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MALAYSIAN CHICKEN CURRY

Even after 20 years of living in the United States and enjoying a variety of international foods, this chicken curry is still one of those dishes that I must come back to at least a few times a month. In Malaysia, there are many cooking styles when it comes to curries. For instance, if you dine in the home of an Indian family, the curry is enriched with spices and aromatics. In a Chinese home it will be seasoned with sweetened coconut milk, while Malay cooks prefer to make their curry with chilies. This recipe balances the three cooking styles, making the curry light yet intensely flavorful and aromatic. Pay close attention as you cook the spice paste, since this is one of your foundational flavors. You never want to leave the spices unattended in hot oil since they can easily burn and turn bitter. Cooks in Malaysia will use store-bought Baba's meat curry powder or Baba's chili powder to achieve an appealing reddish gravy. You can purchase these online.

SERVES 6

2 pounds bone-in chicken thighs or breasts
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Leaves from 2 sprigs curry leaf
2 cinnamon sticks (3 inches each)
1 whole star anise
¼ teaspoon whole cloves
3 green cardamom pods, crushed
1 large red onion, chopped
2 tablespoons Ginger, Garlic, and Cilantro Paste (page 53)
1 medium potato, peeled and quartered
2 tomatoes, quartered
½ to 1 tablespoon hot meat and chicken curry powder
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1½ teaspoons salt, or to taste
½ cup coconut milk

- 1.** Cut chicken thighs in half, or the breasts into 5 pieces each. Set aside.
- 2.** Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the curry leaves (make sure the curry leaves are dry or they will splatter in the oil), cinnamon, star anise, cloves, and cardamom. Stir and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes.
- 3.** Add the onion and cook until translucent and light brown, about 7 minutes. Add the ginger-garlic paste, stir, and cook for about 1 minute.

4. Add the chicken, potato, tomatoes, curry powder, and turmeric and mix well. Cover, turn the heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes and chicken are tender, about 35 minutes. If you prefer a thicker sauce, do not cover the pot.

5. Add the salt and coconut milk, stirring to mix thoroughly. Cook, uncovered, until a little oil appears on the surface, about 10 minutes. Serve warm.