

Let five-spice powder turn a 'blah' chicken into warm spice

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN
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Eating healthy on a budget and tight schedule means the boneless skinless chicken breast makes frequent appearances on our dinner table. It's a smart choice as a lean protein — one cup of cubed chicken breast has a whopping 43 grams of protein yet only 5 grams of fat (fewer than 2 of those are saturated).

But the chicken breast story goes beyond protein gram counts. White meat chicken provides a sizeable chunk of our daily requirements for several vitamins and minerals, most notably B6, niacin, phosphorous and selenium, and smaller quantities of a slew of others. Impressive stats from the cut of meat that goes on mega-sale about every 4 weeks, and freezes so well that you can stock up when it does.

The problem with this wallet-friendly nutrient wonder is that it is so mild and low-fat (read: low-flavor) that it can become "blah" and uninspired on the weekly family menu, elegantly referred to as being

in a rut. The lower fat also puts this protein at high risk for drying out. Today's recipe solves both those problems while also staying weeknight-speedy.

Five-Spice Chicken in Orange Broth is a skillet chicken that starts on the stovetop with a quick sear and then finishes in the oven, bathed in an aromatic orange juice broth, simmering to juicy perfection.

If you don't have five-spice blend on hand, I suggest it as a worthy purchase, because its warm spicy flavors (think ginger, anise and cinnamon) add a perfect depth to a ton of dishes, both savory and sweet. However, feel free to experiment with similar spices or blends (such as a pumpkin pie spice). Another recommended purchase: an instant-read thermometer, which will improve your meat-cookery overall, so you can stop cooking the chicken as soon as it reaches 160 degrees. A final tip: most chicken breasts are larger than one serving. Consider serving the meat already sliced on a platter, and you'll find that two or three breasts will easily feed a family of four.

FIVE-SPICE CHICKEN BREAST IN ORANGE BROTH

Start to finish: 40 minutes

Servings: 4

1 1/2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breast, about 3 breasts

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon olive oil

salt and pepper

1 large onion, diced (about 1 1/2 cup diced)

1 teaspoon Chinese five-spice (spice blend available at regular grocery stores)

3/4 teaspoon ground cumin

3-4 carrots, trimmed and halved both crossways and lengthwise

4 garlic cloves, smashed

1/4 cup white wine

3/4 cup orange juice (fresh or carton)

1 cup low-sodium chicken broth, plus extra if needed

chopped cilantro for garnish (or parsley, if preferred)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Pat the chicken breasts dry with a paper towel, trim visible fat, and season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the flour over both sides of the chicken breasts and lightly press the flour into the meat.

In a large oven-safe skillet, heat the olive oil over medium high flame. Brown the chicken breasts until golden, about 3-5 minutes per side. Remove the chicken and set aside on a plate (it will not be fully cooked). Add the onion to the same pan with a pinch of salt and stir with a wooden spoon. Once the onions are translucent, about 2-3 minutes, add the five-spice, cumin, carrots and garlic, and cook until very fragrant, about 3 minutes.

Increase temperature to high and deglaze the pan with



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Five-spice chicken breast in orange broth.

the wine, scraping up any crusty bits on the bottom of the pan as it bubbles for a minute. Add the orange juice and 1 cup of broth and stir. Return the chicken breasts to the pan, including any juices that have accumulated on the plate. Add extra broth (or just water) so that liquid level is about 1/4 the way up the chicken breasts. Spoon some of the sauce on top of each breast. Bring the mixture to a simmer and then place in the oven to continue cooking until the chicken breasts reach 160 degrees F, about 15-20 more minutes.

Remove the chicken from the oven and let rest a few minutes before slicing and serving with the carrots and the fragrant broth spooned on top. Garnish with fresh cilantro.

Nutrition information per serving: 271 calories; 61 calories from fat; 7 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 86 mg cholesterol; 262 mg sodium; 19 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 29 g protein

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