

Chicken Drumsticks for Dinner

Coated in gutsy spices, roasted to juicy perfection, and dunked in a creamy sauce, drumsticks make a finger-licking-good meal.

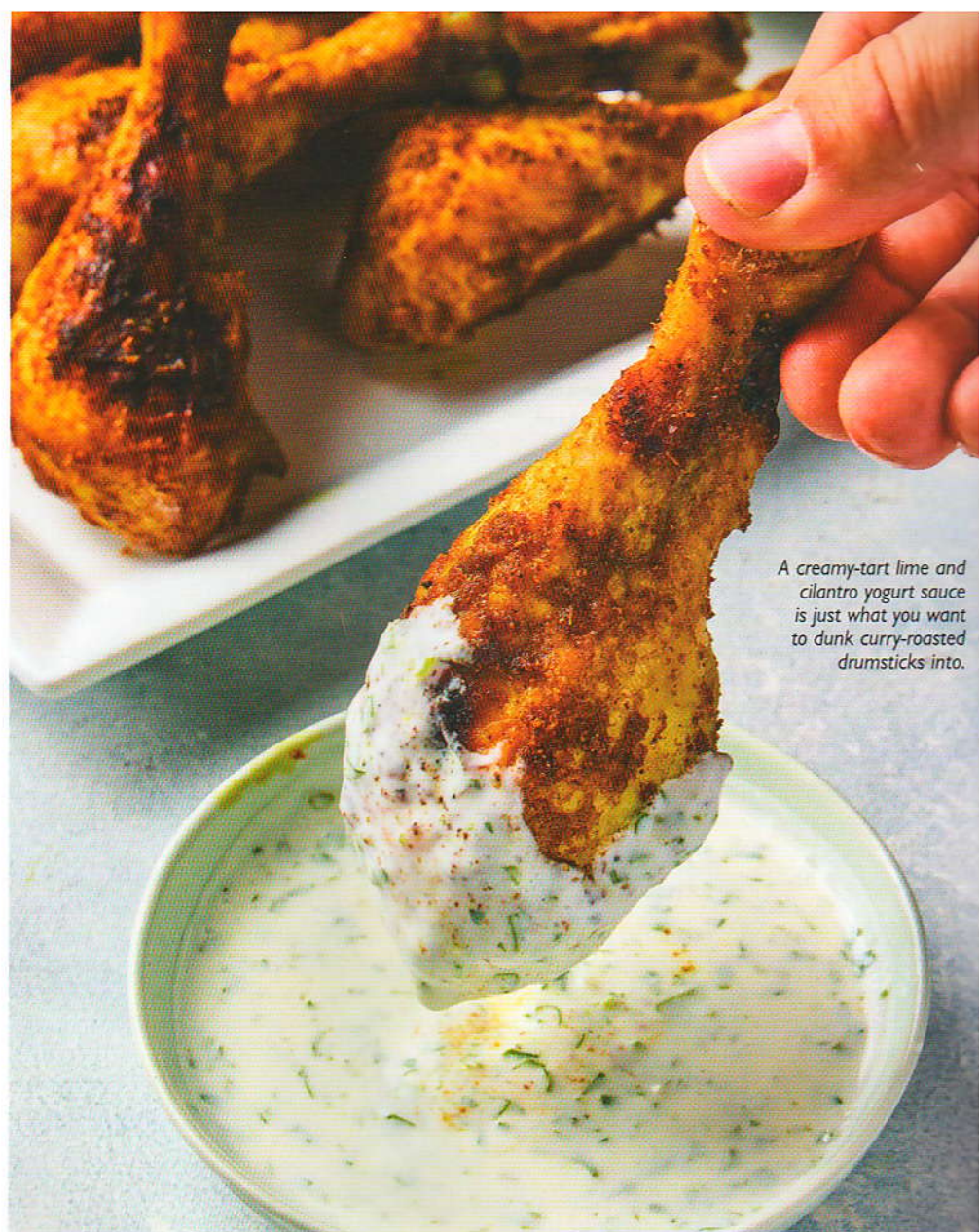
➤ BY STEVE DUNN ◀

Suffering from dinnertime fatigue? Consider chicken drumsticks. They may be unpretentious, but drumsticks outperform their poultry peers on almost every level. Not only do legs have built-in handles to help you devour every meaty morsel but, unlike most other parts of the chicken, they're also encased in skin that can be rendered paper-thin and golden brown, an edible wrapper to the gift of succulent, tender meat inside. Drumsticks are easy on the cook too: They don't require trimming, and there is leeway in the cooking time since the collagen-rich, unctuous dark meat doesn't easily dry out. Then there's economics: Drumsticks are easily the least expensive part of the bird.

