

Better Pressure Cooker Butter Chicken Recipe

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The goal of this recipe is to provide you with a *better* version of pressure-cooker butter chicken, one that hits all of the characteristic notes of a butter chicken—mildly spiced tomato-based sauce; tender, charred chicken pieces; a mother's love's worth of butter and cream folded in at the end—without being too taxing to prepare.

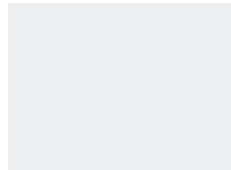


The pressure cooker is used in this recipe to reduce the amount of time it takes to make the sauce. If you don't have a pressure cooker, we have a [stovetop recipe for butter chicken that can be made without a pressure cooker](#).

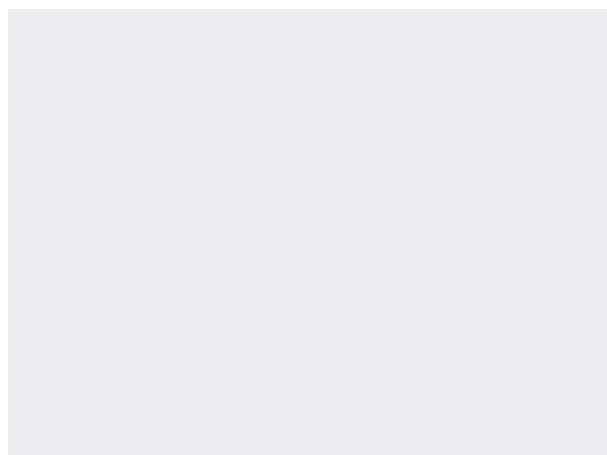
To dial in the ingredient quantities for this recipe, I mostly relied on my own taste memories of eating butter chicken while I lived in India, but I did refer to the extremely popular Instant Pot butter chicken recipe developed by [Dr. Urvashi Pitre](#) as well as the original recipe for *murgh makhani* published by Monish Gujral, the grandson of the inventor of the dish, Kundan Lal Gujral, in the book [On the Butter Chicken Trail: A Moti Mahal Cookbook](#).

Recipe-Testing Notes

Spices

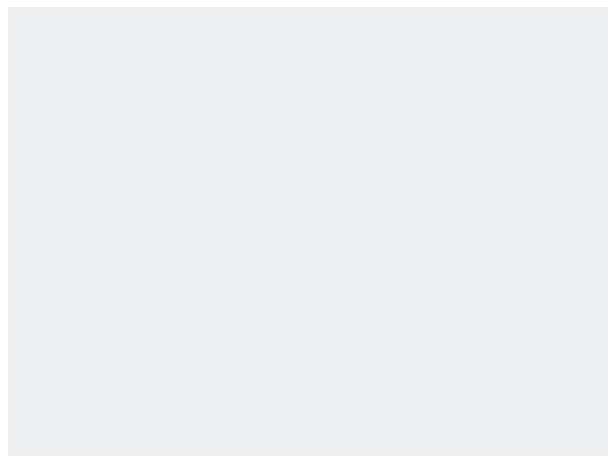


Some of the distinctive flavors I associate with butter chicken come from specific spices, namely fenugreek leaves, brown cardamom, and *kala namak*, or black salt. But I understand that not everyone has them lying around in their pantry, and that some people would be reluctant to seek out and purchase spices that can be difficult to find specifically for this dish, so I tested this recipe with more commonly found alternatives: fenugreek seeds in place of the leaves, green cardamom instead of brown, and standard-issue Diamond Crystal kosher salt instead of black salt. The dish won't be the same, but it's still eminently enjoyable.



There is another spice question to consider, and it has to do with garam masala. Garam masala is a ground spice mixture that varies in composition depending on who's making it. Ready-made garam masala can vary both in quality

and in terms of its component parts.

