Main dishes / Japan

Karaage

Bite-sized chicken thighs marinated in ginger and soy, dredged in potato starch, and fried twice — the first fry sets the crust, the second fry drives it to a mahogany shattering crunch while the interior stays succulent. The defining izakaya bite.

Time 90 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 6 parts Chicken thighs, boneless skin-on (2.5 cm pieces)
- ☐ 1 parts Soy sauce (koikuchi)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Sake
- ☐ 0.4 parts Fresh ginger (grated fine, juice and pulp)
- ☐ 0.3 parts Garlic (grated fine)
- ☐ 0.1 parts Fine salt
- ☐ 2 parts Katakuriko (potato starch)
- ☐ 10 parts Neutral frying oil (vegetable or rice bran)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Lemon (wedges for serving)

Let's make it.

01 Cut chicken thighs into 2.5–3 cm pieces — bite-sized, uniform, with skin on each piece where possible. Place in a bowl. Add soy sauce, sake, grated ginger (including the juice from squeezing the gratings), grated garlic, and salt. Toss to coat evenly. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for a minimum of 30 minutes and up to 2 hours. Do not marinate longer — the salt and soy will begin to cure the exterior and make the crust absorb more oil. Remove from refrigerator 10 minutes before frying.

02 Remove chicken from marinade, shaking off any excess liquid. Place potato starch in a wide, shallow bowl or tray. Add the chicken pieces and toss to coat thoroughly — press the starch onto every surface, including the skin side. Shake off any loose excess starch: you want an even, thin, opaque white coating, not a thick blanket. The marinade's moisture will absorb into the starch and make it cling. Work quickly and cook within 5 minutes of dredging — starch absorbs moisture from the chicken and loses its crunch potential if it sits too long.

03 Pour oil to a depth of 4–5 cm in a heavy Dutch oven or wok and heat to 160–165 C. This is the first, lower-temperature fry — it cooks the interior through without burning the crust. Working in small batches (never more than 5 pieces at once), lower the chicken into the oil gently using chopsticks or a spider. Fry for 3–4 minutes, turning once, until the crust is pale gold and set but not deeply colored. Remove with a spider and drain on a wire rack. Let the chicken rest on the rack for 4–5 minutes. The interior will finish cooking from residual heat.

04 Increase oil temperature to 185–190 C. Return the rested pieces to the oil — they will sizzle immediately and violently. Fry for 60–90 seconds only, turning once, until the crust is a deep, rich mahogany and audibly crunching as the pieces move in the oil. Remove quickly and drain on a clean wire rack — not paper towel, which traps steam and softens the crust. The second fry drives out the last moisture from the crust and gelatinizes the starch, creating the karaage signature: mahogany shattering exterior, juicy steaming interior. Serve immediately.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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