

Dawat Yan Banquet

Dawat-e-Biryani

Audio+Video, Recipe, Storytelling, Archives

Mariam Magsi & Gordan Sumanski

© 2022

Chicken Biryani from the Sindh province of Pakistan

The Sindhi Biryani featured in Dawat-e-Biryani is as close as one can get to the real deal, without traveling to Karachi, Pakistan. It takes time, passion, and patience - but the end result is quite tantalizing. Biryani is a true labor of love. Please note, that while we are sticking to a traditional recipe and using chicken, you are free to use any protein that is available to you. For those of you who do not consume meat and poultry, it is perfectly acceptable to make a vegetarian Biryani as well. For folks in Toronto, Canada, all of the ingredients we have used to make Biryani, can be sourced from Iqbal Halal Foods (2 Thorncliffe Park Drive). Iqbals also offers delivery.

The cooking process of Biryani comprises of 3 main parts:

Step 1: Preparing the salan (curry), with masala (spices) to marinate the chicken. This salan is later layered onto the rice.

Step 2: Parboiling the basmati rice, where we either pressure cook it for 2 minutes on High, or we can parboil it for 5 minutes (no more than this, otherwise it will be too soft). If you cook it too soft, you can simply lay it out on a cold, flat surface.

Step 3: Bringing it all together for the final steam, also known as the “Dum” process as referenced in the video. This part calls for layering half the rice, all the Salan, and then the remaining rice as a final layer on top. We allow the steam to develop, coating every grain of rice with tantalizing masala.

The Layers

Biryani Masala - Pakistani Biryani, especially this variety from the Sindh province of Pakistan, is heavy on spice, and flavor - and this level of spice is often achieved with a good Biryani masala. To make Biryani masala for this recipe, combine the following ingredients in a spice grinder and process until mostly smooth. I do not use any shortcuts when cooking Biryani and stick to the pestle and mortar method. This method makes around 2 tbsp of masala, which is the exact quantity you will need for this recipe on a ratio of rice to meat of the following: **1lb of meat for 1.5 cups of rice**. If you double the meat and rice, then you must also double all the other parts of the recipe.

Masala

- 1 medium dried bay leaf (tez patta)
- 2 dried red chilli peppers (sukhi lal mirch)
- 1 small whole made (javetri)
- 4-5 whole cloves (loung)
- 1 black cardamom (badi elaichi)
- 1 star anise (baadiyan)
- 3-4 green cardamom pods (elaichi)
- 1 tsp roasted cumin seeds or black cumin seeds (shahi zeera)
- ½ tsp black peppercorns (kaali mirch)
- ¼ tsp fennel (saunf)
- ¼ tsp carom seeds (ajwain)

Potatoes

To add potatoes to this recipe, peel and cube 2 small russet potatoes. Fry them lightly, separately, then layer them with the chicken or underneath the rice during the Dum process. Sindhi Biryani is traditionally consumed with potatoes, though if you study how Biryani is made in various countries surrounding Pakistan, other ingredients such as eggs also make an appearance, especially in the South Indian variety. There are many healthy rivalries and regional arguments around which variation of Biryani is the most authentic in South Asian cuisines.

Marinade

- ½ cup plain whole milk yogurt
- 1 tbsp neutral oil
- 2 tbsp Biryani masala (Substitution with store bought masala is permitted, but not preferred)
- 1 tsp coriander powder (dhanial powder)
- ½ - 1 tsp turmeric powder (haldi)

Whole Spices (to be used in the curry)

- 3 medium dried bay leaves (tez patta)
- 5-6 whole cloves (loung)
- 4-5 whole black cardamoms (badi elaichi)
- 6 star anise (baadiyan)

Parboiled Rice

1 ⅓ cups of aged, long-grain Basmati rice
1 ½ tsp kosher salt
1 tbsp oil
1 tsp lemon juice OR white vinegar

