

Chicken Curry Recipe

By Swasthi • Updated: September 14, 2023

Overview

A classic Indian chicken curry of tender pieces simmered in a bright onion–tomato gravy with warm spices. No stock, cornstarch, or canned puree required. Serve with steamed rice (plain, turmeric, or jeera) or with naan/chapati.

At a Glance

Yield	3 servings
Prep Time	15 minutes
Cook Time	35 minutes
Total Time	50 minutes
Heat Level	Adjustable (use less/more chili to taste)

Ingredients (US cup = 240 ml)

Chicken & Liquids

- $\frac{1}{2}$ kg (1.1 lb) chicken, preferably bone-in (boneless ok)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup hot water (*or light coconut milk*)¹
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup yogurt (*or 1.5 tbsp cashew butter, or 12 cashews soaked and blended; see Notes*)

Aromatics & Base

- 2 to 3 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup (about 3 medium) onions, very finely chopped
- 1 to 2 green chilies, slit (omit for less heat)
- 1 tablespoon ginger–garlic paste (*or 3 cloves garlic + 3/4 inch ginger, minced*)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (about 2 medium) tomatoes, finely chopped or pureed
- 2 tablespoons coriander (cilantro) leaves or mint, finely chopped (plus more to garnish)

Spice Powders

- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 teaspoon Kashmiri red chili powder or smoked paprika (use $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp for less spicy)
- 1 teaspoon garam masala (plus up to $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp more at the end, to taste)
- 1 teaspoon coriander powder

Whole Spices (optional but recommended)

- 1 bay leaf (*or 1 sprig curry leaves*)
- 4 cloves

¹Using hot water helps keep the chicken tender.

- 2-inch cinnamon piece
- 3 green cardamom pods

Equipment

Heavy pan or Dutch oven with lid; wooden spoon; ladle; optional blender.

Instructions

Preparation

1. **Bloom whole spices.** Heat oil over medium in a deep pan. Add bay leaf, cinnamon, cloves, and cardamoms; sauté a few seconds until fragrant.
2. **Sweat onions.** Add finely chopped onions and slit green chilies; sauté until deep golden, 7–8 minutes.
3. **Add aromatics.** Stir in ginger–garlic paste; cook about 1 minute until the raw smell disappears.
4. **Tomatoes & spices.** Add tomatoes, turmeric, and salt; cook until completely soft and mushy. Reduce heat to low; stir in yogurt (or cashew paste), red chili powder, garam masala, and coriander powder. Cook gently until the masala is thick and aromatic.

How to Make the Curry

1. **Add chicken.** Stir in chicken and chopped coriander/mint. Fry on medium until chicken turns pale, about 3 minutes.
2. **Brief rest.** Cover and cook on low 3–4 minutes so the meat absorbs the masala.
3. **Add hot water.** Pour in just enough hot water (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) to partially cover the chicken. Avoid cold water.
4. **Simmer.** Cover and cook over medium heat until chicken is soft and cooked through and the gravy thickens. Timing varies by size/age of chicken; cook gently rather than boiling hard.
5. **Finish.** Check salt and adjust. If desired, add up to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon more garam masala. Garnish with coriander, cover, and rest off heat a couple of minutes.
6. **Serve.** With plain rice, turmeric rice, jeera rice, ghee rice, naan, or chapati. Add raita and onion salad on the side if you like.

Pro Tips

- **Fine-chop onions:** Small pieces cook faster and become jammy, enriching the gravy.
- **Tomatoes:** Fresh chopped or pureed both work. Canned tomatoes or passata require slightly more spice.
- **Low & slow:** Gentle simmering yields the best flavor and tender meat.

Ingredients & Substitutes

- **Chicken:** Bone-in pieces develop the best body in the gravy; boneless also works.
- **Whole spices:** Optional but deepen aroma; use when available.
- **Garam masala:** Quality varies; adjust to taste. Sub with meat masala, biryani masala, kitchen king masala, or curry powder (note aroma/heat differ).
- **Natural thickeners:** Yogurt, coconut milk, or nut/poppy seed paste enhance body without flour or starch.

Using Yogurt in Curry (to avoid splitting)

- Whisk the yogurt smooth. Temper it with 2 tablespoons of hot onion–tomato masala, then add over low heat.
- Use yogurt with low whey (Greek or strained). If runny, strain before use.

Variations

- **Smooth gravy:** Cool the masala and blend with about 1 cup water until smooth; strain back if desired.
- **Creamy finish:** Stir in 3–4 tablespoons heavy cream or thick coconut milk at the end (off heat).
- **Coconut-forward:** Replace some or all water with warm light coconut milk (do not add cold).

Notes

- Whole spices may be omitted, but they add depth.
- Use hot water when extending the gravy; cold water can toughen chicken.
- If you dislike onion/tomato texture, blend the masala with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water until smooth.
- Choose a good garam masala; some brands are very pungent, so add gradually.

Nutrition (Approximate, per serving; 3 servings)

Calories	417
Fat	26 g (Saturated 7 g)
Cholesterol	126 mg
Sodium	143 mg
Potassium	521 mg
Carbohydrates	10 g (Fiber 3 g; Sugar 3 g)
Protein	33 g
Vitamin A	705 IU
Vitamin C	10.4 mg
Calcium	65 mg
Iron	2.7 mg

Serving suggestion: garnish with fresh coriander; pair with jeera rice or butter naan.