



Lightly browned onions mixed with lime juice melt into a sweet-sour sauce.

BACK IN DAKAR, I sat on the porch in the soft African night. I was bathed in the familiar and the unexpected: a motorbike passing by, waves on the beach and the scent of cigar smoke followed by an unfamiliar bird call, hushed conversations in Wolof and the taste of chicken and onions that was a correspondence from an older world. Chicken yassa taught us about onions (the harshest raw onion still turns out to be sweet when cooked) and even more about the charms of sweet and sour.

Senegalese Braised Chicken with Onions and Lime (Chicken Yassa)

Start to finish: 1¼ hours, plus marinating | Servings: 4

OUR VERSION of chicken yassa is based on a recipe by Pierre Thiam, who marinates the meat, then uses the marinade as a base for the flavorful sauce. Bouillon concentrate adds savoriness; our preferred brand is Better than Bouillon. Serve with steamed rice.

Don't marinate the chicken for longer than two hours; the acidity of the lime juice will soften the meat. Likewise, don't use an uncoated cast-iron pot. The lime's acidity will react with the metal, causing the sauce to taste metallic. —SARAH GABRIEL

- 4 tablespoons peanut oil, divided
- 3 tablespoons grated lime zest, plus 6 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 habanero chili, seeded and minced
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons chicken bouillon concentrate (see note)
- 2 pounds bone-in, skin-on chicken breasts, thighs and/or drumsticks, trimmed
- 3 medium yellow onions, halved and thinly sliced
- Finely chopped fresh chives, to serve

In a large bowl, stir together 3 tablespoons of the oil, the lime zest, habanero, 1 tablespoon salt and 1 teaspoon pepper. Transfer 2 teaspoons of the mixture to a small bowl and set aside. Into the remaining oil-zest mixture, whisk the lime juice, bouillon concentrate and ¼ cup water. Add the chicken and onions and toss. Cover and let marinate at room temperature for 1 hour or refrigerate for up to 2 hours, stirring once.

Remove the chicken from the marinade and pat dry with paper towels. Set a colander over a large bowl and drain the onions, reserving both the marinade and the onions.

In a large Dutch oven over medium-high, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil until barely smoking. Add the chicken, skin side down, and cook until well browned, about 4 minutes. Transfer to a plate and discard all but 1 tablespoon of the fat from the pot. Set the pot over medium and stir in the onions and ¼ cup water, scraping up any browned bits. Cover and cook, stirring frequently, until the onions are softened and lightly browned, 15 to 20 minutes.

Stir the reserved marinade into the onions. Return the chicken, skin side up, to the pot, nestling the pieces in the sauce, then pour in any accumulated juices. Reduce to medium-low, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the thickest part of the breasts reaches 160°F and the thickest parts of the legs reach 175°F, about 25 minutes.

Using a slotted spoon, transfer the chicken to a serving platter. Off heat, stir the reserved oil-zest mixture into the onions, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Spoon the onions and sauce around the chicken and sprinkle with chives. ♦

The Sweeter Side of Onions

Onions play a central role in chicken yassa, Senegal's tangy-sweet braised chicken, so we tested our recipe using four of the most common varieties: yellow, white, red and Vidalia. To further evaluate their differences, we also compared their flavors when raw and simply sautéed in oil and salt.

Yellow

Also known as Spanish or brown onions, these are what we use most at Milk Street. Pungent when raw and slightly sweet when cooked, yellow onions are perfect for chicken yassa, readily taking on lime juice's sourness but balancing it with their sweetness. If a recipe doesn't specify onion type, use this.



White

Milder than yellow when eaten raw, in our testing, white onions lost much of their flavor when cooked. Their watery texture felt out of place in our braised chicken. Instead, we like them best raw, adding crunch and slight pungency to guacamole, salsas, tacos and deli sandwiches.



Red

Red onions maintained a pronounced astringency in both raw and cooked tests. Though they developed some sweetness in the braised chicken, their pungency seemed out of



place and their color muddied the dish. We like using thinly sliced red onion in salads, for pickling and anywhere some color and oniony bite is desired. It can also provide texture and brightness to stir-fries.

Vidalia

These squat, seasonal Georgian onions have a reputation for being some of the mildest in the onion family. In our testing, they were the least astringent variety when raw and, when sautéed, their sweetness was even more pronounced, masking other flavors in our chicken yassa. When we want sweet, oniony flavor—in a caramelized onion jam, or as a raw topping for burgers—we use Vidalias. If they're out of season, look for other sweet onions (Maui, Walla Walla) as a substitute. ♦

