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CHICKEN STEWS AND CURRIES

Award-Winning Chili

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★★★★★ 5.0 (6,236) | 4 REVIEWS

This white chicken chili is
savory and creamy – with just
the right amount of spice.

By **Peter Kaminsky** |
Updated on December 19, 2024

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PHOTO: FOOD & WINE / PHOTO BY HANNAH HUFHAM / FOOD STYLING BY CHELSEA ZIMMER / PROP STYLING BY JOSH HOGGLE

Prep	Cook	Soak
Time:	Time:	Time:
10	1 hr 40	8 hrs
mins	mins	

Total	Yield:
Time:	6
1 hr	servings
50	
mins	

JUMP TO RECIPE

This white chicken chili recipe is a winner both figuratively and literally: Decades ago, it got first-place honors in a Kansas City cook-off, and it's been one

of our best-loved versions ever since. Here, food writer Peter Kaminsky shares the recipe from chili champions Todd and Nancy Walters. With fragrant spices, creamy beans, fall-apart chicken, and plenty of Monterey Jack cheese, it's sure to be a hit [tailgate recipe](#) – but this [filling and flavorful chili](#) is just as good for a weeknight dinner, too.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can you thicken white chicken chili without cornstarch?

A lot of white chili recipes will use cornstarch or a flour-based roux to thicken up the stew, but this one skips both thickeners in favor of shredded Monterey Jack cheese, which adds creaminess without the risk of things getting gloopy. Breaking up some of the cooked beans

would also add more heft to the broth. If you find the chili is still too loose for your liking, more simmering on the stove can help thicken it further.

How do I add depth of flavor to my chili?

It might seem like a white chili would be a little bland in comparison to its meaty, tomato-y cousin, but it doesn't have to be. This recipe builds a richly flavorful base that includes two full onions, chopped green chiles, and plenty of garlic, rounding it out with cumin and cayenne. Sauteing this fragrant, spicy blend before adding any beans, chicken, or liquid is a crucial step that will help your chili taste more savory and well-rounded. We also reduce the chicken stock on the stovetop to condense its flavor before it's mixed into the chili pot.

Notes from the Food & Wine Test Kitchen

This white chicken chili uses dried Great Northern beans (or other white beans), which must soak overnight before you start cooking. Plan accordingly.

Using dried beans requires more time and effort than simply opening a can, but it's usually worth it. Beginners can get a leg up with Food & Wine's comprehensive primer on [how to cook perfect dried beans](#).

Make ahead

The recipe can be prepared through Step 2 and refrigerated overnight.

Cook Mode

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Ingredients

1
pound
dried
Great
Northern
or
other
white
beans
(about

2
1/2
cups),
picked
over
and
rinsed

1
1/2
pounds
skinless,
boneless
chicken
breast
halves

1
quart
chicken
stock

or
canned
low-
sodium
broth

1
tablespoon
pure
olive
oil

2
medium
onions,
finely
chopped

2
(4-
ounce)
cans
chopped
green
chiles

4
garlic
cloves,
minced

2
teaspoons
ground
cumin

1/4
teaspoon
cayenne
pepper

1
1/4
pounds
Monterey
Jack
cheese,
shredded
(7
cups)

Kosher
salt

3
to
4
jalapeños,
halved,
seeded,
and
coarsely
chopped

Sour
cream,
for
serving

Directions

Step 1

In a large saucepan, cover the beans with 2 inches of water and let soak overnight. Drain the beans, return them to the saucepan, and add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil over moderate heat and simmer until tender, about 1 hour. Drain the beans.

Step 2

Meanwhile, put the chicken breasts in a saucepan and add the chicken stock; if necessary, add a little water to cover the chicken. Bring to a simmer and cook over low heat until the chicken is just opaque throughout, about 15 minutes. Transfer the breasts to a plate to cool, then shred. Boil the stock over high heat until reduced to 2 1/2 cups, about 4 minutes.

Step 3

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add the onions and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until translucent, about 4 minutes.

Add the canned chiles, garlic, cumin, and cayenne and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes. Add the beans, chicken, reduced stock, and 4 cups of the cheese and simmer for 10 minutes. Season with salt.

Step 4

Ladle the chili into large bowls and top each serving with 1/4 cup of cheese and a generous sprinkling of the chopped jalapeños. Serve the sour cream and the remaining cheese and jalapeños on the side.

Originally appeared: November 1998

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Reviews (4)



What do you think of
this recipe? Share
your experience to
help others.

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Food & Wine Member

★★★★☆ 12/29/2024

Could be wonderful with a few
modifications - needs only one
onion, use jalapeños not canned
chilis, and yes make a roux for
thickening. Then you'd only need...

👍 [Helpful \(0\)](#)



Pam Smyth

★☆☆☆☆ 12/24/2024

The flavor is ok, but it's very thin and the cheese becomes a gluey mess at the bottom of the pan, it need something (like a roux) to emulsify

 [Helpful \(0\)](#)

 **Food & Wine Member**

 10/24/2024

Wonderful No changes

 [Helpful \(0\)](#)

 **Amber**

 12/06/2017

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