Sauces / India

Tandoori Marinade

The vivid red-orange yogurt marinade that goes on everything from chicken to cauliflower before hitting the grill — lactic acid tenderizing, spices penetrating, and the high heat charring the outside while the inside stays succulent.

Time 20 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 4 parts Full-fat plain yogurt, strained (labneh-style)
- ☐ 0.4 parts Fresh ginger, minced to a fine paste
- ☐ 0.3 parts Kashmiri chili powder (for color and mild heat)
- ☐ 0.15 parts Ground cumin
- ☐ 0.05 parts Ground turmeric
- ☐ 0.3 parts Neutral oil or mustard oil
- ☐ 0.5 parts Garlic, minced to a fine paste
- ☐ 0.5 parts Lemon juice, freshly squeezed
- ☐ 0.2 parts Garam masala
- ☐ 0.15 parts Ground coriander
- ☐ 0.15 parts Fine salt
- ☐ 0.1 parts Chaat masala

Let's make it.

01 Combine the garlic paste, ginger paste, lemon juice, all the ground spices (Kashmiri chili powder, garam masala, cumin, coriander, turmeric, chaat masala), salt, and oil in a small bowl. Stir vigorously until you have a uniform, smooth paste. The Kashmiri chili is the primary driver of the signature red-orange color; if your Kashmiri chili is from an old batch, add a pinch of beet powder or a touch more chili to compensate. The paste should smell vivid and spiced, not dusty — the oil helps bloom the fat-soluble spice pigments and aroma compounds even before heat is applied.

02 Add the strained yogurt to the spice paste and fold together until perfectly uniform — no white streaks of plain yogurt should remain visible. The marinade should turn a homogeneous, vivid orange-red. Use a spatula to fold from the bottom up; avoid whisking, which can thin the yogurt. Taste carefully: it should be intensely flavored, salty, tangy, and very spiced, because the marinade will be used in a thin coating on a large surface area of protein — its flavors must be assertive enough to penetrate.

03 Score the protein to be marinated (chicken thighs, drumsticks, or cauliflower florets) deeply — cuts every 2–3 cm allow the marinade to penetrate to the bone. Apply the marinade liberally, pushing it into every cut and coating all surfaces, under the skin if applicable. For best results, wear gloves to protect your hands from staining. Refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 4 hours for chicken pieces; 8–24 hours for bone-in or large cuts; 30–60 minutes for fish or paneer; 1–2 hours for vegetables. The lactic acid from the yogurt tenderizes while the spices penetrate. Cook on a screaming-hot grill, in a tandoor, or under a very hot broiler until charred and blistered.

04 Preheat a grill or grill pan to its absolute maximum — or set the oven broiler to 260°C / 500°F with the rack 10 cm from the element. Shake any excess marinade from the protein (thick clumps of marinade burn before the protein cooks). Place directly over the heat. The goal is violent charring of the marinade — black blisters on the outside while the inside stays juicy. Cook chicken thighs for 8–10 minutes per side; for a broiler, cook 10 minutes, then flip for 5 more. The charred marinade is not a mistake — it is the dish. Those blackened spots taste of roasted spice, smoke, and caramelized dairy.

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