With so much to love, I hatched a plan: Create a feast of juicy drumsticks—their skin thin, lightly crisp, and coated in potent spices—to be dipped into a spunky sauce and eaten by hand. What could be more fun and convivial?

The First Legs

I kicked off my drumstick extravaganza with a time- and temperature-testing spree: evaluating long and slow roasting; experimenting with split methods (starting in a hot oven and finishing in a cooler one and vice versa); and considering salting and brining. Ultimately, the easiest approach was also the best. I achieved terrific results by simply roasting the drumsticks in a 350-degree oven until they hit an internal temperature of 180 degrees (by this point, their connective tissue has dissolved into



A creamy-tart lime and cilantro yogurt sauce is just what you want to dunk curry-roasted drumsticks into.

gelatin, turning the meat juicy and tender) and then flashing them under the broiler to deepen browning and ensure that as much fat as possible was rendered. I placed the drumsticks on a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet for plenty of airflow, arranging them so their thick, meaty ends faced the hotter outside edge of the pan to produce the crispiest skin.

With my roasting method established, I wanted to try to conjure up a little kitchen magic: turning plain old drumsticks into a memorable meal by gussying them up with a potent spice rub. I went for a bold, barbecue-esque blend that included salt and pepper, plenty of onion and garlic powders, brown sugar, smoked paprika, and cayenne for heat. The

combination made sense on paper, but at the table the spices came off as powdery and dry and tasted as if they hadn't quite reached their full potential.

Spicy and Saucy

I recalled a test kitchen recipe for broiled spice rubbed snapper in which coriander, cayenne, and other spices were hydrated with water and then thinned with oil before being brushed onto the fish. The water and oil helped unleash water- and fat-soluble flavor compounds in the various spices, giving them fuller, more penetrating flavors and aromas. Sure enough, water and oil were just what the spice doctor ordered here too. Now my drumsticks hit all the notes with vivid sweetness, smokiness, and heat.

For dipping, I mixed up a creamy white barbecue sauce (aka Alabama white sauce) by thinning mayonnaise with horseradish and cider vinegar and bumping it up with sugar, cayenne pepper, and black pepper. The rich, lightly tangy sauce was a fitting foil for the smoky-sweet barbecue drumsticks.

The Thriftiest Part of the Chicken

Drumsticks are a breeze to cook, rich in flavor, and fun to eat. They're also quite a bargain. When we compared average prices for bone-in chicken breasts, thighs, drumsticks, and wings, we found that drumsticks were the most affordable—just one more reason to love them.

PART	*PRICE PER POUND
Drumsticks	\$1.85
Thighs	\$2.04
Breasts	\$2.56
Wings	\$3.99

*Per the USDA Weekly Retail Chicken Feature Activity for 10/14/2024 to 10/18/2024

SCIENCE

For Bolder Flavor, Hydrate Spices with Water and Oil

Before sliding our drumsticks into the oven to roast, we slather them with a slurry of heady spices that's moistened with a couple spoon-

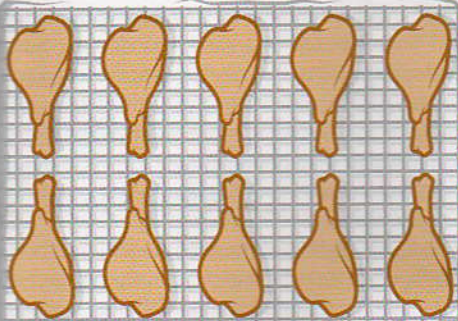
fuls each of hot water and vegetable oil. Spice flavor compounds are largely fat-soluble; oil helps draw out those compounds so that their taste is as pronounced as possible. But some of the flavor compounds in spices are water-soluble, so it's also crucial to add water to the slurry to ensure that all the spices' complexities are fully realized.

Water also softens the dry spices, making it easier for their flavor compounds to emerge into the oil. Once the chicken is cooked, the water has a tertiary function of helping the spices hold on to their volatile flavor compounds.

