

# Shoyu Chicken

Prep: 20 mins

Cook: 35 mins

Total: 55 mins

Servings: 4 servings

Shoyu chicken is a Hawaiian plate lunch staple characteristic of Hawaii's unique and diverse cultural make-up. Due to the island chain's location almost midway between the West Coast of the United States and East Asia, Hawaii's food culture is heavily influenced by Asian cuisines, particularly those of Korea, China, Japan, and the Philippines.

In order to staff Hawaii's fruit and sugar plantations, British and American colonizers imported and exploited contract workers from these countries and others in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Some returned to their home countries after their contracts were up, but many stayed and their descendants still live in Hawaii.

## What Ingredients Are in Shoyu Chicken?

Shoyu chicken's origin story is lost to time, but it bears a strong resemblance to Japanese teriyaki chicken and Filipino chicken adobo. Teriyaki chicken is cooked in a sweet and salty mixture of soy sauce, sugar, and ginger. Chicken adobo is prepared very similarly to shoyu chicken, with the notable addition of cane vinegar to the cooking liquid, which gives it a sharper flavor profile.

Shoyu is Japanese soy sauce, and for this dish you can use your favorite brand, though Kikkoman and Aloha shoyu are both good options. The other primary ingredients in shoyu chicken are sugar, scallions, garlic, ginger, and chicken thighs.

## What Cut of Chicken To Use for Shoyu Chicken

Chicken thighs are the best choice for this recipe, though chicken breast could also be used. Because they contain more fat and collagen than chicken breasts, chicken thighs become tender and succulent during cooking and give the sauce a silky texture. Typically the chicken skin is left on during braising.

## How To Tweak Shoyu Chicken

Of course, there are as many variations on shoyu chicken as there are people who make it. As you learn to make the dish you can tweak the ingredients to suit your tastes, adding more or less sugar, ginger, and garlic. Some cooks also like to brown or broil the chicken thighs after braising, though that is purely optional.

# How To Serve Shoyu Chicken

After the chicken is braised, it is removed to a plate and just enough cornstarch slurry is added to the sauce to thicken it without making it overly thick or stodgy. Some prefer a runnier sauce and omit the cornstarch entirely or simply boil the sauce to reduce it. Keep in mind that reducing the sauce makes it saltier. For a plate lunch experience, serve shoyu chicken with white rice and Hawaiian-style macaroni salad.

## Ingredients

- 4 scallions
- 2/3 cup unsalted chicken stock
- 1/2 cup shoyu (such as Kikkoman)
- 1/3 cup (74 grams) packed light brown sugar
- 6 cloves garlic, smashed
- 1 (2-inch) piece ginger, peeled and cut into 1/8-inch-thick slices
- 1 cup plus 3 tablespoons water, divided
- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 2 1/4 pounds), excess skin and fat trimmed
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- Cooked white rice, to serve

## Steps to Make It

1. Gather the ingredients.
2. Trim scallions; thinly slice dark green parts on an angle and reserve for garnish. Thinly slice remaining white and light green parts; place in a 10- to 11-inch high-sided skillet.
3. Add stock, shoyu, brown sugar, garlic, ginger, and 1 cup of the water to the skillet, whisking gently until sugar dissolves.
4. Add chicken thighs to the skillet, skin-side down. Bring to a boil over medium-high. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer over low, undisturbed, until chicken is cooked through and tender, about 30 minutes, flipping chicken skin-side up halfway through cooking. Remove from heat.
5. Transfer chicken to a serving platter. Loosely tent with aluminum foil to keep warm. Skim and discard as much fat as possible from stock mixture in skillet.
6. In a small bowl, whisk together cornstarch and remaining 3 tablespoons water until well combined.
7. Whisk cornstarch mixture into stock mixture. Bring to a boil over medium, whisking often, and cook until sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, 1 to 2 minutes.
8. Remove from heat. Spoon thickened sauce over chicken and garnish with reserved scallion. Serve immediately with rice and any extra sauce.

# How to Make Shoyu Chicken in the Instant Pot

1. Complete Steps 1 through 3 as directed, combining the ingredients in a 6-quart Instant Pot rather than a skillet. Add chicken thighs to stock mixture, turning to coat; arrange chicken, skin-side up, in a single layer.
2. Cover cooker with lid, and lock in place. Turn steam release handle to SEALING position. Select MANUAL/PRESSURE COOK setting. Select HIGH pressure for 15 minutes. (It will take 10 to 12 minutes for cooker to come up to pressure before cooking begins.)
3. Carefully turn steam release handle to VENTING position, and let steam fully escape (float valve will drop). (This will take 2 to 3 minutes.) Remove lid from cooker. Press CANCEL. Transfer chicken, skin-side up, to an aluminum foil lined baking sheet. Skim and discard as much fat as possible off stock mixture in pot.
4. Preheat oven to broil with rack about 10 inches from heat source. While oven preheats, select SAUTE on HIGH/MORE temperature setting; whisk together cornstarch and remaining 3 tablespoons water until well combined. Whisk cornstarch mixture into stock mixture in pot and bring to a boil, whisking frequently. Cook, whisking constantly, until sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, 1 to 2 minutes. Press CANCEL. Cover cooker with lid to keep warm.
5. Broil chicken in preheated oven until chicken skin bubbles and browns in spots, about 4 minutes, watching closely to keep from burning. Serve as directed.

Note: Times, instructions, and settings may vary according to cooker brand or model.

## Recipe Tips

- “Shoyu” is the overarching term given to Japanese-style soy sauces. The Aloha brand is very popular among many Hawaiians, but Kikkoman soy sauces are some of the most popular in the world and can be found at most major grocery stores. They may not say “shoyu” right on the bottle but you can still use them in this recipe. Note that we used regular, not reduced-sodium, shoyu in this recipe.
- In this recipe we are braising our chicken thighs; you therefore want your stock mixture to at least reach halfway up or more on the chicken thighs. A 10- to 11-inch high-sided skillet is perfect for this, but in a too-large pan, the liquid may fall short.

## Recipe Variations

- To brown the chicken thighs before braising, heat 1 1/2 tablespoons neutral oil in skillet over medium-high until shimmering. Add chicken, skin-side down; cook, undisturbed until skin is golden brown, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove chicken and pour off drippings. Add stock mixture, scraping bottom to release any browned bits, and proceed with recipe as directed. Start checking chicken for doneness 10 or so minutes earlier.
- Alternatively, you can crisp the skin by broiling after cooking. To broil chicken thighs after braising, place them on a baking sheet. Preheat oven to broil with a rack about 6 inches from the heat source. Broil chicken thighs until desired color is reached, 3 to 5 minutes, rotating pan 180 degrees on rack once halfway through. Keep an eye on chicken thighs to prevent them from overbrowning.

## How to Store

- Store leftovers in an airtight container for up to 3 to 4 days.
- The cooked chicken thighs, once cooled, can be placed in a freezer-safe large resealable plastic bag with as much air pressed out as possible, then frozen. I suggest putting it in a second large resealable plastic bag for extra protection. Thaw frozen chicken in a 13x9-inch pan (to catch any liquid) in the refrigerator overnight before reheating. To reheat, microwave chicken thighs on high for 2 minutes, or until heated through.

## Make Ahead

The shoyu mixture can be whisked together and refrigerated overnight so it's ready to go the next day. You can also trim your chicken the day before so it's ready to go right into the pot when you need it.