STOVETOP CURRY / INDIAN-INSPIRED

Butter Chicken with Coconut Milk

Coconut milk softens the spiced tomato sauce and adds a gentle coconut note; butter gives this easy stovetop curry a rich finish.

20 min prep | 35 min cook | 55 min total

4 servings | Easy | Stovetop



Finished butter chicken served with rice and flatbread

Why coconut milk works here

Browning creates savory flavor before the chicken simmers in the tomato-spice base. Coconut milk goes in at low heat at the end, giving the sauce a smooth finish without masking the garam masala and ginger.

Ingredients (4 servings)

- **Chicken:** 1 1/2 lb (680 g) boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into even 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces
- **Butter & oil:** 2 tbsp (28 g) unsalted butter, divided; 1 tbsp (15 ml) neutral oil
- **Aromatics:** 1 medium onion (150 g), finely chopped; 4 garlic cloves (12 g), minced; 1 tbsp (15 g) grated ginger
- **Spices:** 2 tsp (4 g) garam masala; 1 tsp (2 g) ground cumin; 1 tsp (2 g) mild paprika; 1/4 tsp (0.5 g) turmeric; 1/2 tsp (3 g) salt
- **Tomato base:** 1 1/2 cups (360 ml) plain tomato passata; 1/2 cup (120 ml) water
- **To finish:** 3/4 cup (180 ml) unsweetened full-fat coconut milk

Step-by-step method

1. Brown the chicken. Pat chicken dry and season with half the salt. Heat oil in a deep skillet over medium-high heat. Brown chicken in batches for about 3 minutes per side; transfer to a clean plate. It need not be cooked through yet.

2. Soften aromatics and bloom spices. Reduce heat to medium. Add half the butter and onion; cook about 6 minutes until soft. Stir in garlic and ginger for 1 minute. Add garam masala, cumin, paprika and turmeric; stir for 30 seconds until fragrant.

3. Simmer in tomato sauce. Add passata, water and remaining salt. Return chicken and its juices to the skillet. Bring to a gentle simmer, partially cover and cook 12-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the thickest chicken pieces reach 165°F (74°C).

4. Finish with coconut milk. Turn heat to low. Stir in coconut milk and the remaining butter; warm gently for 2 minutes without a hard boil. Add a spoonful of water if the sauce is too thick, then taste and adjust seasoning.

FOOD SAFETY & COOKING CHECK

Use a food thermometer to confirm chicken reaches **165°F (74°C)** in the thickest piece. Color alone cannot confirm poultry is safely cooked. Keep raw-chicken tools and plates separate from cooked food.

The recipe stages shown in the images follow this method: measured ingredients, browning, tomato-sauce simmer, dairy finish, plated serving.

Cook’s notes, serving & storage

A simple guide to texture, sauce adjustments and make-ahead handling.

Ingredient and technique notes

Cut evenly: 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces cook more evenly. Use plain passata without added seasoning. Garam masala blends vary, so measure it before starting. Brown chicken in batches to avoid crowding; keep it separate from ready-to-eat food. Do not judge doneness by color alone.

Coconut milk: use unsweetened full-fat coconut milk, not coconut cream. Shake or stir it before measuring. Keep the sauce at a gentle heat after adding it.

Variations

• **Spinach:** Wilt 2 cups (60 g) baby spinach into the sauce just before finishing.

• **Hotter curry:** Add 1/4 tsp cayenne with the ground spices.

• **Peas:** Simmer 1 cup (140 g) frozen peas in the sauce for the final 3 minutes.

For a milder finish, use less garam masala only if desired; keep the salt and thermometer check unchanged.

Serving suggestions

Serve four portions with separately cooked basmati rice or warm flatbread and cucumber salad. Spoon the sauce over the chicken and offer extra sauce with the rice.

Make-ahead, storage & reheating

REFRIGERATE

Refrigerate leftovers in shallow, covered containers within 2 hours (within 1 hour above 90°F/32°C). Keep at 40°F (4°C) or below and use within 3-4 days.

FREEZE

Freeze airtight portions for up to 2 months for best quality. Thaw in the refrigerator. Cream or coconut sauces may separate slightly after freezing; stir gently while reheating.

REHEAT

Reheat gently in a covered saucepan over low to medium-low heat, stirring, until the center reaches 165°F (74°C). Add a splash of water if needed and avoid repeated cooling and reheating.

Frequently asked questions

Can I prepare this ahead?

Chop aromatics and measure spices ahead. Refrigerate perishables separately from raw chicken, then cook within 1-2 days.

How many servings does this make?

Four main-dish portions, with rice or flatbread prepared separately.

How can I adjust the sauce?

Add a spoonful of water if it is too thick. Taste after cooking and adjust salt modestly; keep the coconut milk unsweetened.

Food-safety references: FoodSafety.gov - Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures; FoodSafety.gov - Cold Food Storage Chart.