

Grilled Chicken Teriyaki

Every time I try to make grilled chicken teriyaki, it comes out so salty that it leaves me begging for mercy—and a jug of water. Any way to tame this salty beast?

—Bob Jorgenson, St. Paul, Minn.

Teriyaki sauce may taste complex, but it typically contains only three ingredients: soy sauce, sugar, and mirin (a sweet Japanese rice wine available in the international aisle of most supermarkets). This simple sauce is versatile, too, as it's used as a marinade, basting sauce, and serving sauce. But when I made a handful of recipes, I discovered that grilled chicken teriyaki isn't without problems. Like any sweet sauce, teriyaki can easily burn over the high heat of the grill. If simply brushed on at the end of cooking, it doesn't add much flavor—although that can be a good thing, because most of the recipes I tried were far too sweet and salty. I had two goals: First, to bring the strong flavors into harmony, and second, to make the grilled chicken breasts a worthy ally, with succulent, flavorful meat and thin, crisp (not charred) skin.

Soy sauce is an essential component of teriyaki, but tasters felt battered by its saltiness in every recipe I tried. Diluting the soy sauce with water allowed me to keep its rich flavor while cutting back on the saltiness. My tasters preferred the traditional sweet components of granulated sugar and mirin (brown sugar, honey, and corn syrup all added off-flavors), but they demanded restraint. Instead of the $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (or more) of sugar



The secret to flavorful, crisp (but not charred) skin is to hold back on the sugar until the last five minutes of cooking.

in some recipes, I cut it back to 6 tablespoons, and I used just $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of mirin. My tasters loved the flavor boost provided by garlic and ginger.

Using the teriyaki as both a marinade and a basting sauce was my next test. As a marinade, the mixture needed just 30 minutes to thoroughly flavor the meat, but, thanks to the sugar, it burned on the grill. Omitting the sugar from the marinade fixed the burning problem, but when I tried basting with the same mixture (with the sugar added back in), it ran off the chicken as fast as I could brush it on. I tried thickening the

sauce by boiling it down, as suggested by many recipes, but that made the sauce too salty again. Adding a bit of cornstarch turned out to be the key, as it allowed me to just simmer the mixture for a few minutes to get the syrupy texture I wanted—without the salty bite.

My tasters now demanded crisp, rendered skin beneath the glaze. Having grilled plenty of chicken wings (the glory of which is also crisp skin), I knew that long, slow cooking was needed to melt the fat away. I turned the grill burners down and tried cooking the chicken over both direct and indirect

heat. I was pleased to discover that direct cooking with all the burners on medium-low worked best; the meat cooked in a reasonable time, and much of the fat was rendered (without flare-ups). Pricking the skin with the tip of a knife helped render even more fat, leaving the chicken with incredibly crisp skin.

For good measure, I gave the chicken one last slather of teriyaki sauce just as it came off the grill. Finally, this was the chicken teriyaki I was after: crisp, juicy, grill-marked, and powerfully—yet evenly—salty-sweet. —Adam Ried

GRILLED CHICKEN TERIYAKI SERVES 8

If you like, reserve 3 chicken breasts and 3 tablespoons of the extra glaze for use in our Teriyaki Chicken Salad (page 23).

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup soy sauce
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mirin (see page 30)
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 8 bone-in, skin-on split chicken breasts (about 7 pounds total), trimmed, skin pricked several times with paring knife
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon cornstarch

1. Combine soy sauce, water, mirin, ginger, and garlic in saucepan. Toss chicken with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup soy sauce mixture in large bowl and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 day. Meanwhile, whisk sugar and cornstarch into remaining soy sauce mixture in saucepan. Simmer over medium-high heat until thickened and reduced to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, about 5 minutes. (Glaze can be refrigerated for up to 1 day.)

2. Heat all burners on high for 15 minutes, then turn all burners to medium-low. (For charcoal grill, light 50 coals; when covered with fine gray ash, spread in even layer. Set cooking grate in place and heat, covered, for 5 minutes.) Scrape and oil cooking grate. Grill chicken skin-side up, covered, until well browned on bottom and internal temperature of meat registers 120 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes. Flip chicken skin-side down and grill, covered, until skin is rendered and deep brown and meat registers 160 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes. Brush chicken with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup glaze and grill, covered, until glaze is caramelized, about 5 minutes.

3. Transfer chicken to serving platter and brush with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup glaze. Let rest 10 minutes. Serve, passing remaining glaze at table.