

Tuesday, July 28, 2015

Turkish Chicken Kebabs – Expect More



I'd like to think that all the chicken coming off American grills this summer will be as tasty, juicy, and tender, as these Turkish chicken kebabs, but I know better. This has nothing to do with cooking skills, or quality of grills, but rather the unremarkable residue of low expectations.

People simply don't expect much from their grilled chicken, and that's exactly what they get. They use too little seasoning, and way too much time on the grill, followed by the inevitable barbecue sauce cover-up. Sure, the chicken was dry, but at least we couldn't taste it.

It doesn't have to be this way. By using a flavorful, yogurt-based marinade, like the one seen herein, even inexperienced grillers can produce impressive results. The acid and calcium in the yogurt tenderizes the meat, and unless it's horribly overcooked, you'll be enjoying the kind of succulent chicken you didn't even realize was possible.

Like I mentioned in the video, I'm not sure how "Turkish" this is. It's loosely based on a lamb marinade I've used for a long time, but it really worked beautifully on these thighs. I really hope you give this easy, and very adaptable recipe a try soon. Enjoy!

Ingredients for 4 large portions:

- 1 cup plain whole milk Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 or 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tbsp ketchup
- 6 finely minced garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp Aleppo red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 1/2 teaspoon cumin
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 1/2 pounds boneless skinless chicken thighs
- 4 long metal skewers

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Posted by Chef John at 12:57 PM

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32 comments:



lukas rödin said...

What's the bread called you served it on?

July 28, 2015 at 1:35 PM



Lupe said...

I'm giving this recipe a grade A SLOBBER.

Here in Germany, getting anything Turkish is easy, with all the Turkish expatriots. My veggie dealer is a Turk. The one thing that is hard to get is deboned chicken thigh. For some reason, my fellow Germans are attached to dry overcooked chicken breast. And deboning a chicken thigh isn't that easy. S-th-igh.

To make this more Turkish, I'll use Pul Biber (a prepared Aleppo pepper mix with a little salt) and a more authentic onion salad called Soğan Salatası.

Which goes like this: Mix sliced onion and salt. Let it sit 15 min in a colander. Wash. Dry. (All to make the onions milder.) Mix with persil and sumach. Optional: add lemon juice and olive oil. Let it sit a while. Serve decorated with additional sumach.

[Sumach](#) is probably not widely known in the States and may be hard to get. But it's worth the effort.

July 28, 2015 at 2:19 PM



Dain said...

This looks amazing with some homemade hummus I just put together the other night! Chef John - if I wanted to add some veggies to the skewers to get grilled along with the chicken, is there anything you could recommend that might be finished around the same time? I was thinking some red onion chunks or green peppers might go well.

Thanks again for another great video!

July 28, 2015 at 3:32 PM



Jef Willemsen said...

While I'm no BBQ expert, given the heat of the average grill and the length of time (at least 10 minutes) the chicken pieces need to really cook through... There are very few, if any, vegetables that would be suitable. Consider this: in a pan, over significantly lower heat, (red) onion is done in about 5 minutes. Same goes for peppers, mushrooms or fruit. You could consider adding some hard root vegetables like carrots, turnips or sweet potatoes, but who would want to eat that?

July 28, 2015 at 4:54 PM



Andy Skeptic said...

Made it tonight with a 6 hr marinade time. Fantastic. The only thing I changed was to sub out the chilli for a combo of chipotle and paprika.

July 28, 2015 at 5:40 PM



Mark said...

If you want grilled veggies for kabobs simply skewer each veggie on its own skewer and grill separately. Try to time it so everything comes off at the same time.

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Just my \$.02

July 28, 2015 at 5:55 PM



lambda100 said...

Instead of 2 skewers, use Turkish skewer which are flat, about 1/8th inch wide. They prevent the meats from rotating on the skewer.

July 28, 2015 at 6:30 PM



ckorba93 said...

I dont have a grill, is there anything that would discourage me from using a broiler with this recipe? Slightly worried about how the yogurt marinade would handle under a broiler..

July 29, 2015 at 2:14 PM



Carla Anderson said...