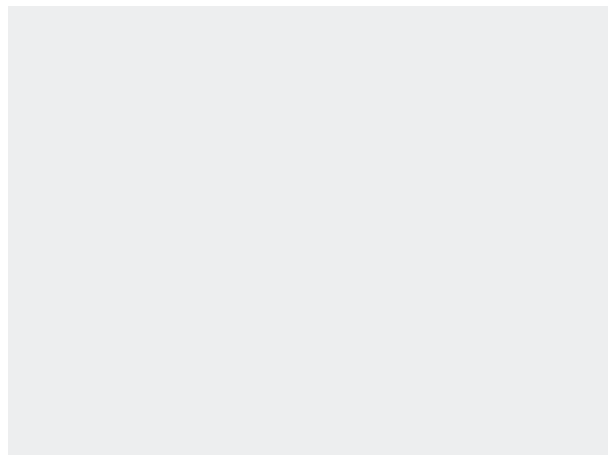


As you can see above, these purchased garam masalas have very different ingredient lists. This recipe was tested using a variety of store-bought garam masalas as well as with the [garam masala recipe](#) we have on the website. Any kind will work, but there will be small differences in flavor depending on the mix you use.

Do note that the recipe ingredient list calls for whole spices to be toasted and ground before you start making the dish. While the dry-toasting can be considered optional, [toasting whole spices](#) before grinding them greatly improves their flavor.

The recipe makes a point of calling for mounding the onions in the center of the pot before adding spices and for turning off the heat on electric pressure cookers after browning the onions. Both of these instructions are meant to hedge against the possibility of burning the spice mixture when it's added to the pot. To reinforce this point: Burning the spice mixture will produce a cloying bitterness, so do be careful.

Tomatoes



This recipe was initially developed using canned whole tomatoes, but many tasters found the tomato flavor to be a little too "fresh" and pronounced in this pressure-cooker version. That complaint was not echoed when tasters commented on the stovetop version in side-by-side tastings, which seemed to suggest that the longer cooking time on the stovetop created a deeper tomato flavor than the short cooking time in the pressure cooker. To improve the pressure cooker version, I tried the recipe using canned whole fire-roasted tomatoes, which seemed to largely address the issue.

Further testing revealed that straining the tomatoes to remove excess liquid improved the flavor further. Rather than just tossing all that liquid, I opted to use a half-cup of it to hydrate the cashews, which helps to soften them up and

allows them to blend more seamlessly into a creamy sauce.

Onions

By far the most time-consuming part of this recipe is, as it is in most recipes, frying the onions. To cut down on the time it takes to get the onions to brown nicely, I cribbed a trick from Kenji's [channa masala](#) recipe and added a bit of baking soda to the pot along with the onions, which resulted in a reduction of about 5 minutes in the time it takes to brown the onions, on average. The baking soda seemed to also improve the final "balance" of the sauce, particularly when using more acidic canned whole tomatoes.

Bringing the Mixture to Pressure

In some tests, using just one of the Instant Pots in our test kitchen, the pressure cooker failed to come to pressure and flashed the dreaded "BURN" sign instead. For this reason, the recipe calls for heating the sauce ingredients until steaming before giving the bottom of the pot a good scraping and then securing the pressure cooker lid.

While this seemed to work in subsequent tests, the first time you make this recipe, I suggest you keep a close eye on your pressure cooker after you secure the lid. If the "BURN" sign displays (if you have an Instant Pot) or if you're worried about the time it's taking to come to pressure, you can open the lid and add another 1/2 cup of water (or reserved tomato liquid), stir the contents, re-secure the lid, and proceed with the recipe as written. You may need to adjust the final seasoning with a smidge more salt at the end due to the extra liquid.

Broiling the Chicken

While it may seem odd to cook the chicken under the broiler rather than in the pressure cooker, I found the texture of pressure-cooked chicken to be wanting over the course of my testing. Plus, the broiled chicken adds an absolutely amazing flavor to the dish.

For the sake of clarity, the recipe has been broken up into two parts, but I recommend marinating the chicken first, then proceeding to cook the sauce. The time it takes to broil the chicken is identical to the time it takes to pressure cook the sauce, so no time is added to the recipe by broiling the chicken separately. Once the chicken is cooked, you can set it aside while you finish the sauce.

