

Grilled Chicken Satay

YIELD Serves 4 to 6

TIME 1¾ hours

Why This Recipe Works

Malaysian chicken satay (satay ayam) features pieces of chicken coated in a deeply fragrant paste, skewered, and charred on the grill. We used fatty, collagen-rich chicken thighs because they cooked up juicier and more tender than white meat and could stay on the grill longer to pick up flavorful charring without drying out. Cutting the chicken into wide strips (instead of chunks) and stretching them between two skewers created more surface area for coating with the paste and for charring. Loads of lemongrass, ginger, and galangal, plus garlic, shallots, pepper flakes, spices, and a touch of sugar made for a complex, aromatic paste that developed savory character when charred. Briefly microwaving the paste deactivated the enzyme in ginger that makes meat mushy. We used a portion of the paste as the base for our dipping sauce, browning it deeply to soften the aromatics' raw edge and fibrous texture and to develop savory depth. We then simmered it with ground peanuts, water, tamarind, and sugar to create a subtle sweet-tangy undertone that added complexity; simmering also thickened the mixture.



Gather Your Ingredients

Aromatic Paste

- ☐ **2** lemongrass stalks, trimmed to bottom 6 inches
- ☐ **3** shallots, chopped (¾ cup)

Before You Begin

- * You will need eight 12-inch metal skewers for this recipe. If galangal is unavailable, increase the ginger to one 1½-inch piece. The aromatic paste can also be prepared using a mortar and pestle. For a spicier dish, use the larger amount of red pepper flakes. Use a Thai or Indonesian tamarind concentrate and not one from India, which is darker and has a more cooked flavor. If you can't find tamarind concentrate substitute with equal parts lime juice.

- ☐ **3** tablespoons water
- ☐ **1** tablespoon vegetable oil
- ☐ **1** tablespoon packed brown sugar
- ☐ **3** garlic cloves, chopped
- ☐ **1** (1-inch) piece galangal, peeled and minced
- ☐ **1** (1-inch) piece ginger, peeled and sliced into ⅛-inch-thick coins
- ☐ **2** teaspoons table salt
- ☐ **1** teaspoon ground turmeric
- ☐ **½-¾** teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ☐ **½** teaspoon ground coriander

Peanut Sauce

- ☐ **⅓** cup dry-roasted peanuts
- ☐ **2** tablespoons vegetable oil
- ☐ **¾** cup water, plus extra as needed
- ☐ **1** tablespoon tamarind juice concentrate
- ☐ **1** tablespoon packed brown sugar

Chicken

- ☐ **2** pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and

Instructions

- 1. FOR THE AROMATIC PASTE:** Halve lemongrass lengthwise and, using meat pounder, lightly crush on cutting board to soften. Mince lemongrass and transfer to food processor. Add shallots, water, oil, sugar, garlic, galangal, ginger, salt, turmeric, and pepper flakes and process until uniform paste forms, about 2 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as necessary. Measure out ⅓ cup paste and set aside. Transfer remaining paste to bowl and stir in coriander and cumin. Cover bowl and microwave paste for 1½ minutes, stirring halfway through microwaving. Transfer bowl to refrigerator and let paste cool while preparing sauce.
- 2. FOR THE PEANUT SAUCE:** Place peanuts in now-empty processor and process until coarsely ground, about 15 seconds. Heat oil and reserved ⅓ cup paste in medium saucepan over medium-low heat until fond begins to form on bottom of saucepan and paste starts to darken, about 5 minutes. Stir in water, tamarind, sugar, and peanuts and bring to boil, scraping up any browned bits. Reduce heat to maintain gentle simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce is reduced to about 1 cup, 8 to 10 minutes. Season with salt to taste, cover, and set aside.
- 3. FOR THE CHICKEN:** Add chicken to cooled paste and toss to combine. Thread chicken onto 4 sets of two 12-inch metal skewers. (Hold 2 skewers 1 inch apart and thread chicken onto both skewers at once so strips of chicken are perpendicular to skewers.) Do not crowd skewers; each set of skewers should hold 6 to 8 pieces of chicken. Transfer kebabs to large plate and refrigerate while preparing grill. (Kebabs can be refrigerated for up to 4 hours.)
- 4. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL:** Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high; cover; and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium.

cut crosswise into 1- to 1½-inch-wide strips

○ **2** tablespoons vegetable oil

- 5.** Clean and oil cooking grate. Brush both sides of kebabs with oil. Place kebabs on grill and cook (covered if using gas) until browned and char marks appear on first side, about 5 minutes. Using large metal spatula, gently release chicken from grill; flip; and continue to cook until chicken registers 175 to 180 degrees, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Transfer to large platter. Gently reheat peanut sauce, thinning with extra water, 1 tablespoon at a time, to desired consistency. Serve chicken, passing peanut sauce separately.