



Peri Peri Grilled Chicken

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 16: Grilled Chicken and Salad with a Kick

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

The first step in making this spicy African grilled chicken dish is producing perfectly cooked meat and crisp skin. To do this, we add plenty of salt to the spice rub and let the chicken sit overnight, which seasons the meat throughout and helps it stay juicy and moist when cooked. We then set up the grill with a cooler side and a hotter side, as well as a pan of water to help regulate the temperature. After rendering the skin and charring it on the hotter side, we move the chicken to the cooler side to finish cooking gently, placing the dark meat closer to the heat and the white meat farther away. The next step is giving the chicken robust flavor. We start with a paste of garlic, shallot, bay leaves, lemon zest and juice, and pepper. Five-spice powder, tomato paste, and finely chopped peanuts give the dish complexity, depth, and richness. Finally, we use more commonly available—and just as fruity-tasting—arbol chiles, along with some cayenne pepper, in place of hard-to-find *peri peri* peppers, including a range to accommodate different heat-level preferences.

Serves 6 to 8

This recipe requires refrigerating the spice paste-coated chicken for at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours prior to cooking. When browning the chicken, move it away from the direct heat if any flare-ups occur. Serve the chicken with white rice.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 — 10** arbol chiles, stemmed
- 3** tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2** tablespoons salt
- 8** garlic cloves, peeled
- 2** tablespoons tomato paste
- 1** shallot, chopped
- 1** tablespoon sugar
- 1** tablespoon paprika
- 1** tablespoon five-spice powder
- 2** teaspoons grated lemon zest plus 1/4 cup juice (2 lemons)
- 1** teaspoon pepper
- 1/2** teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3** bay leaves, crushed
- 6** pounds bone-in chicken pieces (breasts, thighs, and/or drumsticks), trimmed
- 1/2** cup dry-roasted peanuts, chopped fine
- 1** (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum pan (if using charcoal) or 2 (9-inch) disposable aluminum pie plates (if using gas)

INSTRUCTIONS Lemon wedges

1. Process 4 arbolos, oil, salt, garlic, tomato paste, shallot, sugar, paprika, five-spice powder, lemon zest and juice, pepper, cayenne, and bay leaves in blender until smooth, 10 to 20 seconds. Taste paste and add up to 6 additional arbolos, depending on desired level of heat (spice paste should be slightly hotter than desired heat level of cooked chicken), and process until smooth. Using metal skewer, poke skin side of each chicken piece 8 to 10 times. Place chicken pieces, peanuts, and spice paste in large bowl or container and toss until chicken is evenly coated. Cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours.

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent halfway and place disposable pan filled with 3 cups water on 1 side of grill. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over other half of grill (opposite disposable pan). Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent halfway. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Place 2 disposable pie plates, each filled with 1 1/2 cups water, directly on 1 burner of gas grill (opposite primary burner). Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn primary burner to medium-high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner as needed to maintain grill temperature between 325 and 350 degrees.)

3. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place chicken, skin side down, on hotter side of grill and cook until browned and blistered in spots, 2 to 4 minutes. Flip chicken and cook until second side is browned, 4 to 6 minutes. Move chicken to cooler side of grill and arrange, skin side up, with legs and thighs closest to fire and breasts farthest away. Cover (positioning lid vent over chicken if using charcoal) and cook until breasts register 160 degrees and legs and thighs register 175 degrees, 50 to 60 minutes.

4. Transfer chicken to serving platter, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 10 minutes before serving, passing lemon wedges separately.

TECHNIQUE**CORE TECHNIQUE: GRILLING WITH WATER**

Whether you're cooking this recipe or barbecued chicken, it's key to cook the meat through gently for tender, juicy results. To do this, in addition to setting up the grill with a cooler side that is left free of coals, we also put an aluminum pan or pie plates filled with water on the grill. Both the pan (or plates) and the water absorb heat, lowering the heat overall and eliminating hot spots.

GAS

1. Fill 2 disposable aluminum pie plates with 1 1/2 cups water each.
2. Place pie plates on 1 burner, opposite primary burner, and set cooking grate in place.
3. Light burners as directed and proceed with recipe.

**CHARCOAL**

1. Fill 13 by 9-inch disposable aluminum pan with 3 cups water.
2. Place pan on 1 side of charcoal grate.
3. Once coals are lit, pour them next to pan, put cooking grate in place, and proceed with recipe.

**TECHNIQUE****PICKING THE RIGHT STAND-IN FOR THE PERI PERI PEPPERS**

Traditionally, dried African *peri peri* peppers, which are about 10 times hotter than serrano chiles, give this dish its spicy heat, but they

are hard to find in the States.

Because they have a fruity, complex flavor in addition to heat, we found that no one chile could replace them. Instead, we landed on a combination of cayenne, for a baseline level of heat, and dried arbol chiles, which are spicy but, more important, have the right fruity note that mimics the peri peri chiles' flavor.

PERI PERI PEPPERS



ARBOLS PLUS CAYENNE



TECHNIQUE

TASTE THE PASTE

In test after test, we found that pastes that tasted exactly as spicy as we wanted before cooking had a more tempered flavor in the final dish. After some research, we learned that when exposed to high heat, capsaicin, the primary chemical compound responsible for the chile's heat, actually breaks down. After an hour on the grill, about 30 percent of the capsaicin will have broken down. To counteract this effect, your paste should taste just a bit spicier than you want prior to cooking. We call for using a relatively wide range of arbol peppers not only because tolerance for spiciness varies but also because the intensity of individual dried chiles can differ greatly. We suggest starting with four. Then, after mixing together the paste, give it a try and add up to six more chiles as necessary.