

Filipino Chicken Adobo

Published March 1, 2012. From Cook's Illustrated.

Adobo is the national dish of the Philippines, and chicken adobo is among the most popular. The dish consists of chicken simmered in a mixture of vinegar, soy sauce, garlic, bay leaves, and black pepper. The problem with most recipes we found was that they were aggressively tart and salty. Our secret to taming both of these elements was coconut milk. The coconut milk's richness tempered the bracing acidity of the vinegar and masked the briny soy sauce, bringing the sauce into balance.

Serves 4

Serve this dish over rice.

Ingredients

-) 8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed
-) 1/3 cup soy sauce
-) 1 (13 ½ ounce) can coconut milk (light coconut milk works well in this dish)
-) ¾ cup cider vinegar
-) 8 garlic cloves, peeled
-) 4 bay leaves
-) 2 teaspoons pepper
-) 1 scallion, sliced thin

Instructions

1. Toss chicken with soy sauce in large bowl. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes and up to 1 hour.
2. Remove chicken from soy sauce, allowing excess to drip back into bowl. Transfer chicken, skin side down, to 12-inch nonstick skillet; set aside soy sauce.
3. Place skillet over medium-high heat and cook until chicken skin is browned, 7 to 10 minutes. While chicken is browning, whisk coconut milk, vinegar, garlic, bay leaves, and pepper into soy sauce.
4. Transfer chicken to plate and discard fat in skillet. Return chicken to skillet skin side down, add coconut milk mixture, and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes. Flip chicken skin side up and continue to cook, uncovered, until chicken registers 175 degrees, about 15 minutes. Transfer chicken to platter and tent loosely with aluminum foil.
5. Remove bay leaves and skim any fat off surface of sauce. Return skillet to medium-high heat and cook until sauce is thickened, 5 to 7 minutes. Pour sauce over chicken, sprinkle with scallion, and serve.

Recipe Testing

What Is Adobo?

While many Americans think of “adobo” as the tomato-based sauce packed in cans with chipotle chiles, the most basic definition of the word is “sauce” or “seasoning.” The Spanish term originally referred to a vinegar- or chile-based sauce or paste that was added to meat as a preservative. Over time, the term came to apply to similar dishes in Latin American and Filipino cuisines. In the Philippines, where adobo is considered the country’s national dish, it’s a braise commonly prepared with chicken or pork. Vinegar and soy sauce (acetic acid and salt are natural preservers) flavored with aromatics like garlic, bay leaves, and black pepper serve as the braising liquid. The tangy cooking liquid is then reduced to make a sauce, and the dish is served with steamed white rice.

Recipe Testing

Balancing Act

The two core components of Filipino adobo—vinegar and soy sauce—add up to a predictably sharp, salty braising liquid. To even out the acidity and salt, we took a cue from a regional variation and added a can of coconut milk. The thick, rich milk mellows those harsher flavors while still allowing for plenty of tanginess. It also adds welcome body to the sauce.



SALTY AND SOUR

Soy sauce and vinegar are staples in Filipino adobo.



THICK AND CREAMY

We add coconut milk for body and richness.