



Food for Thought

This dish is called Aji de gallina, a very traditional Peruvian food (criollo). It is usually made for big family reunions, because you need few ingredients to make a lunch for many people. The following recipe is my way to make it. I added more ingredients than the traditional one, but I kept the same soul of the dish.

Ingredients to Serve Six

For the chicken stock:

- Whole chicken breast with bone
- Half a celery bunch, chopped into large pieces
- One whole leek, cleaned and chopped into large pieces
- The white part of 3 scallions
- Half a head of garlic, peeled so that there is only one layer of skin remaining
- One red onion, peeled and chopped into quarters
- Four dried bay leaves
- One-inch piece of ginger, with the skin on
- Enough water to cover one inch above all ingredients in stockpot

For the stew:

- One and a half pounds of Peruvian yellow pepper (aji amarillo) - you can find this in the freezer section of Latin food stores (El Rey, Cermak)
- One red onion, finely chopped
- One head of garlic, mashed or minced
- Half a loaf of white bread, crusts removed
- Three cups of prepared chicken stock (recipe above)
- Poached chicken breast (from the stock)
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil, separated
- One tablespoon of salt
- One teaspoon of fresh ground white/black pepper
- Half tablespoon of ground cumin (I toast fresh cumin seeds and ground it by hand)
- If you have MSG, use a teaspoon (optional)
- Two ounces of canned evaporated milk

For serving:

- Three hard boiled eggs
- Two boiled Idaho potatoes (peeled and 1 inch sliced)
- Six kalamata olives (sliced in four)
- Two tablespoons of fresh chopped parsley
- One cup of freshly shredded parmesan
- 6 sliced pecans

Preparation

First clean the frozen yellow peppers by cutting them in half lengthwise and removing the seeds and veins. Wash them well and put it in a pot with enough water to cover one inch above the peppers. Boil until the skins start to pull away from the flesh of the pepper. Drain and chill enough so you can pull the skins off the peppers. Blend together with 1-1/2 tablespoons of the vegetable oil until pureed.

While the peppers boil, make the chicken stock. Into your stockpot, add the chicken breast with bones, celery, leek, onion, garlic, bay leaves, scallions, ginger and water to boil. Let boil for 25 minutes until the chicken is cooked. Remove the meat and shred it with a fork (you can eat the leftovers from the bones as I do). You can save the cooked vegetables and blend separately with some stock to make a nice creamy soup for the next day or to freeze for later (without the ginger and bay leaves).

Now pour one and a half tablespoons of vegetable oil into a big pot over medium-low heat. Add the minced onion, and stir constantly until the onion is translucent. Add the seasoning: salt, white pepper, cumin and MSG; then add the mashed garlic and let it cook slowly and even, until you can almost get a paste. Pour the prepared yellow pepper paste into the pot and cook it until the stew starts "kissing" you (bubbling). Pour the stew back into the blender and puree until smooth. Transfer the puree back to the pot and add 2 cups of the prepared chicken stock. At the same time when the stew is cooking, put the bread into a bowl and soak with one cup of stock. Add this to the same blender you used before (no need to wash it out) and puree. Once the stew comes to a boil, pour the blended bread into the pot and keep stirring until the stew thickens. Taste and add more seasoning if necessary (salt, pepper and cumin). Add the shredded chicken breast and keep stirring.

Then, add 4 tablespoons of the shredded parmesan and evaporated milk. Turn off the burner when the stew looks thick enough as in the pictures. Hard boil the eggs and cut them in quarters. Finely chop the fresh parsley. Bake the rest of the shredded parmesan to make six parmesan chips. (350°F for 8-10 mins)



Time to plate up!

First put three slices of potatoes in the plate, then pour enough of the stew on top of the potatoes, add two pieces of eggs, one sliced pecan on top, sprinkle chopped parsley, garnish with a couple slices of olives and finally the parmesan chip. And that's it!! **Enjoy your aji de gallina.**

Recipe & photos provided by ELL student, Alexander Gomez. Find him on Instagram @sknopnks.