

Grilled Isaan Chicken with Aromatic Lemongrass and Cilantro Roots

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All over Thailand, roadsides grills roast this simple chicken dish over an open fire. It's served with steamed sticky rice and Thai sweet chili sauce (pg. 134) (*nahm jim gai*). The classic Thai triad, cilantro roots, garlic, and peppercorns, creates the flavor profile of the dish. For authentic appearance and flavor, use a charcoal- or wood-fired rotisserie to cook chicken. In Thailand, chicken is usually "grilled" by roasting over open flames but not actually placed on grill grates. The same marinade can be used on a whole chicken that can be roasted in the oven.

Makes 4 to 6 servings as part of a multi-dish meal

- 1 tsp. White peppercorns
- 1 stalk Lemongrass, trimmed and sliced very thin, about 1/16 inch (.1 cm.)
- 1^{1/2} Tbsp. Minced cilantro roots or 3 Tbsp. minced stems
- 5 cloves Garlic, roughly chopped
- 1 Tbsp. Light brown palm sugar (pg. 58)
- 1/4 cup Fish sauce (*nahm pla*)
- 1 medium Whole Chicken, 3 to 4 lbs. (1.4 to 1.8 kg.), or 2 lbs (1.9 kg) bone-in thighs and/or drumsticks
- 2 lg. Cucumber, Kirby preferred, cut into 1-inch (2.5 cm.) chunks
- 1 recipe Thai sweet chili sauce (*nahm jim gai*) (pg. 134)

1. Make the marinade: if using a mortar, pound the peppercorns and lemongrass into a coarse paste. Add cilantro roots and garlic; pound into a semi-smooth paste. Add palm sugar and fish sauce; stir with pestle until well combined. If not using a mortar, crack peppercorns in a spice grinder, mince lemongrass, cilantro roots, and garlic; combine with palm sugar and fish sauce and whisk until smooth.

2. Marinate chicken: Combine marinade with chicken; massage well. Marinate at least 2 hours or overnight in the refrigerator.

3. Grill or roast the chicken: Cook chicken slowly on rotisserie or grill until cooked through (165°F or 74°C), turning occasionally to prevent burning and create an even brown color. Serve with cucumber chunks and Thai sweet chili sauce on the side.

How and Why

Use a mortar and pestle for an authentic-textured marinade. When the ingredients are pounded, they split into small, short, fibrous bits. These cook differently than knife-chopped ingredients. See page 104 for more on mortar and pestle use.

At right: *Roadside stalls display the grilled chicken along side the charred chicken livers.*