

Pollo al Ajillo

Said to be the most popular way to cook chicken in Spain, as the name implies this is something of a garlic fest. As usual, variations abound. This is my most successful execution which, typically, was my first attempt. It was in Spain and is essentially a combination between the eminent Mr. Stein's approach, calling for marinating the chicken pieces in garlic, and the equally eminent Moro approach taken by Moro using masses of fresh bay. Recipes usually state, "white wine or fino sherry". In my view, the sherry is essential.

Planning

serves:	4
prep time:	4 hrs
cooking time:	40 mins

Ingredients

1 chicken, ~1.5kg
1 bulb garlic, separated
5 tbs olive oil
200ml fino sherry
6 fresh bay leaves
Salt & pepper

Method

Marinate the chicken. Remove the legs, breasts and wings of the chicken. Skin the breasts (including the first part of the wing) and legs. Leave the skin on the middle part of the wings. The Spanish would leave the bones in the legs but I like to bone it for my guests: two chunks of meat from each drumstick and two from each thigh. Separate the fillets from beneath the breasts and cut each breast into, say, four chunky pieces. Put the chicken pieces into a suitable glass bowl. Skin four of the plumpest garlic cloves, crush them and, with a tablespoon of olive oil, massage them into the chicken pieces. Leave it to marinate, stirring it occasionally, for three hours, if possible, but at least an hour in any case.

Heat the remaining 4 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet or frying pan - you want all the chicken to fit in one layer. Gently fry all the remaining garlic cloves, skin still on, until lightly browned then remove them from the pan and set aside. Add the chicken pieces to the pan and cook them, turning occasionally, until golden all over. The chicken should be barely cooked through; the breast pieces should need ~10 minutes so rescue them before they overcook and leave the leg pieces to cook for about 5 minutes more. Increase to a high heat and add the sherry, bay leaves and browned garlic cloves to the pan, scraping the gooey bits off the base. Return the breast meat to the pan and bring it all to a boil. Reduce the heat a little to keep a moderate boil going to reduce the liquid, turning the chicken pieces in the sauce occasionally. Reduce the liquid to about a quarter, agitating the pan to help form an emulsion with the olive oil. Adjust the seasoning to taste (without drinking too much of the juice!).

If you've got a *cazuela* instead of a skillet/frying pan, I'm sure that would add an air of authenticity. I must get one!