

MRIDULA'S ALTERNATIVE CHRISTMAS

Spring Chicken in Almond and Poppy Seed Sauce (Serves 4)

This opulent dish will make a perfect centre stage for any special occasion. It is rich, decadent and yet easy to cook. A little care and patience in preparing the spices will ensure that you delight everyone on Christmas day. You can double up on the quantity if you need to.



INGREDIENTS

- 2 poussins
- 25g blanched almonds
- 1 tablespoon coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 2 tablespoons white poppy seeds
- 125g Greek yogurt
- 1 teaspoon besan (gram flour) or ½ teaspoon corn flour
- 2 teaspoons ginger puree
- 2 teaspoons garlic puree
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- ½-1 teaspoon hot chilli powder
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 6 green cardamom pods, bruised
- Salt or to taste
- 2 tablespoons sunflower, rapeseed or light olive oil
- 15g coriander leaves and stalks, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh mint leaves, chopped
- 2-3 small green chillies, slit lengthways

METHOD

Skin the birds first. It is easier if you lay the bird on its back and hold it down with one hand then using a cloth pull away the skin. The cloth prevents the fingers slipping. Once you have skinned the birds, joint them discarding the leg and wing tips. The wings can be left attached to the breast joints. You only need the breast and leg joints. Use the backs to make a stock for soups and sauces.

Soak the almonds in 150ml boiling water for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat a small heavy pan over a low-medium heat and add the coriander and cumin seeds. Stir them around until they begin to release their aroma (about a minute), then add the poppy seeds. Reduce the heat to low and stir until the poppy seeds are a shade darker, but do not allow them to brown. Remove the pan from heat if necessary as the residual heat is often enough. Transfer them onto a plate and allow to cool.

Whisk the yogurt and the gram flour or corn flour together until smooth. This stops the yogurt curdling during cooking. (cont...)

METHOD CONTINUED

Put the poussin joints in a non-stick pan and add the yogurt, ginger, garlic, onion, chilli powder, turmeric, cardamom pods and salt. Stir over medium heat until the joints are opaque (4-5 minutes). Cover the pan and reduce the heat to low. Cook for 15 minutes, stirring once or twice. Remove the lid and cook, uncovered, over a medium-high heat until the sauce resembles a very thick batter. (You can cool and refrigerate the meat at this stage and it can be left in the fridge for up to 36 hours).

Puree the almonds with the water in which they were soaked until smooth.

In a coffee or spice mill grind the roasted ingredients until fine. The blades of the spice mill will slow down because of the oil present in poppy deeds. Switch the grinder off and scrape the contents with a teaspoon or a knife. Grind until everything is fine. Add this to the poussin along with the oil and stir over medium heat for 2-3 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and continue to cook until the meat begins to brown (5-6 minutes), stirring regularly. Add the almond puree and 150ml warm water. Cook for 2-3 minutes or until the sauce thickens.

Stir in the coriander, mint and chillies and remove from the heat. Serve with saffron pilau.