

Thai Yellow Chicken Curry

This curry builds layers of flavor through careful technique. Chicken thighs are first rendered to develop a deep golden crust and richness. Coconut cream is "cracked"—heated until the fat separates and pools—creating the foundation for blooming the curry paste. The paste is fried in this coconut fat until darkened and fragrant, transforming raw spice notes into toasted complexity. Aromatics follow, then the chicken returns to braise with vegetables in coconut cream enriched with stock and fish sauce. Potatoes break down during the long simmer, naturally thickening the sauce while absorbing flavor. Pineapple is seared to caramelize its sugars before joining the curry, adding brightness and balancing the rich coconut base. The result is a harmonious blend: sweet from pineapple and sugar, salty and umami from fish sauce, sour from lime, all rounded by coconut cream and deepened by bone-in chicken. A fiery chili oil provides optional heat without overwhelming the delicate balance.

Ingredients

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| Bone-in chicken thighs | 3 lbs | Fish sauce | 3 Tbsp. |
| Coconut cream | 2 (13.5 oz.) cans | Brown or turbinado sugar | 3 Tbsp. |
| Yellow curry paste | 5 Tbsp. | Chicken stock | 2 cups |
| Yukon gold potatoes | 1½ lbs | Neutral oil | 2 Tbsp. + ½ cup |
| Carrots, medium | 3 | Limes | 2 |
| Yellow onion, large | 1 | Fresh cilantro | for garnish |
| Shallots | 3 | Thai basil | for garnish |
| Garlic cloves | 8 | Salt | to taste |
| Fresh ginger | 3 Tbsp. | Dried árbol chilies | 15-20 |
| Lemongrass stalks | 2 | Fresh serrano peppers | 3-4 |
| Canned pineapple slices | 2 cups | | |

Directions

Cut 1½ lbs **potatoes** into 1½" uniform chunks — Peel and roll-cut 3 medium **carrots** into 1" pieces — Combine **potatoes** and **carrots** in *Medium Bowl #1* (vegetables) — Cut 1 large **onion** into 1" wedges — Slice 3 **shallots** — Mince 6 **garlic cloves** — Mince 3 Tbsp. **ginger** — Combine **shallots**, **ginger**, and **garlic** in *Small Bowl #1* (aromatics) — Bruise and cut 2 **lemongrass stalks** into 3" pieces — Drain and pat dry 2 cups **canned pineapple slices** and place in *Large Bowl #1* — Remove stems from 15-20 **árbol chilies** — Slice 3-4 **serrano peppers** thin (seeds in) — Slice 2 **garlic cloves** thin for oil — Zest and juice 2 **limes**

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Chili Oil

1. In a small saucepan, combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup **neutral oil**, 15-20 **dried árbol chilies**, 3-4 sliced **serano peppers**, and 2 sliced **garlic cloves**. Place over medium-low heat.
2. Heat gently, watching carefully. When **chilies** darken and become fragrant (about *2-3 minutes*), immediately remove from heat.
3. Add pinch of **salt** to the hot oil off-heat. Let steep for at least *20-30 minutes*. Strain or leave **chilies** in for presentation. Set aside.

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Curry

1. Render 3 lbs bone-in **chicken thighs** in dutch oven over medium-high heat for about *3-4 minutes* per side, until deeply golden-brown and skin releases easily from the pan. Transfer to *Large Bowl #2* and set aside.
2. Open 2 (13.5 oz.) cans of **coconut cream** without shaking. Scoop the thick cream from the top of one can into a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot (should yield about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup thick cream). Reserve the remaining coconut liquid and the second can in *Medium Bowl #2*.
3. Heat the thick **coconut cream** over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. It will begin to separate and the fat will "crack" (you'll see oil pooling). This takes *3-5 minutes*. When you see clear oil separating, you're ready.
4. Add 5 Tbsp. **yellow curry paste** to the coconut fat. Fry the **paste**, stirring constantly, until it darkens, becomes very fragrant, and the oil takes on the **paste's** color, about *3-4 minutes*. The mixture should smell toasted and complex, not raw.
5. Add 3 sliced **shallots**, 3 Tbsp. minced **ginger**, and 6 minced **garlic cloves** (*Small Bowl #1*) to the **paste** and cook, stirring, for *2 minutes* until **shallots** are softened. Continue cooking for *1 minute* more until fragrant.
6. Add seared **chicken thighs**, remaining **coconut cream** (*Medium Bowl #2*), 2 cups **chicken stock**, 2 bruised **lemongrass stalks**, **potatoes** and **carrots** (*Medium Bowl #1*), and 3 Tbsp. **fish sauce**. Stir to combine.
7. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cover partially and cook for *35-40 minutes*, stirring occasionally, until **chicken** is very tender and **potatoes** have softened and begun to break down slightly, thickening the sauce.
8. Add 1 large **onion** cut into 1" wedges and continue simmering for *10 minutes* until **onions** are tender but still hold their shape.
9. Remove **chicken thighs** to a cutting board. The bones should pull out easily at this point. Discard skin if desired. Shred or chop the meat into bite-sized pieces and return to the curry.
10. While curry continues to simmer, heat a skillet over high heat. Sear **pineapple slices** (*Large Bowl #1*) quickly, about *1-2 minutes* per side, until lightly caramelized. Roughly chop seared **pineapple** and add to curry.
11. Taste the curry broth. Add **brown or turbinado sugar** 1 Tbsp. at a time (up to 3 Tbsp. total), tasting as you go. The curry should be balanced: rich, slightly sweet, savory, with subtle sour notes from the **pineapple**.
12. Simmer for final *5 minutes* to meld flavors. Taste and adjust seasoning with **salt** if needed (**fish sauce** usually provides enough).
13. Remove **lemongrass stalks**. Turn off heat and stir in **juice** and **zest** from 2 **limes**.
14. Ladle curry over steamed jasmine rice. Garnish with fresh **cilantro** and **Thai basil**. Provide **lime wedges** and the **chili oil** on the side. For heat, drizzle *1-2 tsp.* of **chili oil** over individual portions.

