



A FRIDAY TABLE

Seven-Vegetable Chicken Couscous

— *bone-in · broth-forward · seven vegetables* —

YIELD

4 to 6
servings

TOTAL TIME

About 1 hr 30 min

30 minutes hands-on, the rest
simmering

Shopping List

what to buy

You need one big heavy pot (6 quarts or larger), a colander that sits inside the rim of that pot without touching the liquid, and a lid or sheet of foil. That is your whole setup.

The meat

- 3 to 3½ lb bone-in, skin-on chicken pieces – thighs and drumsticks, or one whole chicken cut into 8 pieces. Bone-in is important: the bones are what give the broth its body.

The seven vegetables *buy whole; cut as you go*

- 3 medium carrots
- 2 medium turnips
- 1 medium sweet potato
- Half a small butternut squash (about 1 lb)
- Half a head of green cabbage
- 2 medium zucchini
- 10 to 12 fresh okra pods

Also

- 1 bunch collard greens (you use about 4 large leaves)
- 1 can (15 oz) chickpeas
- 2 large yellow onions
- 3 tablespoons olive oil (or any neutral oil)
- 1 can (14.5 oz) diced tomatoes, or 2 fresh tomatoes chopped
- 1 small bunch fresh cilantro (or flat-leaf parsley), plus a little extra for the top
- 1 box (about 17 oz) plain couscous – the small yellow grains, not the round pearl kind

The spices *measure these exactly – this is the flavor of the dish*

- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons ground turmeric
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground white pepper (black pepper is fine if that is what you have)
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon salt, plus more to taste
- A pinch of saffron threads if you have it (optional; the dish is good without it)

Before you start

- Rinse the chickpeas in the can under water and set them in a strainer.
- Pull the tough center stem out of each collard leaf and tear the leaves into big pieces. Stack them and cut once or twice so no piece is bigger than your palm.
- Peel the carrots, turnips, sweet potato, and butternut squash. Leave the zucchini and cabbage unpeeled.
- Pat the chicken pieces dry with paper towels – dry skin browns; wet skin steams.
- Do not cut the vegetables yet – you cut each one right before it goes in the pot, because they go in at different times. Cutting instructions are in the steps.

METHOD

1 Brown the chicken.

Set the big pot over medium-high heat and add the olive oil. When it shimmers, lay the chicken pieces in skin-side down in a single layer. Do not move them for 4 to 5 minutes, so the skin turns deep golden brown, then turn and brown the other side for 3 more minutes. You are not cooking the chicken through, just building color and leaving browned bits stuck to the pot – that is the flavor of the broth. Work in two batches if the pot is crowded. Lift the browned pieces out onto a plate and set aside; leave the fat and browned bits in the pot.

3 Add tomatoes, cilantro, water, and the chicken — start the simmer.

Stir in the diced tomatoes and the cilantro (whole small bunch, stems and all – you fish out the stems later or just leave them). Nestle the browned chicken pieces back into the pot along with any juice on the plate. Pour in enough water to just cover the chicken – roughly 8 cups. Bring it up to a boil, then turn the heat down to low so it simmers gently with small bubbles. Cover with the lid, leaving it cracked open a little. Let it simmer

15 min.

Chicken cooks far faster than beef – do not give it the long braise beef needs, or it will fall off the bone into rags before the vegetables are done. You are timing the vegetables against the chicken from here on.

2 Soften the onions and bloom the spices.

Peel and roughly chop both onions. Add them to the pot with the chicken fat still in it. Stir for 4 to 5 minutes, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom, until the onions soften and go translucent. Now add all the spices – the ginger, turmeric, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, white pepper, black pepper, salt, and saffron if using. Stir constantly for 1 minute so the spices coat the onions and smell toasty. This one minute is what makes the broth taste right.

The Vegetables & the Couscous

steps four to six

4 Add the hard vegetables.

While the chicken simmers, cut the hard vegetables:

- Carrots into 2-inch pieces
- Turnips peeled and cut into quarters (or sixths if large)
- Sweet potato into 2-inch chunks
- Butternut squash into 2-inch chunks

After the chicken's 15 minutes, add these four to the pot along with the drained chickpeas and the torn collard greens. Stir gently. If the liquid no longer covers everything, add a cup or two of hot water – you want a brothy pot, not a dry one. Bring back to a simmer, cover cracked open again, and cook

20 min

6 Steam the couscous over the pot.

While step 5 cooks, get the couscous going. Pour the dry couscous into the colander. Set the colander over the simmering pot so the rising steam passes up through the grains – the colander should sit above the liquid, not in it. If there are big gaps where steam escapes, drape a sheet of foil loosely around the rim. Let the couscous steam this way for **15 min**, giving it a stir with a fork once halfway through so it steams evenly. The grains will swell and turn fluffy and separate.

If your colander holes are too big and grains fall through, skip the steaming and instead cook the couscous by the box directions, using broth spooned from the pot in place of water – it still works beautifully.

5 Add the soft vegetables.

Cut the cabbage half into 2 or 3 thick wedges, keeping a bit of the core on each so it holds together. Cut the zucchini into 2-inch pieces. Trim just the tip of the stem off each okra pod but leave them whole (whole pods stay firm; cut okra turns slippery). Lay the cabbage, zucchini, and okra on top of the pot. Do not stir them in – let them sit on the surface and steam in the broth. Cover and cook **20 min**, until the cabbage is tender and a knife slides into the squash easily. By now the chicken should be fork-tender and cooked through – the meat pulls easily from the bone but still holds its shape.

If a piece of chicken is done early: lift it out onto a plate, cover it, and slip it back into the pot to warm through at the very end. Better to rescue one quick-cooking piece than to boil the whole batch into rags.

7 Finish the couscous.

Tip the steamed couscous into a wide serving bowl. Add a big pinch of salt, a spoonful of olive oil, and ½ cup of broth ladled from the pot. Rake it all through with a fork until every grain is separate and glistening and no clumps remain. Taste – it should taste seasoned on its own.

8 Taste the broth and serve.

Fish out the cilantro stems if you left them whole. Taste the broth in the pot and add salt until it tastes full and savory – the broth is the soul of this dish, so make it taste good.

Mound the couscous on a large platter or in a wide shallow bowl. Pile the chicken and all seven vegetables on top, arranging them so everyone can see them.

Ladle several big spoonfuls of the hot broth over everything so the couscous drinks it in – this is meant to be moist and brothy, not dry. Put the rest of the broth in a bowl on the table for people to add more as they eat. Scatter a little fresh cilantro over the top.

Serve hot, with the extra broth alongside. Eat it while it steams.
