

Chicken Xinxim

From Nelson's Kitchen
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Chicken Xinxim is a dish traditional of Bahia. It has origin in Africa and there are many variations of this dish in different regions in Brazil. I composed this recipe after researching many others. To make a good xinxim takes time, but most of the work can be done in advance. Some substitutions are possible, but here I describe the procedure that I used for the *Festa Nordestina* organized by Brased in November 2008. The best shrimp for this dish is the fresh frozen shrimp from Thailand. The shrimp must be prepped at least three days before you will cook the Xinxim, but it can be done even a month in advance and frozen. I prefer to prepare my own dried shrimp and to roast and grind my own peanut paste. I find that the dried shrimp commercially available in ethnic stores have a very pungent smell that overpowers the dish. The freshly roasted peanuts yield a much more aromatic peanut paste. However you can substitute good quality peanut butter for the home-made peanut paste. The red pepper that I use is *Pimenta de Cheiro*, a fragrant and not very hot pepper from Brazil. Make sure to read the whole recipe before you start any preparation.

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds of skinless chicken thighs
- 1.5 lb of shrimp with shells and heads
- 2 large onions
- 100 grams of raw peanuts
- 2 tablespoons of azeite de dendê (red palm oil)
- 4 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1 cup of all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup low sodium chicken broth
- 1 small fresh red hot pepper (mashed)
- 4 cloves of garlic (mashed)
- 1 inch of ginger (grated)
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Salt and white pepper

Procedure:

1. Make Dried Shrimp

- Remove the heads and shell the shrimp, reserve heads and shells for broth (see below).
- Devein the shrimp
- Split each shrimp lengthwise in the same way that you would do to butterfly the shrimp, but cut all the way through. The best technique is to place the shrimp on a clean cutting board, press down with the palm of your hand, and slice through with a sharp knife.
- rinse the split shrimp thoroughly in fresh cold water and drain on a colander.

- dry the shrimp on paper towels.
- sprinkle the shrimp with 1 teaspoon of salt
- put a rack on top of a cookie sheet and carefully lay each shrimp half on top so that they are only touching the rack.
- place the rack containing the shrimp under a fan in high speed and leave it to dry overnight.
- turn off the fan and let the shrimp continue to dry on a cool dry room for another day or two.
- if not ready to use, put in clean ziplock bags and put in the freezer.

2. Prepare the Shrimp Broth

- Immediately after shelling the shrimp, add one tablespoon of vegetable oil to a hot skillet and saute the reserved shrimp shells and heads for a minute or two until they change color, add 1 cup of water and let it simmer for 3 to 5 minutes.
- Strain the shrimp-shell broth and reserve. Discard heads and shells.
- If not ready to proceed, put the broth on a clean container and freeze.

3. Prepare Peanut Paste

- Preheat oven to 250F.
- Put raw peanut on a cookie sheet and put in the oven.
- After 20 minutes start monitoring the peanuts every 5 minutes or so.
- Peanuts may take up to 45 minutes to roast at this temperature, but once they get to the point of roasting, they will go from perfectly toasted to bitter very quickly.
- Peanuts are done when they are very fragrant and light golden.
- Remove peanuts from oven and let them cool completely.
- Process peanuts in the food processor until they form a ball of a very smooth paste. You may have to scrape sides of the food processor from time to time. It may take 3 to 5 minutes of processing.
- If you are not ready to proceed, put the peanut paste on a clean ziplock bag and freeze

4. Salt the Chicken

- Mix 1 tablespoon of salt with 1/4 teaspoon of white pepper.
- Make sure to remove any small pieces of bone that may be attached to the joints of the chicken thighs.
- Wash skinned chicken thoroughly in running cold water, place in a colander and let it drain.
- Put chicken in a container with cover to go into the refrigerator — or in a dish that can be covered with plastic wrapping.
- Sprinkle the mixture of salt and white pepper on all sides of the chicken thighs.
- Cover and put in the refrigerator. It can stay there from 2 hours to 2 days.

5. Marinate the Chicken

- One hour before you are ready to start the preparation of the dish, mash a clove of garlic and put in the food processor along with 1/2 of one onion. Process until it turns into a liquid paste. Added this paste to the salted chicken thighs.
- Add the juice of one lemon to the chicken thighs.
- Make sure that all pieces are coated and leave it marinating, outside of the refrigerator, for one hour.

6. Make Shrimp paste

- Place the dried shrimp in a bowl.
- Pour one cup of hot water over the shrimp.
- Cover and let it soak for at least 1/2 hour.

- Put re-hydrated shrimp and soaking liquid in the food processor.
- Process until you obtain a smooth paste.

7. Sauté the Chicken

- Put flour on a shallow wide dish.
- Choose a sauté pan that can accommodate all the chicken later.
- Heat up two tablespoons of olive oil in the pan.
- Drain the chicken thighs on paper towels.
- Lightly coat chicken pieces with flour.
- Sauté chicken until it is golden in each side (you may have to work in batches removing golden pieces to a dish).
- When all the chicken pieces are golden and out of the pan, remove excess fat from the pan, add 1/2 cup of chicken broth to deglaze the pan. Let it cook down until it is reduced to a very small amount of liquid.

8. Prepare the Sauce

- Process the remaining 1 1/2 onion in the food processor until it is a watery paste.
- Add the mashed garlic, grated ginger, and mashed red pepper to the reduced juices in the pan and cook for a few minutes until fragrant.
- Add the processed onions to the pan and cook until the onions no longer have the strong smell of raw onions.
- Add the shrimp broth, the shrimp paste, and the peanut paste and stir.
- Return the chicken pieces, along with any accumulated juices to the pan, nestle chicken into the thick sauce.
- Reduce fire to low and simmer gently, watching and gently stirring (to not break up the chicken pieces) frequently because the thick sauce will stick to the bottom of the pan and burn if not watched.
- Immediately before serving, drizzle the azeite de dende on top of the sauce and stir.
- If you wish, garnish with a small amount of chopped cilantro.
- Serve with steamed white rice.