

Old Delhi Butter Chicken

Murgh Makhani

SERVES 6

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES | COOK TIME: 7 HOURS ON LOW OR 3 TO 4 HOURS ON HIGH

Murgh makhani is a classic restaurant dish that is silky, smooth, and beautifully luxurious. The complex flavors include the natural sweetness of honey, the earthy bitter undertones of fenugreek leaves, the creaminess of makhani (butter), and the tang of fresh tomatoes. All combine to produce a thick, rich sauce that's North Indian through and through. Many restaurants have the luxury of marinating the chicken pieces and cooking them in the tandoor before adding them to the decadent sauce—not always possible at home. This is my interpretation of how you can make this classic in a slow cooker. Yes, it's a two-stage process, but the result is fantastic!

FOR THE TOMATO SAUCE

3 medium red onions, roughly chopped
2 to 3 fresh green chiles
1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
6 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
2¾-inch (7-cm) piece cassia bark
5 green cardamom pods
4 cloves
10 black peppercorns

1 teaspoon salt
10 ripe red tomatoes, roughly chopped, or 1 (14-ounce/400-g) can plum tomatoes
1 tablespoon tomato paste
½ teaspoon turmeric
1 tablespoon Kashmiri chili powder
2 teaspoons coriander seeds, ground
2 cups hot water

FOR THE CHICKEN

2 tablespoons ghee or butter
1 tablespoon cumin seeds
12 chicken thighs, skinned, trimmed, and cut into cubes
1 to 2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon dried fenugreek leaves
⅓ cup (100 mL) heavy cream (optional)
1 tablespoon butter (optional)
Coriander leaves to garnish (optional)

TO MAKE THE TOMATO SAUCE

1. Heat the slow cooker to high and add the onion, chiles, ginger, garlic, cassia bark, green cardamom pods, cloves, black peppercorns, salt, tomatoes, tomato paste, turmeric, chili powder, ground coriander seeds, and water.
2. Cover and cook on high for 1 to 2 hours, or on low for 3 hours. By the end, the tomatoes should have broken down.
3. Remove the cassia bark (this is important, because if you grind the cassia in the sauce it will turn out much darker) and blend the sauce with an immersion or regular blender until it's smooth. You can strain this to get a fine, glossy sauce, if you'd like, or leave it as it is. Return the sauce to the slow cooker.

TO MAKE THE CHICKEN

1. In a frying pan, heat the ghee. Add cumin seeds and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Pour into the sauce in the slow cooker.
2. Add the diced chicken, cover the slow cooker, and cook on high for 2 hours, or on low for 4 hours.
3. When the chicken is cooked, stir in the honey, dried fenugreek leaves, and cream (if using). If you want to thicken the sauce you can turn the cooker to high and reduce for a while with the cover off. Add some butter, a little extra drizzle of cream, and garnish with coriander leaves (if using) just before serving.

EASY ADJUSTMENT: You can also marinate the chicken in a tandoori-style marinade (as on page 112) and cook it in the oven, and then add it to the tomato sauce in this recipe. It's also the perfect sauce to have with paneer. Once the paneer is added (step 2 in the section "To make the chicken"), it will only need about 15 minutes of cooking on high, just to heat through.