



Madhrouba

Dried Lime Chicken & Rice Balls with Coriander Aioli



Makes 15

- 120g (generous ½ cup) white basmati rice
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil, plus 500ml (generous 2 cups) for deep-frying
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp garlic paste
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 2 fresh tomatoes, finely diced
- 3 dried limes
- 600g (1lb 5oz) boneless, skinless chicken thighs (about 6–7 pieces)
- salt, to taste
- small handful of sage leaves (about 16 leaves), finely chopped

For coating the balls

- 2 large eggs
- 100g (generous ¾ cup) plain (all-purpose) flour
- 150g (5½oz) breadcrumbs

For the aioli

- 1 large egg
- 200ml (scant 1 cup) extra virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, crushed or finely chopped
- 50g (1¾oz) coriander (cilantro), finely chopped
- sea salt flakes, to taste
- juice of 1 lime

Madhrouba literally translates from Arabic as “beaten rice”. This dish is mainly made by Omanis with Bahraini ancestry and Bahrainis, but it’s sometimes seen in other Gulf countries and among the Bedouin community. Traditionally, it’s served as a rice porridge, made with chicken, fresh tuna or lamb, but you could use crab, or even melt-in-the-mouth goat meat, if you like. Here, I’ve shaped the *madhrouba* into balls, almost like arancini, inspired by my good friend Abdullah, who had the idea when we worked together on a menu for a kitchen takeover at a hotel in the south of Oman. Of course, you can keep the *madhrouba* in its original porridge-like form if you prefer – it’s a great comforting dish for the winter. You can opt for any part of the chicken for this recipe, and if you use on-the-bone chicken, you will yield an even better flavour, but then it’s a case of picking out the bones. The aioli is a non-traditional addition that I’ve created for supper clubs; if you are entertaining guests, it’s a perfect choice.

Rinse the rice well under running water, then tip into a bowl. Pour over enough water to cover and leave to soak for at least 20 minutes or while the chicken is cooking.

Heat the 3 tablespoons of oil in a large saucepan over a high heat. Add the onion and fry for around 10 minutes until beginning to brown. Stir in the garlic, along with the spices and tomatoes, and fry for 2 minutes more.

Break the shells of the dried limes and remove the inside skin, discarding the seeds. Roughly tear the dried lime skins then add to the saucepan, along with the chicken pieces and 1 litre (4⅓ cups) of water. Season with salt, then cover with a lid and leave to boil for 45 minutes on a medium-high heat until the chicken is cooked through and very tender. Reduce the heat to low and, one piece at a time, remove the chicken pieces and shred into long, thin strands using two forks – the meat should fall apart. Once shredded, return the chicken to the saucepan.

Drain the rice and add it to the saucepan. Stir well, then add 500ml (generous 2 cups) of water. Increase the heat to medium, then cover and leave to cook for 15 minutes. Remove the lid and stir, then add the sage leaves and leave to simmer, uncovered, for another 25–30 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes to stop it from sticking. You want the water to be fully absorbed, the rice to have broken down and the mixture to have come together like a thick porridge.

Recipe continues overleaf

Remove from the heat and leave to cool completely, then place in the fridge for at least 15–20 minutes to chill and become firmer – this will make it easier to shape it into balls.

Meanwhile, make the aioli. In a bowl, combine the egg, half the oil, the garlic and the coriander. Season with salt to taste, then blend with a hand-held blender until the mixture emulsifies and thickens. Add the remaining oil and lime juice, and continue to blend until combined. Place in a jar and leave to chill in the fridge until needed. (If you don't have a blender, you can do this by hand, but it will take longer and you will need to add the oil gradually.)

When you're ready to cook, use clean hands to shape the rice mixture into 15 balls, each one slightly bigger than a golf ball.

To coat the balls, whisk the eggs in a bowl, then scatter the flour and the breadcrumbs on to separate plates.

Roll each ball in the flour, then the eggs, then the breadcrumbs, making sure each one is well coated.

Heat the oil for shallow-frying in a large frying pan over a high heat. The oil should be deep enough to come about a quarter of the way up the balls when you add them. To check if the oil is hot enough, add the first ball – it should begin to sizzle straight away. If so, add the remaining balls and fry for 2–3 minutes on each side until they are a deep golden colour. Once they are cooked, transfer to a plate lined with kitchen paper (paper towels) to soak up the excess oil.

Serve hot with the aioli for dipping.