I'm in the market for a new grill and I like that yours has cast iron grates and is charcoal, two features I'm looking for. But you never seem to show more than the cook surface, and if you've spoken at any length about it here I can't find it. Would you mind talking a little bit about the grill you're using? Thank you!

July 29, 2015 at 3:14 PM



Chef John said...

It's a "Weber Q" but they don't make the charcoal version anymore!

July 29, 2015 at 4:09 PM



Carla Anderson said...

Hashtag ARGH! Thank you for the info. Guess I've gotta keep looking. And what a terrible task it is, grill shopping. ;)

July 29, 2015 at 4:21 PM



Mark Anderson said...

Their gas grill has a cast iron grate, though not the same grilling experience. I bought a cast iron grate for my Weber Kettle...not cheap, but works great.

July 29, 2015 at 8:37 PM



Julia said...

This is the best new recipe I have tried for a long time. Thank you so much (now, I am sure, you suspect as much), here comes the crabbiness:

Not just you, but everybody, everybody, everybody who does summertime recipes, assumes that as well as "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" all Americans, even those tragically not American, own an outdoor grilling mechanism that may be brought into play all summer, all the time. To not own one of these devices is not just weird and wrong, it is, at best, inconceivable.

Alas, we need to reconceive: grill-dom, either gas or charcoal, is not within ambit of all, Americans and otherwise. Meaning to say, lots of folks don't have these things, mostly because they live where they can't use them. Alas, like me, evidence of recipe sites probably makes me/them feel that their summertime culinary adventures must be severely restricted because there is something tragic and wrong (embarrassing?) about their/our without-grill lifestyle. We get sad. We think we don't count. This is tragic.

I thought I would try to break out of this sense of pathetic inconsequentiality. I used your very delicious and toothsome chicken recipe marinated in yogurt, for the outdoor grill, and cooked it at high temperatures on in a ridged cast iron pan on my gas stove. And it worked a charm!

I think that maybe some of us who cannot do outdoor grilling have lost a certain amount of spirit and (let's face the French) je ne sais quois, have lost the sense of personal legitimacy, integrity and pride to say: "Can I do that some other way besides on a grill?"

In your future grilling recipes, can you lead non-grill owners out of the wilderness of general personal unfulfillment? Somehow? Please?

July 30, 2015 at 3:47 PM

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Chef John's Bio

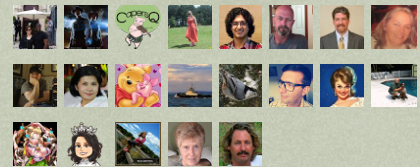
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**Chef John said...**

My first recommendation would be to move somewhere where you can grill, otherwise, ANY grill recipe can be done under a broiler, as that's nothing more than an upside-down grill! Good luck!

July 30, 2015 at 4:28 PM

**kimmyyiew said...**

How many chicken thigh should i use in this recipe?

July 31, 2015 at 1:51 AM

**wendyc said...**

Delicious! Made last night, marinated for 4 hours. Like the zip from the pepper flakes!

July 31, 2015 at 8:39 AM

**Unknown said...**

Is there something i could sub for the cumin? I made this tonight and it was well received, but I personally don't enjoy cumin that much so I'd love to get a recommendation for an alternate ingredient, because otherwise i really liked the marinade. Maybe next time I'll do just 1/2 tsp instead or just eliminate it altogether.

July 31, 2015 at 9:43 PM

**Farhang said...**

It is called Indian kebab chef cause in Turkey they got no such ingredients. Anyway I made it and it tasted awesome. Thank you

August 2, 2015 at 1:31 AM

**Food Junkie said...**

I made this tonight with chicken breast because that is what I had lots of. With the marinade it is harder to dry out the breast meat. The result was delicious, very moist and flavourful.

August 2, 2015 at 6:26 PM

**Celine L. said...**

Amazing! I made this for a BBQ party and it was an instant hit. I cooked about 30-35 min in total but the thermometer is the way to go. I also asked the butcher to leave the skin on which gave more flavor to the chicken and did not come out rubbery at all. Chicken was tender, moist, flavourful and well seasoned. Will definitely do this recipe again! Thanks!