The amount of chicken and yogurt marinade listed in the recipe fits almost perfectly in a quarter-sheet pan. If you don't have a quarter-sheet pan, the best alternative is to create a quarter sheet pan-sized "boat" (about 13 inches by 9 inches with 1-inch sides) with aluminum foil and place it in the center of a half sheet pan.

Leftovers

This recipe produces extra sauce. You can, if you like, remove 1 1/2 cups of the final sauce before adding the broiled chicken and reserve it for another use. We can heartily recommend tossing wedges of [roasted cauliflower in the sauce](#) (any sauce removed before adding the chicken will be 100% vegetarian).

Why It Works

- Toasting whole spices before grinding improves their aroma and flavor.
- Microwaving the cashews in the reserved liquid from strained canned tomatoes hydrates and softens them, making it easier to blend them into the final sauce.

- Coating the chicken in a spiced marinade and broiling it produces tender, juicy chicken morsels with a little bit of char, which boost the final flavor of the dish.

Ingredients

For the Marinating the Chicken:

1 tablespoon *kasuri methi* (fenugreek leaves) or, alternatively, 2 teaspoons fenugreek seeds (see note)

1/4 cup (60ml) plain Greek yogurt, store-bought or homemade

1 tablespoon garam masala, store-bought or homemade

2 teaspoons Diamond Crystal kosher salt (if using table salt, use half as much)

1 teaspoon *kala namak* (black salt) (optional, see note)

One 1-inch piece of ginger (1/2 ounces; 14g), peeled and finely grated

2 pounds (900g) boneless, skinless chicken thighs (about 4), cut into bite-size, 1-inch pieces

For the Makhani Sauce:

1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons *kasuri methi* (fenugreek leaves) or, alternatively, 1 tablespoon fenugreek seeds (see note)

2 whole dried chiles de arbol (see note)

Directions

- To Marinate the Chicken:** Add fenugreek leaves (or fenugreek seeds, if using) to small skillet and place over medium heat. Toast leaves, tossing them constantly, until quite fragrant, about 30 seconds. Transfer toasted leaves to spice grinder or mortar and pestle and grind to fine powder. Set aside.
- In the center of a rimmed baking sheet, create a roughly 9- by 13- inch aluminum-foil boat with 1-inch sides, and set aside. (Alternatively, if you have a 1/4 rimmed baking sheet, use that instead, omitting foil.) In a medium mixing bowl, stir together yogurt, garam masala, salt, black salt, grated ginger, and ground fenugreek leaves.
- Add chicken thigh pieces to bowl and, using clean hands, toss with marinade until evenly coated. Transfer chicken to prepared baking sheet, arranging pieces in an even, single layer. Set aside.
- For the Makhani Sauce:** Add fenugreek leaves (or seeds, if using), chiles de arbol, brown cardamon (or green cardamom, if using), and clove to small skillet and place it over medium heat. Toast, tossing frequently, until spices are quite fragrant, about 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer spices to spice grinder or mortar and pestle along with garam masala and salt and grind to a fine powder. Set aside. (If you don't want to toast and grind the spices yourself, see the note section for instructions on making a spice mixture with pre-ground spices.)
- In a small, microwave-safe bowl, combine cashews and reserved liquid from strained tomatoes. Microwave on high until cashews look plump and have softened slightly, about 1 minute. Set aside.
- Add canola oil to pressure cooker pot. If using an electric pressure cooker, turn on "Sauté" function. If using a stovetop pressure cooker, place pot over medium-high heat. When oil is shimmering, add onions and baking soda and, using a wooden spoon, stir to coat onions in oil and distribute baking soda. Cook, stirring occasionally, until onions have completely broken down, most of their moisture has cooked off, and they begin to brown, 14 to 17 minutes. If at any

1 pod brown cardamom or, alternatively, 1 pod green cardamom (see note)

1 whole clove

1 tablespoon garam masala, store-bought or [homemade](#)

1 tablespoon Diamond Crystal kosher salt (if using table salt, use half as much)

