

Çerkez tavuğu

This chicken and walnut dish is Circassian (*Çerkez*) in origin, but it was adopted by the Ottoman Palace chefs and became an Ottoman classic. At the height of the Ottoman Empire, young Circassian women were captured to serve as concubines to the sultans, who appreciated their renowned beauty and fair features. The true Circassian dish includes threads of fresh coriander through it, but the fine Istanbul version is famed for its pale colour, perhaps reminiscent of the fair beauties. Sometimes served as a cold *meze* dish, *çerkez tavuğu* is ideal for lunch or supper, or for a buffet spread.

1 free-range chicken, trimmed of excess fat

3 slices of day-old white bread, crusts removed

150ml/¼ pint/⅔ cup milk

175g/6oz/1½ cup shelled walnuts

4–6 garlic cloves

salt and ground black pepper

FOR THE STOCK

1 onion, quartered

1 carrot, chopped

2 celery sticks, chopped

4–6 cloves

4–6 allspice berries

4–6 black peppercorns

2 bay leaves

5ml/1 tsp coriander seeds

1 small bunch of fresh flat leaf parsley, stalks bruised and tied together

FOR THE GARNISH

30ml/2 tbsp butter

5ml/1 tsp Turkish red pepper or paprika

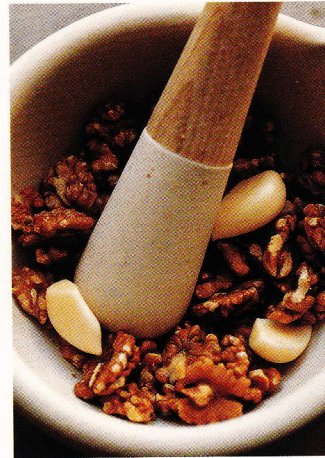
a few fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

SERVES 6

1 Put the chicken into a deep pan with all of the ingredients for the stock. Pour in enough water to just cover the chicken and bring to the boil. Lower the heat, cover the pan and simmer the chicken for about 1 hour.

2 Remove the chicken from the pan and leave until cool enough to handle. Meanwhile, boil the stock with the lid off for about 15 minutes until reduced, then strain and season with salt and pepper. When the chicken has cooled a little, pull off the skin and discard it. Tear the chicken flesh into thin strips and put them into a large bowl.

3 In a shallow bowl, soak the bread in the milk for a few minutes until the milk is absorbed. Using a mortar and pestle, pound the walnuts with the garlic to form a paste, or whiz them in a blender. Beat the soaked bread into the walnut paste, then add to the chicken mixture. Now beat in spoonfuls of the warm stock to bind the chicken and walnut mixture until it is light and creamy.



4 Spoon the mixture into a serving dish, forming a smooth, rounded mound. To garnish in the Istanbul fashion, melt the butter and stir in the red pepper or paprika, then pour it in a cross shape over the mound.

5 Serve at room temperature, garnished with the coriander leaves.

per portion Energy 222kcal/937kJ; Protein 34.1g; Carbohydrate 7.6g, of which sugars 1.6g; Fat 6.4g, of which saturates 3.3g; Cholesterol 105mg; Calcium 53mg; Fibre 0.2g; Sodium 324mg.