TECHNIQUE

A Strategic Arrangement Yields the Crispiest Skin

For well-rendered, mahogany skin, give the drumsticks plenty of air circulation by placing them on a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet. Arrange them so the bulbous sides face the edges of the pan, where it gets the hottest.



Inspired, I dug deeper into my spice cabinet and came up with a variation that zhuzhes up earthy store-bought curry powder with brown sugar and a few choices from the warm-spice canon: ginger, nutmeg, cardamom, and smoked paprika. The result was toasty and savory, with a sweet finish. And because one good turn deserves another, I paired the curry drumsticks with a cooling cilantro-ginger yogurt sauce that's tart with lime and sweet with a drizzle of honey. Regardless of which version you try, be sure the table is outfitted with a big stack of napkins when you gather round to dig in to these succulent, boldly flavored drumsticks.

—*Edited by Rebecca Hays*

SPICE-ROASTED CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS

We developed these recipes with Diamond Crystal kosher salt. If using Morton kosher salt, which is denser, use only 2¼ teaspoons in the spice mixture for the chicken. Before applying the spice slurry, smooth the skin over the drumsticks so it is covering as much surface area as possible. This will help the skin render evenly and prevent the meat from drying out.

BARBECUE SPICE-ROASTED CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS WITH WHITE BARBECUE SAUCE

SERVES 4 TO 6 TOTAL TIME: 1¼ HOURS

White Barbecue Sauce

- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon prepared horseradish
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Chicken

- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1¼ teaspoons packed brown sugar
- 1¼ teaspoons pepper
- 1¼ teaspoons ground coriander
- 1¼ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1¼ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1¼ teaspoons onion powder
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ⅛–¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon warm tap water
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2½ pounds chicken drumsticks

1. **FOR THE SAUCE:** Whisk all ingredients in bowl until smooth. Refrigerate until needed. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

2. **FOR THE CHICKEN:** Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and set wire rack in sheet.

3. Whisk salt, sugar, pepper, coriander, cumin, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, and cayenne together in medium bowl. Add water and stir until all spices are hydrated. Let sit until spice mixture has thickened to paste, 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk in oil to make loose slurry.

4. Pat drumsticks dry with paper towels. Holding 1 drumstick by bone end, roll in spice slurry until evenly coated on all sides. Let any excess slurry drip back into bowl, then arrange drumstick, skin side up, on prepared rack with thick end closer to edge of baking sheet. Repeat with remaining drumsticks, arranging pieces in 2 rows along length of sheet. Using brush or your fingers, dab any remaining slurry in bowl on tops of drumsticks.

5. Roast until drumsticks register 180 degrees, 45 to 50 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through cooking. Turn on broiler and continue to cook until tops of drumsticks are well browned in spots, 2 to 3 minutes longer. Remove from oven and let rest for 10 minutes. Serve, passing sauce separately.

CURRY-ROASTED CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS WITH HERBED YOGURT SAUCE

SERVES 4 TO 6 TOTAL TIME: 1¼ HOURS

Herbed Yogurt Sauce

- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves, minced
- 3 tablespoons lime juice (2 limes)
- 2 tablespoons water, plus extra as needed
- ½ teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- ½ teaspoon honey

Chicken

- 4 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1¼ teaspoons ground cardamom
- 1¼ teaspoons packed brown sugar
- ¾ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¾ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ¾ teaspoon smoked paprika
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon warm tap water
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2½ pounds chicken drumsticks

1. **FOR THE SAUCE:** Whisk all ingredients in bowl until smooth. (If necessary, add up to 2 tablespoons extra water so sauce is pourable.) Season with salt to taste, then refrigerate until needed. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

2. **FOR THE CHICKEN:** Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and set wire rack in sheet.

3. Whisk curry powder, salt, cardamom, sugar, ginger, nutmeg, and paprika together in medium bowl. Add water and stir until all spices are hydrated. Let sit until spice mixture has thickened to paste, 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk in oil to make loose slurry.

4. Pat drumsticks dry with paper towels. Holding 1 drumstick by bone end, roll in spice slurry until evenly coated on all sides. Let any excess slurry drip back into bowl, then arrange drumstick, skin side up, on prepared rack with thick end closer to edge of baking sheet. Repeat with remaining drumsticks, arranging pieces in 2 rows along length of sheet. Using brush or your fingers, dab any remaining slurry in bowl on tops of drumsticks.

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