

Recipe: Chicken, Garlic and Soy Stew

Time: about 1 hour

3 tablespoons neutral oil, like corn or grapeseed

8 chicken thighs, skin-on

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup minced Chinese ham or sausage, prosciutto or bacon, optional

At least 40 cloves peeled garlic

½ cup dry white wine or water

¼ cup sugar

4 star anise

1 stick cinnamon

5 nickel-thick slices ginger

1 teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns

1/3 cup soy sauce

Chopped fresh cilantro leaves for garnish.

1. Put oil in large well-seasoned or nonstick skillet that can later be covered and is large enough to accommodate chicken in one layer. Turn heat to medium-high and a minute later add chicken, skin-side down. Cook, adjusting heat so chicken browns on one side without burning. Turn and cook another minute or 2. Remove chicken to plate and pour off all but about 3 tablespoons fat.
2. Return pan to medium heat and add meat, if using it, with garlic. Cook, stirring occasionally, until garlic is nicely browned, adjusting heat so it does not burn. Add wine or water and cook, scraping bottom of pan with a wooden spoon to release any browned bits, meanwhile adding sugar and spices. When sugar dissolves, add soy sauce and about 1 cup water.
3. Return chicken to pan, skin side down, and adjust heat so mixture simmers gently; cover and cook about 15 minutes. Turn chicken; if mixture is very watery, raise heat and leave cover off. If less than ½ inch of liquid remains, leave cover on. Cook for another 10 minutes.
4. When chicken is done (it will be tender and no blood will be visible when you cut into it), uncover and raise heat; cook until sauce is thickened slightly. Remove the chicken to a deep platter. Remove cinnamon stick and star anise from the sauce, then spoon or pour sauce over chicken. Garnish with cilantro and serve with white rice.

Yield: 4 to 8 servings.