 2½ cups water and the browned chicken. Return the pan to the heat and bring to a boil. Cover the skillet with a lid and transfer to the oven. Bake until the chicken is cooked through, 20 to 22 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, mix together the yogurt, remaining 1 teaspoon garlic, cilantro, ½ teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste in a small bowl.

5. Remove the cardamom pods, ginger coins, and cinnamon sticks from the skillet and adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper to taste. Serve the chicken and rice immediately, passing the yogurt sauce separately at the table.