

FILIPINO CHICKEN ADOBO ‡

My son, who lives in the culinarily eclectic silicon valley, told me of a marvelous dining experience he had recently had at a local Filipino restaurant. The dish was called Chicken Adobo. Being from the Southwest, I grew up eating foods cooked in adobo sauce, so I was very surprised at his description, because clearly we were not talking about the same thing.

On probing further, I found that adobo, in Spanish, means marinade, pickling, sauce, or seasoning. Originally, it was the immersion of raw food in a stock made variously of paprika, oregano, salt, garlic, and vinegar to preserve and enhance its flavor. The practice originated in Iberia and thence passed to Latin America and other Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Paprika was used because it was found to have antibacterial properties and because its capsaicin helps fats to dissolve, tissues to absorb the marinade, and flavors to penetrate deeper into the meat. Vinegar was used because it tends to impede bacterial growth.

But in the Philippines the name was applied by arriving colonists to an indigenous method that happened also to use vinegar, but was otherwise very different. Adobo is considered to be the Filipino national dish, the prototypical stew, served both at daily meals and at feasts; it is always served with rice.

The recipe below is my own attempt to recreate the native fare from online descriptions and ingredients found in my pantry, subject to my dietary guidelines. I must say that it is pretty good, but I perhaps would not rave about it quite as intensely as did my son over that which he had encountered. (I found myself wanting to add some piquancy to it!).

2 chicken thighs, skinless and boneless
½ medium onion, sliced thin
2 oz light unsweetened coconut milk
¼ cup cider vinegar

1 tbsp crushed garlic
¼ cup crumbled bacon
1 oz low-salt soy sauce
2 bay leaves
½ tsp ground black pepper
1 tsp fish sauce
1 cup lower sodium chicken stock
1 scallion, sliced for garnish

Put all the ingredients except the scallion in a bowl, stir around to mix the marinade and coat the chicken, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight.

Pour the marinade in a saucepan, bring the heat to a boil, and begin to reduce it to a sauce. Meanwhile, put the chicken in a sauté pan and cook it, turning as needed, until it is well browned all over.

Add the sauce to the chicken and let it simmer over medium low heat for about 20 minutes. Turn the chicken over and continue cooking for another 15 minutes.

Transfer the chicken to serving dishes and keep warm. Bring the sauce to a strong simmer and reduce it until it is reasonably thick, say another 5 minutes. Remove bay leaves and spoon the sauce over the chicken, garnish with sliced scallions, and serve immediately. Traditionally accompanied with cooked white rice, but a lower G. I. pasta would also suffice, per your glucose tolerance.

Serves 2.