THE STIRRING LIFE

Dijaj Mai Narinj

Chicken orange water

My mother-in-law makes this when someone's sick. I make it when I'm short on time and need something guaranteed delicious. Serve it over saffron and rose water rice.

INGREDIENTS

The Chicken

- 1 whole chicken, cut into pieces
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 6–8 oz tomato paste
- About 4 cups water, plus more as needed
- About 20 green cardamom pods (roughly 1 Tbsp), plus 1½ tsp ground cardamom
- 4–5 potatoes, peeled and quartered into large chunks
- About 3 Tbsp citrus juice: 2 parts lemon, 2 parts orange or clementine, 1 part grapefruit
- Zest of ½ orange
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

The Rice

- 3 cups rice, rinsed
- 3 Tbsp oil (1 Tbsp per cup of rice)
- 4½ cups water (1½ cups per cup of rice)
- 3 tsp salt (1 tsp per cup of rice)
- A pinch of saffron, bloomed in a splash of rose water
- About ½ tsp turmeric, for color

INSTRUCTIONS

The Chicken

1. Clean the chicken. Blanch the pieces in boiling water for a minute or two to remove the scum, then drain.
2. Prep the potatoes. Peel and quarter them, and keep them in a bowl of cold water until needed.
3. Darken the tomato paste. Heat the olive oil in a large pot and stir the paste until it darkens and builds a fond on the bottom.
4. Build the broth. Add about 4 cups of water, scrape up the fond, add the chicken and bring to a simmer.
5. Add the cardamom. Add the pods and ground cardamom while the chicken cooks. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Potatoes at the halfway point. Drain and add them, with more water if needed to keep everything nearly covered.
7. Simmer 30–40 minutes, until the chicken is tender and the potatoes are cooked through.
8. Finish with citrus. Stir in the juice and orange zest, then taste and adjust the salt and sourness.

The Rice

1. Bring the water, oil, salt, turmeric and saffron rose water to a boil.
2. Stir in the rice, cover, turn the heat to low and cook about 20 minutes without lifting the lid. Fluff and serve.

No sour oranges? Me neither. My lemon, orange and grapefruit mix plus orange zest gets very close to that tart, slightly bitter, fragrant flavor. See the kitchen notes on the next page.

KITCHEN NOTES

No sour oranges?

Me neither. Narinj, also called sour or Seville orange, is only in season for a short stretch each year, so most of the year I can't get it here in Michigan. Two parts lemon juice, two parts orange or clementine juice, and a little less than one part grapefruit juice, plus orange zest, gets very close to its tart, slightly bitter, fragrant flavor. You can also use just lemon juice or a little citric acid.

Extra cardamom

People actually fight over the cardamom pods in my house, so I add extra so everyone gets a few to crack open in their stew.

About the potatoes

Many people don't add potatoes to this dish, but they give it more body. If you like potatoes, add them.

> *Saffron & rose water rice: lots of yellow rice gets its color from red dye. I skip it and use turmeric along with my own little mix of saffron and rose water.*

A LITTLE HISTORY

Sour orange stews were so beloved in medieval Arab kitchens that they had their own name, *narinjiyya*, after the fruit. One appears in a Baghdad cookbook from around 1226, *Kitab al-Tabikh*. It even advises having one person peel the oranges and another squeeze them, so the bitter peel never touches the juice.

The fruit's name traveled from Sanskrit *nārañga* to Persian *nārang* to Arabic *nāranj*. Arabs later brought the fruit to Spain, which is why the Spanish word for orange is *naranja*, and where the English word "orange" comes from too.