

# Jerk Chicken

There are as many jerk recipes as there are moms in Jamaica, but everyone uses allspice, nutmeg and aromatics. We use chicken thighs because they have a higher fat content that makes them tender and tasty. In Jamaica, jerked meats are smoked over allspice wood (they call it pimento) because it's plentiful there. If you don't have access to the wood, you can smoke it with allspice berries and finish off over high heat on the grill, like we do here. If there's anything that will invigorate the monotony of backyard barbecue fare, it's this dish. The peppery spices will dance on your tongue long after the last of this tender, smoky chicken has been consumed.

*See Cook's Notes for tips on alternate cooking method, using a spice grinder and protective gloves when handling Scotch bonnet peppers.*

## Ingredients

- 5 scallions, trimmed and cut into thirds
- 1 or 2 Scotch bonnet peppers, stems removed, or habanero
- 1-inch knob of ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
- 10 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves
- 1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons ground allspice, preferably freshly ground
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg, preferably freshly ground
- Zest and juice from 1 lime (2 tablespoons juice, 1 teaspoon zest)
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, trimmed of excess fat
- 1/2 cup distilled white vinegar
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1/2 cup whole allspice berries

## Special Equipment

- Gas grill
- Small disposable foil pan or smoker box
- Instant-read meat thermometer

## Directions

Place the scallions, Scotch bonnet, ginger, garlic, thyme, 2 tablespoons brown sugar, ground allspice, salt, pepper, nutmeg, lime zest and juice, soy sauce in blender and buzz to puree. You should have about 1 cup. Measure 1/4 cup marinade into a small saucepan. Using a spatula, transfer the rest into a zip-top gallon-sized plastic bag or a shallow baking dish. Use a sharp knife to score top of chicken with a few 1/4-inch slashes and place it in the bag or dish. Toss to coat, close bag or cover pan, and refrigerate overnight.

To make the barbecue sauce, add the vinegar, ketchup and remaining 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar to the marinade reserved in the saucepan. Place pan over high heat and boil for for a minute, whisking constantly. Remove from heat, cool and refrigerate.

Soak whole allspice in water for at least 30 minutes, then drain. If your grill has a smoke box, place the allspice inside. If you don't, put the soaked allspice in a small, disposable foil pan balanced on one of the heating elements underneath the grate. Close the lid and preheat the grill, covered, to 400 degrees. Open the lid and oil the grates. Remove the chicken from the marinade and place it on the grates skin-side up and close lid. Discard marinade. Turn the burner under the allspice down to low and turn off the rest of the burners. Keep an eye on temperature. You want it to fall to about 250 degrees with the flame as low as possible, so adjust as needed. Try to keep it between 225 and 275 degrees. Smoke the chicken for 30 minutes without opening the lid. With an instant-read thermometer, test the chicken for doneness; it should be 155-160 degrees. If not, close the lid and continue to smoke until done. Turn the burners to high and finish grilling chicken on both sides for a few minutes. It's done when the skin turns a nice rich brown and chars in places, about 8 minutes. Remove from heat and let it rest for 10 minutes. Reheat the barbecue sauce and serve it on the side.

### **Cook's Notes**

You *can* roast the chicken in the oven. You'll miss the rich, smoky depth, but it will still be delicious.

We keep a grinder dedicated to processing whole spices, but if you don't want to commit to another appliance, don't worry. You can clear most of the flavor from your mill by grinding a batch of raw rice after a batch of spices. It will pick up most of the spice oils. That way, when you use it to grind your morning coffee, it will still taste like coffee.

You can use gloves to handle the Scotch bonnets if you are going to remove seeds and membranes to dial down spice. The spice level mellows a bit during cooking. If you love spicy food, toss two peppers into the blender, or maybe even more.

**total time:** 1 hour 40 min, plus overnight marinating

**active prep:** 45 minutes

**serves:** 4

**difficulty:** medium