Kerala Biryani Recipe

Serves 6
Prep time: 45 minutes
Marinating: 1 hour - overnight
Cook time: 1 hour 15 minutes

Ingredients:

Chicken Marinade

- [ ] 2 lbs (900 g) bone-in chicken, cut into medium pieces
- [ ] ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- [ ] 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- [ ] 1 tsp turmeric
- [ ] 1 tsp Kashmiri chili powder
- [ ] 2 tsp coriander powder
- [ ] 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- [ ] 1½ tsp kosher salt
- [ ] Juice of ½ lime

Rice

- [ ] 2 cups jeerakasala (kaima) rice
- [ ] 4 cups water
- [ ] 1 tbsp ghee
- [ ] 1 bay leaf
- [ ] 4 green cardamoms
- [ ] 4 cloves
- [ ] 1-inch cinnamon stick
- [ ] 1 tsp salt

Chicken Masala

- [ ] 2 tbsp ghee
- [ ] 2 tbsp neutral oil
- [ ] 4 green cardamoms
- [ ] 4 cloves
- [ ] 1-inch cinnamon stick
- [ ] 1 star anise

Vegetables

- [ ] 3 large onions, thinly sliced
- [ ] 2 green chilies, slit
- [ ] 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- [ ] 2 medium tomatoes, chopped

Ground Spices

- [ ] ½ tsp turmeric
- [ ] 2 tsp coriander powder
- [ ] 1 tsp Kashmiri chili powder
- [ ] 1 tsp fennel powder
- [ ] 1 tsp Kerala-style garam masala
- [ ] ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

Herbs

- [ ] ½ cup chopped fresh mint
- [ ] ½ cup chopped cilantro

Garnish

- [ ] 1 cup fried onions (from the sliced onions or store-bought)
- [ ] ¼ cup cashews
- [ ] ¼ cup raisins
- [ ] 2 tbsp ghee
- [ ] Juice of ½ lime
- [ ] Pinch of saffron soaked in 2 tbsp warm milk

Directions

Step 1 - Make Marinade

- Combine the chicken marinade ingredients and marinate for at least 1 hour (overnight is best).

Step 2 - Prepare rice

- Wash the rice until the water runs mostly clear, then soak for 20 minutes. Drain before cooking.

Step 3 – Fry the Garnish

- Warm 2 tbsp ghee in a pan over medium heat.
- Fry the cashews constantly until golden, once removed, fry raisins until they puff. Around 30 - 45 seconds for each and then remove just the contents not the oil.
- Next, on medium heat, fry the sliced onions constantly until deep golden brown for about 20–25 minutes.
- First 10 minutes: stir every 2–3 minutes.
- Last 10 minutes: stir every 30–60 seconds so they brown evenly without burning.
- When removing onions from pan, use the slotted spoon to avoid excess oil.
- Reserve about 1 cup for layering.

Step 4 – Cook the Rice

- Bring 4 cups water to a boil over high heat and add 1 tbsp ghee, bay leaf, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and salt to the water
- Once boiled, add the soaked rice and reduce heat to medium.
- Stir once immediately after adding the rice. After that, do not stir again.
- Cook until about 90% done (the rice should still have a slight bite).
- Drain immediately and spread on a tray to stop the cooking.

Step 5 – Make the Chicken Masala

- In a large heavy pot, heat on medium 2 tbsp ghee and 2 tbsp oil
- Once warmed through, add cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and star anise.
- Cook for 30 -45 seconds, stirring constantly until fragrant.
- Add the remaining sliced onions and cook until golden, keeping heat at medium and stirring every minute.
- Stir in green chilies and ginger-garlic paste and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly.
- Add tomatoes and cook until they soften and the oil begins to separate. Stir every minute, scraping the bottom of the pot.
- Once you can see separation of oil and tomatoes, reduce heat to medium low and mix in turmeric, coriander, Kashmiri chili, fennel powder, garam masala and black pepper, stirring constantly.
- Cook for another minute.
- Add the marinated chicken and stir well to coat, increasing heat to medium and stirring every minute.
- Cover and cook over medium low heat for 20–25 minutes, stirring every 5 or so mins, until the chicken is cooked and the masala is thick. If there's too much liquid, cook uncovered for a few more minutes and increase the heat to medium.
- Taste and see if it's to your liking. The masala should be thick enough that a spoon dragged across the bottom leaves a clear path for a second or two before the sauce slowly fills it back in.
- If ready, reduce heat to low and stir in the mint, cilantro, and the juice of ½ lime. Fold gently just until the herbs are incorporated.

Step 6 – Layer the Biryani

- Turn off heat and leave the chicken masala in the pot.
- Top with the cooked rice, no more stirring here. Keep the layers intact.
- Sprinkle over fried onions, fried cashews, fried raisins, a little extra mint and cilantro, drizzle 2 tbsp melted ghee and saffron milk

Step 7 - Dum (steam)

- Turn heat to low.
- Cover the pot tightly with a lid (or seal with foil or dough for an extra-tight seal).
- Cook over very low heat for 20 minutes.
- Turn off the heat and let it rest, covered, for 15 minutes.

Step 8 - Serve

- Gently fluff the rice, lifting from the bottom so each serving includes both rice and chicken
- Fold only 3–4 times, just enough to lightly combine. Avoid mixing vigorously, as that will break the delicate jeerakasala rice.

Tips

- Jeerakasala (kaima) rice is traditional Kerala rice and gives an authentic flavor and texture but can be substituted for aged basmati or regular basmati but not jasmine rice.
- Bone-in chicken adds richness that boneless meat can't match.
- Don't overcook the rice before layering; it will finish cooking during the dum.
- Use freshly chopped mint and cilantro for the brightest flavor.
- The fried onions, cashews, raisins, and generous use of ghee are what give Kerala biryani its signature style.