Salan/Curry Ingredients

¼ cup neutral oil
2 tbsp ghee (clarified butter)
2 medium yellow onions, finely chopped
6-8 garlic cloves, crushed
1 inch ginger, crushed
1 small tomato, finely chopped
1-2 small green chili peppers, chopped
5 dried plums (aalu bukhara)
½ tsp kosher salt
1 tsp garam masala (can be omitted if using store bought spices)
½ tsp red chili flakes (optional)
1 tsp lemon juice

Top Garnish Layer

½ tsp chaat masala or garam masala
1 tbsp oil
¼ cup cilantro leaves, chopped
1-2 tbsp mint leaves, chopped
⅛ tsp yellow or orange food colouring mixed with 1 tbsp of milk or water
1 lemon, thinly sliced

Raita (A cooling yogurt and cucumber based dip that is poured over the Biryani)

1 ½ cup of plain yogurt
1 cup cucumber, finely diced
¼ cup of fresh cilantro, minced
½ teaspoon of cumin
½ teaspoon of garam masala
½ Teaspoon of Salt

Method to make Raita

1. Peel the cucumbers into tiny cubes, and mince some cilantro
2. Stir together the yogurt, salt, and spices
3. Add the cucumber and cilantro, stir to combine

Instructions

In a medium bowl, combine the chicken with the ingredients listed under '**marinade**'. Cover and set aside or refrigerate (ideally) overnight. When ready to use, allow the chicken to transition from cold to room temperature.

Thoroughly wash the rice and soak it in water. Set aside.

Heat a large, heavy bottomed pan over high heat. Add the oil, ghee, onions and sauté until the onions are golden (15-20 minutes). Deglaze the pan with ¼ cup water. Once the water dries up, add the whole spices, garlic, and ginger and sauté for another 2 minutes.

Add the chicken with its marinade and sauté until cooked through (2-3 minutes). Add the tomatoes, green chili peppers, dried plums and stir to coat. Add ½ cup water (the water should cover about 1/3 of the chicken) and bring to a gentle boil.

Turn the heat down to a gentle simmer, cover, and allow the chicken to cook for 30 minutes, stirring midway. While the chicken is cooking, proceed to the next step. Turn off the heat once the chicken has cooked.

Meanwhile, prepare the rice. Place a medium pot over high heat and bring 7 cups of water to a boil. Add salt, oil, and lemon juice or vinegar and stir. Once the water comes to a boil, drain and add the rice. Stir, and bring it back up to a boil. Once it comes to a boil again, boil for 5 minutes (no more than 5 minutes and 30 seconds), or until the rice is just cooked with a bite to it. It shouldn't get mushy when pressed between your fingers. Drain and set aside.

Uncover the chicken. Raise the heat to medium-high to sauté out any excess water for 2-3 minutes. Add salt, garam masala, and red chili flakes for more heat (if desired). The oil will be separated from the masala. Turn off the heat. Add lemon juice and stir to combine.

The Dum Process

If needed, lightly oil the bottom of a dutch oven or stock/soup pot. Layer half of the drained rice at the bottom of the pot. Sprinkle 1/4 tsp of the chaat or garam masala on top of the rice. Add in all the chicken, and top with the remaining rice. Sprinkle the remaining 1/4 tsp of chaat or garam masala. Drizzle in the coloured milk and oil. (Optional: Sprinkle a pinch of food colouring directly for more variation in colour.) Sprinkle the cilantro leaves and mint leaves, and arrange the lemon slices on top.

If your pan isn't heavy-bottomed, place a heat diffuser, flat griddle, or "tava" underneath the pan to diffuse the heat. Layer the lid with a kitchen cloth (or aluminum foil) and seal tightly. Turn the heat to medium and allow the Biryani to undergo the Dum process and develop steam for 4-5 minutes. You'll be able to see the steam escaping from the sides. This would be the ideal moment to turn down the heat to its lowest, while allowing the Biryani to go through the Dum process for about 20 minutes. Turn off the heat and allow the biryani to rest with the lid on for 10 minutes. Do not stir or mix yet.

To serve, gently move the Biryani onto a platter with a rice paddle or small plate. Serve hot with yogurt or raita on the side.