

## butter chicken (murgh makhani) *delhi*

Chicken Makhani, made either with tikkas – derived from the Hindi word *tukra* and meaning pieces – or quarters of chicken, is the most popular dish in Indian restaurants both in India and overseas. It is essentially a restaurant and not a homestyle dish, because there are no tandoors in Indian domestic kitchens, and this dish consists of tandoor-cooked chicken in a sauce.

However, since the dish is so popular, many would like to recreate it at home, and I give a simplified way to do so here, cooking the chicken in a skillet. Alternatively, it is possible to roast a whole small chicken, marinating it first, then quartering it and adding the juices from the roasting pan into the *makhani* sauce.

Butter chicken originated in the 1950s at the Moti Mahal restaurant in Delhi where they made the sauce by adding butter and tomato to the leftover chicken juices in the marinade trays from which they used to sell hundreds of portions of Tandoori Chicken every day.

### Serves 4

900g (2lb) chicken (skinned quarters, smaller pieces on the bone) or boneless pieces (tikkas)  
4–5 tablespoons oil

### For the marinade

400ml (14fl oz) full-fat yogurt  
6 garlic cloves  
1cm (1/2in) square of fresh ginger  
2/3 teaspoon red chilli powder or paprika  
1/4 teaspoon coriander powder  
1/2 teaspoon cumin powder  
1/2 teaspoon garam masala powder  
a tiny pinch of tandoori colouring (optional)  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
2 teaspoons lime juice

- 1 First prepare the marinade. Place the yogurt in a piece of cheesecloth and hang to allow the whey to drip away. Purée the garlic and ginger in a blender. Add this and the marinade spices, salt and lime juice to the yogurt and mix well.
- 2 Scald the tomatoes for the *makhani* sauce and peel off the skin. Reduce to a semi-pulp with a fork or potato masher. Put the *kasuri methi* into a grinder and reduce to a powder.
- 3 Make gashes in the chicken if using pieces on the bone. Marinate the chicken in the yogurt mixture for at least 1 hour, preferably 2; for best results leave overnight.
- 4 When ready to cook, heat the oil in a large, thick-bottomed skillet and put in the chicken with the marinade. Cover and cook over a low heat until done. Turn the chicken over during cooking.
- 5 Put the tomato pulp into a frying pan and cook for 5 minutes or so until the liquid has evaporated slightly.
- 6 Add the chilled butter and paprika; after the butter has melted, let it cook for just 1 minute. Taste. If it is not sour, add a few drops of vinegar. Add the *kasuri methi*, garam masala powder and salt to taste. After 30 seconds, add the cream and stir. The sauce is now ready. Pour it into the skillet and mix well with the chicken. Serve immediately.

### For the makhani sauce

700g (1 1/2lb) tomatoes  
1/2 teaspoon kasuri methi (dried fenugreek leaves)  
75g (3oz) chilled butter  
1/2 teaspoon paprika  
few drops of vinegar  
1/4 teaspoon garam masala salt  
40g (1 1/2oz) single cream

If butter is cooked for as long as 3 minutes it will turn into ghee and become a grainy emulsion. So start with chilled butter and cook for less than 2 minutes after the butter has melted.

You can cook the chicken ahead of time. But *makhani* sauce takes only 5–6 minutes to prepare and should be made when the dish is to be eaten. You can cook the tomato ahead, but add the butter just before serving.

In India, restaurateurs mix a little raw papaya purée into the marinade as a tenderiser.