1 ounce (28g) raw cashews (about 12 to 15)

One 28-ounce (800g) can whole fire-roasted tomatoes (see note), strained, with 1/2 cup of liquid reserved

2 tablespoons (30ml) canola oil or other neutral-flavored oil

1 medium white onion, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

One 1-inch piece of ginger (1/2 ounce; 14g), peeled and thinly sliced

4 cloves garlic, smashed and roughly chopped

1/2 cup (120ml) heavy cream, plus more for drizzling

4 tablespoons (60g) unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces

Warm long-grain rice, for serving

point, the onions seem to be browning too quickly or unevenly, add a tablespoon (15ml) of water and scrape up any brown bits that form on the bottom of the pot.

7. If using an electric pressure cooker, turn off "Sauté" function. If using a stovetop pressure cooker, reduce heat to medium-low. Add ginger and garlic to pot and cook, stirring constantly, until quite fragrant, about 1 minute. Using wooden spoon, push onions into center of pot to form a mound. Add ground spice mixture to the mounded onions to prevent spices from scorching. Cook, stirring constantly, until onions are coated in spices and mixture is very fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add cashews and their soaking liquid, scraping up any bits stuck to the bottom of the pot. Add tomatoes and, using the back of wooden spoon, crush tomatoes.
8. If using an electric pressure cooker, turn on "Pressure Cook" function; set pressure to high and time to 7 minutes (do not close lid). If using a stovetop pressure cooker, increase heat to medium. Cook, uncovered, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a simmer. Close and seal pressure cooker lid, bring to high pressure, and cook for 7 minutes. Allow contents of pressure cooker to sit, off-heat, for an additional 7 minutes. If, after 7 minutes, the pressure cooker has not depressurized, manually release pressure.
9. While the sauce cooks, adjust oven rack to 3 inches below broiler element and preheat broiler on high. Transfer sheet pan with marinated chicken to broiler. Cook, checking the chicken frequently to ensure it is not burning, until chicken is charred in spots and fully cooked through, about 14 minutes (time will vary depending on the strength of the broiler). Remove chicken from broiler and set aside.
10. Using an immersion blender, blend contents of pressure cooker until completely smooth, about 2 minutes. Alternatively, transfer contents of pressure cooker to countertop blender and blend until completely smooth, about 2 minutes. Add butter and cream, and blend until completely smooth and emulsified, about 2 minutes. At this point, you may remove 1 1/2 (360ml) cups of sauce and reserve it for another use. If using a countertop blender, return sauce to the pot.
11. **To Finish:** Add reserved broiled chicken along with any juices in the sheet pan to sauce and stir until chicken is well incorporated and

warmed through. Ladle chicken and sauce into serving bowl and drizzle with additional heavy cream. Serve immediately with rice alongside.

Special Equipment

Electric pressure cooker or **stovetop pressure cooker**; **spice grinder**; **immersion blender** or blender.

Notes

If you cannot find kala namak, or black salt, you can substitute a 1/2 teaspoon of Diamond Crystal kosher salt. (Read more about black salt in our [guide to salt](#).)

If you'd prefer to forego toasting and grinding the spices yourself, you can use pre-ground spices. Substitute 1 tablespoon of ground fenugreek for the 2 teaspoons of fenugreek called for in the marinade, and 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon of ground fenugreek for the 1 tablespoon of fenugreek seeds called for in the sauce; you can substitute 1/4 teaspoon of ground cardamom for the 1 green cardamom pod called for in the sauce; you can substitute 1/8 teaspoon of ground clove for the 1 clove called for in the sauce; you can substitute 1/2 teaspoon of cayenne pepper for the chile de arbol (more, if you like it spicier).

Brown cardamom is sometimes called black cardamom, but note that it's not the same as Chinese black cardamom (also sometimes called red cardamom).

Fire-roasted whole canned tomatoes are preferred, but plain whole canned tomatoes can be used as well.

Make-Ahead and Storage

Sealed in an airtight container, butter chicken will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator.