Sweet and Sour Stuffed Chicken

Makes 4 servings
Preparation time: 30 minutes
Cooking time: 1½ hours

**C H I C K E N**

4 Cornish game hens or 2 small frying chickens
2 teaspoons sea salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1 teaspoon turmeric

**F I L L I N G**

¼ cup (60ml) oil, (55g) butter, or ghee*
1 large onion, peeled and thinly sliced
4 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
1 cup (175g) pitted prunes, finely chopped
1 apple, cored and chopped
1 cup (175g) dried apricots, finely chopped
½ cup (75g) raisins (or pitted dates, chopped)
1 teaspoon sea salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 teaspoons *advieh* (Persian spice mix)*
1 teaspoon grape or date molasses
2 tablespoons lime juice or vinegar
½ cup (60ml) melted butter or oil

**B A S T I N G**

½ cup (110g) butter, ghee* or (120ml) oil
¼ cup (60ml) fresh lime juice or vinegar
½ teaspoon ground saffron
½ teaspoon sea salt

1. Clean and rinse the Cornish hens in cold water, then pat dry. Mix the salt, pepper, and turmeric, and rub the hens inside and out with this mixture.

2. To make the filling: Heat the oil in a wide skillet and brown onion and garlic. Add all the ingredients for the filling and stir-fry for 1 minute. Remove from heat and set aside.

3. Preheat oven to 450°F (230°C). Stuff the hens with the fruit mixture and pin or sew the cavities shut. Place the hens in an oiled ovenproof dish.

4. In a saucepan, combine the ingredients for the baste and paint the hens with this mixture. Cover with a layer of parchment paper and a layer of aluminum foil on top and seal tight. Place in the oven and bake for 1 hour. Uncover, baste with the pan juices, and bake for 30 minutes, until the meat separates easily from the bone.

5. Serve in the ovenproof dish or arrange on a serving platter. Serve with plain rice (*chelow*) or bread, salad, and fresh herbs. *Nush-e Jan!*

**V A R I A T I O N S**

**Roast Chicken with Lime, Dates, and Capers**—Preheat oven to 450°F (230°C). Oil a baking sheet and place the hens on top of it. Rub inside and outside with a mixture of ½ cup (120ml) fresh lime juice, 1 tablespoon salt, 1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper, 1 tablespoon dried thyme, 1 tablespoon date molasses, 1 tablespoon sumac powder, and ½ cup (120ml) olive oil. Stuff the hens with 4 cloves garlic, ½ cup (75g) chopped pitted dates, and 2 tablespoons capers. Cover with oiled parchment paper and aluminium foil and bake for 1 hour. Uncover and bake for another ½ hour.

**Chicken Stuffed with Rice and Cherries**—In step 2, after browning the onion and garlic, replace the prunes, apple, and apricots with ½ cup (100g) cooked rice, 2 cups (480ml) chicken broth, ½ cup almonds, ½ cup dried tart cherries. Add the remaining ingredients for the filling. Cover and cook over medium heat for 20 minutes, remove from heat, and proceed with step 3 above.

**Sumac and Walnut Stuffing**—In step 2, replace the prunes, apple, and apricots with 1 cup (120g) coarsely chopped walnuts, ¼ cup (25g) sumac powder, 1 teaspoon chili flakes, 1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses. Add the remaining ingredients for the filling and proceed with step 3 above.

**Sweet and Sour Stuffed Duck**—In step 2, replace the prunes, apple, and apricots with 1 cup (150g) barberries (thoroughly cleaned and rinsed), ½ cup (40g) chopped fresh cilantro, ½ cup (120g) pomegranate molasses. Add the remaining ingredients for the filling and proceed with step 3. In step 4, cook, covered, for 1 hour, then uncover and cook for 2 hours, until duck is tender.