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Equipment Required

- Large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot (6-8 quart capacity)
- Small saucepan (for chili oil)
- Large skillet (for searing pineapple)
- Cutting board and sharp knife
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Wooden spoon or silicone spatula
- Fine-mesh strainer (optional, for chili oil)
- Vegetable peeler
- Citrus zester or microplane
- Ladle
- Tongs (for removing chicken thighs)

Mise en Place

- Chill **coconut cream** cans overnight or for several hours to ensure proper fat separation
- Cut all vegetables before starting
- Cut **potatoes** into uniform $1\frac{1}{2}$ " chunks for consistent cooking
- Prepare **chili oil** while curry simmers or up to several days ahead
- Have all aromatics prepped and ready before beginning to cook
- Bruise **lemongrass** by smashing with the flat of a knife to release oils
- **Small Bowl #1** — aromatics: sliced **shallots**, minced **ginger**, and minced **garlic** (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup total)
- **Medium Bowl #1** — vegetables: **potatoes** cut into $1\frac{1}{2}$ " chunks and roll-cut **carrots** (about 3 cups total)
- **Medium Bowl #2** — reserved **coconut cream** liquid from both cans (about 2 cups)
- **Large Bowl #1** — drained and patted dry **canned pineapple slices** (2 cups)
- **Large Bowl #2** — seared **chicken thighs** (set aside after initial searing)

Ingredient Tips

- Bone-in **chicken thighs** provide superior flavor - the bones contribute gelatin and depth during cooking
- Russet **potatoes** are essential for their high starch content which naturally thickens the curry as they break down
- Cut **potatoes** into uniform $1\frac{1}{2}$ " chunks - consistent size ensures even cooking and proper breakdown
- Mae Ploy brand **curry paste** is recommended for consistent results
- **Fish sauce** brands vary in saltiness - Red Boat and Three Crabs are more concentrated than Squid or Tiparos brands
- Drain and thoroughly pat dry **canned pineapple** before searing to ensure proper caramelization
- If **lemongrass** is unavailable, substitute with lemon zest added at the finish
- **Palm sugar** can replace brown sugar for more authentic flavor

Preparation Tips

- The "cracking" of **coconut cream** is critical - don't rush this step. You must see clear oil separating before adding **curry paste**
- Properly blooming the **curry paste** in the fat until darkened and fragrant is what elevates this above takeout quality
- Sear **chicken thighs** for only *3-4 minutes* - they will finish cooking during the simmer
- The curry should simmer gently, not boil hard, or the **chicken** will toughen
- After *35-40 minutes*, the **chicken** bones will pull out easily - this is the ideal time to debone
- Keep 2-3 bones in the curry during final simmer for additional body and flavor
- Don't skip searing the **pineapple** - the caramelization adds complexity. Rough chopping after searing helps distribute the flavor throughout the curry
- Taste and adjust seasoning multiple times - the balance of sweet, salty, sour is crucial
- Add **lime juice** and zest at the very end to preserve bright citrus notes

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Make Ahead & Storage

- **Chili oil** can be made up to *2 weeks* ahead and stored at room temperature
- Curry can be made *1-2 days* ahead and often tastes better as flavors meld
- Store curry in refrigerator for up to *4 days*
- Curry thickens significantly when refrigerated - thin with **stock** or **coconut milk** when reheating
- Freezes well for up to *3 months* - thaw overnight in refrigerator
- Reheat gently over medium-low heat, stirring frequently
- Add fresh **lime juice** and herbs after reheating for brightness

Serving Suggestions

- Serve over steamed jasmine rice (traditional) or sticky rice
- Accompany with Thai cucumber salad for cooling contrast
- **Chili oil** can be drizzled on individual portions for customizable heat
- Garnish generously with fresh **cilantro**, **Thai basil**, and **lime wedges**
- Crispy fried shallots make an excellent textural garnish
- Leftover curry can be used as a filling for savory crepes or over noodles
- For a complete meal, serve with spring rolls or satay as appetizers