August 2, 2015 at 11:12 PM

**Elastirion said...**

I prepared this recipe last Saturday and it was totally delicious. I made Kisir (Bulgur-Salad), Cacik and the onion salad recommended by Lupe here in the comments to go with it. All very good, but the juicy flavourful chicken was the best. This won't be the last time I made this.

August 4, 2015 at 5:24 AM

**Scion said...**

Well, I just did a run over to Charlotte, NC, for my rare-and-hard-to-find items that your video recipes have caused me to lose all self-will and go buy

"Aleppo Chili Flakes" was a no-go. Not at The Fresh Market, or the huge Harris Teeter. The only chili flakes I could find had seeds, so ...

As a substitute - which would you recommend?

Ancho chili powder?
crushed red pepper?
smoked paprika?
ground chipotle?
plain chili powder?

August 7, 2015 at 7:23 PM

**Chris Yetman said...**

I made this for my family last night, and it was immediately dubbed a 'keeper'. I served it exactly as shown, with lavosh, hummus, tzatziki, and vegetables. I also made a rice pilaf. My teen-aged boys gorged themselves on it. I had the (minimal) leftovers for lunch today, and it was still very, very good. Thank you - I will be making this every couple weeks.

August 12, 2015 at 11:56 PM

**kusok said...**

What should be the grill temperature? (If I was to put a grill thermometer right where the meat is going to be?

August 15, 2015 at 3:11 PM

**Eric Eligator said...**

Fantastic. While we were enjoying this at dinner my wife asked if it took long to make. I answered that it took a little longer than it normally would, only because it was the first time I made it. My 14 year-old daughter immediately said, "Well I hope it's not the last!" Thanks for a great recipe.

August 26, 2015 at 10:43 AM

**Sena said...**

I am Turkish and this is the exact recipe I use for marinating my oven cooked chicken wings. The ingredients are the same, I just eyeball how much of each to use. My husband is a grill master and he also uses this marinating sauce for lamb kebabs or "kuzu şiş" as we say. It's always a hit! I'll second the commenter about sumac though, onions taste way better with it. In restaurants kebab is always served with "bulgur pilavı".

I was actually here to learn how to make pie but wanted to comment as I think you nailed this recipe. I love how food brings people together.

August 27, 2015 at 5:56 AM

**lulusherin said...**

Tried out today.. loved it..Thanks for the awesome recipe!!!

April 26, 2016 at 2:39 PM

**Michele Cryan said...**

would pork tenderloin work in this recipe? do you think?

May 30, 2016 at 1:39 PM

**Michael Hagberg said...**

Why don't you post recipe instructions? What would be really nice is to have a print version with photo, ingredients, instructions and a QR code linked to the youtube video.

August 16, 2016 at 9:57 PM

**Jeff said...**

2 questions (or... maybe 1 question and 1 request). My wife absolutely insists on my using chicken breasts. Would it be a horrible thing to sub the 1tbsp kosher salt with +Martin+ (...ahem) tender quick (my grandfather always brined his chicken -- smoked or otherwise with that stuff and it always turned out great... but I learned the hard way that one has to be careful because of the salt content. 1tbsp couldn't hurt, could it?)?

2nd... wow -- that bread! I can't find a recipe for it on your site. Most of the stuff I find online refers to "Lavash" bread as Armenian "cracker bread" -- i.e. crisp and crunchy like a cracker. That is clearly NOT what you are using. I wanna know how to make it myself. Thanks in advance.

May 3, 2017 at 7:14 PM



Jeff said...

+Michael Hagberg, All of Chef John's recipes can be found on allrecipes.com -- fully transcribed with printable instructions (including photos). This recipe + <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/244632/turkish-chicken-kebabs/?internalSource=hub%20recipe&referringContentType=search%20results&clickId=cardslot%201>

May 3, 2017 at 7:17 PM



Care said...

Chef John, for a camping trip...what if I wanted to do the marinade minus the oil and yogurt, and freeze the chicken with it. Then let it slowly thaw in the cooler, and the day planned to eat it, add the yogurt and oil to continue to marinade. Would that work? I thank you for sharing your skill!

June 18, 2017 at 8:14 PM

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