

Amazing Chicken and Walnut Chili

Roast 3-4 large chicken breasts or 6-8 thighs (or some other equivalent) of chicken (skin on and bone in, skin side up) in a crockery pot like Corning Ware with half an inch of white vermouth, several liberal shots of soy sauce, and a largish handful of dried juniper berries¹ in the bottom. Cook an hour or so at 350 degrees. Strain and keep the broth and dump the juniper berries.

Dice two large yellow onions and 6-8 peppers. I like Cubano, Anaheim, and Poblano for this. If you want heat, throw in a couple of Jalapenos or, better yet, Serrano peppers.

In the bottom of a big (not cast iron²) kettle, sauté the veggies in hot walnut oil until they have lost most of their water but not until they begin to turn brown and caramelize. Add a half-pound of English walnut meats chopped coarsely and continue the sauté until they smell a little toasted. Now the onions are beginning to turn brownish. Add one bulb (yep, a whole bulb) of garlic minced (with a knife, not a garlic press) and cook for another 30 seconds, then quickly bring the heat down (overcooked garlic is bitter) with the following additions.

Add 2-3 cans each of cannellini (white kidney) beans, hominy, and garbanzos, including the liquid in the cans. Add 4-6 of those little cans of green chilis from the Mexican food section. Get the cans with whole chilies and cut them up yourself. The pre-diced chilies have lost their flavor. Add the chicken, cut up or pulled apart into bite-sized pieces, the liquid from the roasted chicken, a third-cup of Masa Harina and, if needed, some water. Now you have the basic chili foundation.

I season immediately to taste with salt, cumin, Mexican oregano, and powdered Ancho chilies.³ Maintain on a very low simmer at least an hour or so for the flavors to marry. Don't let it boil or scorch.

About 15 minutes before you serve it, add a lot of black pepper, a little gin (for more juniper flavor), a little Liquid Smoke, and some (you decide how much) Tabasco Chipotle sauce. These last seasonings don't hold up well to the heat, and need to go in very late in the game. The Tabasco Chipotle is very mild, but it can go on the table instead if wimps are eating.

Serve straight up with crackers or corn bread, or on rice or noodles or pasta. Top with grated cheese or nothing. Wash down with gin and tonic (obviously!) or beer if you don't like gin. But then, you probably won't like the chili either.

¹ Everything here can be had at Whole Foods and most urban supermarkets.

² Cast iron reacts with walnuts and will turn your chili black as coal. Doesn't hurt the flavor, but your friends won't eat it.

³ I do not use commercial chili powder blends, as I like adjusting the ratios of seasonings myself.