

## CHICKEN IN COCA-COLA SAUCE

Next Tuesday is Cinco de Mayo, so in honor of our Mexican-American neighbors here's a delicious chicken dish from the barrios of Los Angeles. It is from a wonderful book of Mexican-American home cooking titled *Cocina de la Familia*, by Marilyn Tausend and Miguel Ravago. It is simply chicken thighs braised in Coca-Cola. Yes, you heard me right. The original dish was developed down in Oaxaca, Mexico in the early 1940s after Coke started being sold in the area.

You'll need about 2 pounds of chicken thighs, one large white onion, a cup of pitted prunes, 1 cup of raisins, 3 to 5 canned chipotle peppers in adobo, which you can get in the Mexican food section of your local supermarket, 2 cans of Coke (or Pepsi if you prefer), some cooking oil and salt.

Cut the onion in half, peel it and thinly slice it. Roughly chop the pitted prunes and the chipotle peppers in adobo. Heat 4 tablespoons of cooking oil, I use canola or peanut oil myself, in a large heavy skillet with a lid over medium-high heat. Be sure to use a large skillet. Add the chicken pieces and brown on both sides for about 10 minutes. Season the chicken with some salt while you are browning it. Remove the chicken and put it on a plate. In the fat remaining, add the onion slices and sauté until soft. Pour off any fat remaining in the skillet. Return the chicken to the skillet with the onions, lower the heat, and cook over low heat for another 5 minutes or so.

Now it's time to make the sauce. While the chicken is cooking, Put the chopped prunes, the raisins and the chopped chipotle in an electric blender with some of the Coke and blend until smooth. Continue to blend in the remaining cola.

Pour the sauce over the chicken and onions, stir to blend well, cover and simmer for about half an hour, until the chicken is completely cooked and the sauce has thickened somewhat. Check for seasoning and add more salt if needed. This serves 4.

I like to serve this with white rice, either just plain, or you can make a delicious Mexican seasoned white rice. You'll need 1 ½ cups of long-grain rice. Plus you'll need ¼ medium white onion, peeled and finely chopped, 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and minced, a bay leaf, and three cups of chicken stock. You'll also need a couple of whole green jalapeno or Serrano chilies if you like things spicy.

Warm 2 tablespoons of cooking oil in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. When hot, add the rice and stir with a wooden spoon for about ten minutes, until it becomes chalky white and speckled with tan. You will hear the sounds of dry cracking as the rice is cooking. (When cooking, a good cook cooks with his ears as well as his eyes and his nose.) Then add the onion and garlic and stir and cook for another minute. Add the chicken stock, bay leaf, a couple of pinches of salt, and the whole chilies if you are using them.

Bring the rice to the boil, lower the heat and let the rice cook for about five minutes, uncover red, stirring occasionally. Then cover and simmer over very low heat for 15 more minutes so the rice can absorb all the liquid. Take it off the hot burner and let it stand, covered, for another 10 minutes. Before serving, remove the bay leaf and the whole chilies and fluff the rice with a fork.

All you need with this dinner is a salad. I like to peel and thinly slice some jicama and put it in a bowl with some thinly sliced red onion and some peeled segments of fresh orange. Squeeze some of the peel over the bowl to get a few drops of orange juice. Then add a little olive oil and some salt and freshly ground black pepper and serve, garnished with some chopped cilantro. Wishing you all a wonderful Cinco de Mayo, this is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.