Main dishes / India

Hyderabadi Dum Biryani

Layers of saffron-stained basmati and yogurt-marinated chicken sealed under a dough-crimped lid, slow-cooked on a tawa so the steam trapped within perfumes every grain from the inside out. When the seal breaks at the table, a cloud of rose water, mace, and charred meat rises and fills the room.

Time 210 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 1 kg Bone-in chicken pieces (leg and thigh)
- ☐ 200 g Full-fat plain yogurt
- ☐ 2 tbsp Biryani masala (ground: coriander, cumin, cardamom, clove, black pepper, cinnamon, mace)
- ☐ 1 tbsp Kashmiri red chili powder
- ☐ 2 tbsp Fresh lemon juice
- ☐ 2 tbsp Ginger-garlic paste (equal parts)
- ☐ 2 tsp Salt
- ☐ 500 g Aged basmati rice, rinsed and soaked 30 min
- ☐ 3 L Water, heavily salted (for parboiling)
- ☐ 1 tbsp Whole spices: bay leaves, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon stick, star anise
- ☐ 4 tbsp Ghee
- ☐ 3 medium Thin-sliced onions, deep-fried until mahogany (birista)
- ☐ 0.5 tsp Saffron strands steeped in 3 tbsp warm milk
- ☐ 1 tbsp Rose water
- ☐ 20 leaves Fresh mint leaves
- ☐ 200 g Atta (whole wheat) dough for sealing (dum)

Let's make it.

01 In a large bowl, combine the chicken pieces with yogurt, biryani masala, Kashmiri chili powder, lemon juice, ginger-garlic paste, and salt. Use your hands to work the marinade into every crevice — get under the skin, into the joints, and between the bones. The yogurt should completely coat each piece in a thick, rust-red paste. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, ideally overnight. The lactic acid in the yogurt begins tenderizing the protein while the spices perfume the meat from the surface inward. Before cooking, return the chicken to room temperature for 30 minutes — cold chicken will steam rather than sear and will cook unevenly in the dum.

02 Bring a large pot of heavily salted water (it should taste like the sea — about 1 tablespoon of salt per liter) to a rolling boil. Add the whole spices — the bay leaves, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and star anise — and let them bloom in the water for 2 minutes before adding the soaked, drained rice. Cook the rice at a vigorous boil, stirring gently once, for exactly 5–6 minutes. The rice is ready for dum when each grain is 70% cooked: the outside is tender but the center still has a chalky-white, firm resistance when you bite through one grain. Drain immediately through a fine-mesh sieve — do not rinse. The starchy, spice-perfumed surface of the partially cooked grains is essential for the layers to bind as they finish in the dum.

03 In a wide, heavy-bottomed pot (a degchi or a 28 cm dutch oven), heat 2 tablespoons of ghee over high heat until it ripples. Working in batches if needed — do not crowd the pot — sear the marinated chicken pieces, skin-side down first, for 3–4 minutes per side. You are not cooking the chicken through; you are browning the marinade surface to create the caramelized crust that will give the biryani its base of savory depth. The yogurt will sputter and the spices will bloom explosively in the hot fat. Once all pieces are seared and arranged in a single layer in the pot, pour any remaining marinade around them and reduce the heat to medium. Cook, uncovered, for 8–10 minutes until the marinade has reduced into a thick, clinging gravy around the chicken.

04 With the chicken spread at the base of the pot in its gravy, begin the rice layers. Spread half the parboiled rice over the chicken in an even, flat layer — do not press it down; keep it loose and airy. Scatter half the fried onions (birista) across the rice, drop half the mint leaves evenly, and drizzle half the saffron milk in a zigzag pattern so pools of gold will marbleize the white grains. Drizzle 1 tablespoon of ghee and a few drops of rose water. Repeat with the remaining rice, onion, mint, saffron milk, ghee, and rose water. The final layer should be rice, crowned with the last of the saffron and golden onion. The pot is now a cathedral of layers — do not disturb it.

05 Roll the atta dough into a thick rope and press it firmly around the rim of the pot, then set the lid on top and press to seal — the dough creates an airtight gasket that traps steam inside. Place the sealed pot over a flat tawa or griddle over the lowest possible heat. Cook on dum for 35–40 minutes. The tawa acts as a heat diffuser, turning the stove's direct flame into a gentle, all-surrounding warmth. After 25 minutes, lay a lit charcoal briquette on the lid if you want a smoky char note, or simply continue without it. To check doneness, press the lid — it should feel warm but not scorching, and you should hear a very faint, occasional hiss of steam. After 40 minutes, remove from heat and let the sealed pot rest for 10 minutes before breaking the seal at the table. Pry the dough seal off, lift the lid slowly, and let the column of fragrant steam rise before the room.

Recipe & provenance ForkRecipe Kitchen / ForkRecipe / FoodML and contributors / CC BY-SA 4.0.
Original recipe and attribution CC BY-SA 4.0
Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
recipes.dvs-services.be / biryani