

Seasonal Eating
Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Give Salsa an Indian Twist
September 2020

I love fruit and a protein together. The freshness and sweetness of the fruit against the savory, umami flavors of meat, poultry or seafood is a match made in heaven. Scallops with mango salsa, pork tenderloin with apples, ham with pineapple - all favorites. Salsas are a great way to incorporate fruits with meats. Often when we think of salsa, we think tomatoes and hot peppers with a Mexican flavor profile of cumin and oregano. But fruits work really well in salsas with a sweet and spicy mix that zings with flavor.

So for a late summer chicken with salsa dish, peaches and cucumbers were the stars along with onion, bell pepper and a little jalapeno pepper. This combination is sweet from the peaches but refreshing and crisp from the cucumbers.



There are basically three kinds of cucumbers - pickling cucumbers, slicing cucumbers and English cucumbers. English cucumbers are the long skinny ones usually wrapped in plastic at the grocery store. They are sometimes called "burpless" cucumbers. The English variety has smaller seeds and a thinner, more tender skin than the regular slicing cucumbers and pickling cucumbers are usually smaller, thicker skinned with no waxy coating and have little bumpy spines on them. The English and slicing cucumbers are used for fresh eating while the pickling cucumbers are best for making pickles and relishes. For making a fresh salsa, English cucumbers are the best choice or you can use peeled slicing cucumbers and scoop out some of the seeds.

Next came the seasonings and this is where the peach and cucumber salsa took another twist, a delicious route through India. Instead of Mexican chili powder and cumin, Indian curry powder combines with red pepper flakes, salt, pepper, apricot preserves, lemon juice and fresh cilantro for a warming, comforting, not super spicy (you can leave out the jalapeno and/or red pepper flakes if you wish) flavor that perfectly complements a simple sautéed chicken breast. The curry is not overwhelming, but adds a special, unique flavor that makes you want to eat this with a spoon from the bowl. Let the mixture sit for about 30 minutes to let the flavors mingle before serving. You can also store it in the refrigerator for a day or so.

The chicken is simply sautéed in a little butter in a covered skillet and then glazed with a little of the peach or apricot preserves. Be sure to season the chicken well with a sprinkle of kosher salt and black pepper. Don't forget to pour the pan juices, over the top of the chicken before serving. They mingle with the juice from the salsa and make a wonderful sauce to swirl your chicken in before scooping up some of the salsa for the perfect bite!

I know this sounds very different - but every time I eat this I say, "Wow, that was a great dinner". Visit the Bedford County Extension website for more recipes and information about seasonal eating (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Glazed Chicken with Curried Cucumber Peach Salsa

2 medium peaches, peeled, pitted and chopped (about 2 cups)
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1 cup chopped cucumber (peeled, if using slicing cucumbers)
1/2 green bell pepper, chopped
1/4 cup chopped onion
1/2 jalapeño pepper, finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro
5 tablespoons peach or apricot preserves, divided
1 teaspoon curry powder
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes, optional
2 tablespoons butter
4 small, boneless, skinless chicken breasts
kosher salt
black pepper

In a large bowl stir together the peaches and lemon juice. Add the cucumbers, bell peppers, onion, jalapeno, cilantro, curry powder, salt, red pepper flakes and 3 tablespoons of preserves. Mix well and let stand for at least 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a skillet, melt the butter. Add the chicken breasts and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cover and cook over medium high heat for 7-8 minutes. Turn the chicken over, season with salt and pepper, cover and cook another 5 minutes. Spoon the remaining 2 tablespoons of preserves over the top of the chicken and cover and cook until chicken reaches 160 degrees, about another 2-3 minutes. Place chicken breasts on four plates and pour any drippings in the pan over the top. Spoon the salsa next to the chicken and serve immediately.