

Spring-Summer Menu

Three Takes On Chicken

I decided to do something a little different this time out. Rather than create a seasonal menu, as I have done over the past year, I'm sharing three recipes that are main course items. They are all simple and straightforward, and have one thing in common: Chicken

CHICKEN SOUP

This is the first food my son ate that didn't come from a breast or a jar. When he took his first bite, his eyes got big and round. It's been a favorite of his ever since. Mine is a basic soup, but it has a lot of soul and is the best thing you can eat when you have a cold.

BROTH:

1 3 ½ to 4 pound chicken

1 carrot

1 celery stalk

1 yellow onion

12 peppercorns

½ teaspoon salt

SOUP:

3 medium carrots, peeled and chopped

2 stalks celery, chopped

1 medium yellow onion, peeled and chopped

(you should have roughly equal amounts of celery, carrots, and onion)

4 tablespoons butter (1/2 stick)

¾ cup white rice (like Uncle Ben's converted) or alphabet noodles

1 10 ounce bag frozen peas

Salt and pepper to taste

BROTH:

Rinse chicken inside and out under cold running water. Remove any excess fat from the cavity. Place it breast-side-up in a stockpot that is large enough to hold the chicken leaving no more than ½ an inch to an inch around the sides. Fill the pot with cold water until the top of the breast is barely out of the water. Add carrot, celery, onion, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer over low heat for 1 ½ to 2 hours. Remove chicken and set it aside to cool. When it is cool enough to handle, remove the skin, and pull the meat off the bones. Reserve the white meat for the soup, and the dark for another use. Chop or shred the white meat. Discard vegetables, strain broth into another container, and allow it to cool, before refrigerating. When the fat has risen to the top of the broth, remove it. Place broth in a saucepan and return it to a boil.

SOUP:

Melt butter in a heavy 4 ½ to 5 quart kettle over medium-high heat, and cook carrots, onion and celery until soft. Add a few grinds of freshly ground pepper and a dash of salt, before adding the broth. When broth returns to a boil, add rice or noodles. Cover and simmer over low heat for 20 minutes. Add chicken and peas, and return to medium heat for 5 minutes or until peas are tender and chicken is heated through. Taste, adjust seasonings and serve. We always set half aside to freeze in 2 cup containers.

ROAST CHICKEN

I use the convection fan in my oven for this recipe. The resulting chicken has a crisper, browner skin than one cooked in a conventional oven. If your oven does not have a convection fan, increase both temperatures by 25 degrees.

1 3 ½ to 4 pound chicken

½ medium yellow onion

1 sprig thyme

1 sprig rosemary

salt and freshly ground pepper

olive oil

butcher's twine

Preheat oven to 450 degrees

Rinse chicken inside and out under cold running water. Pat it dry with paper towels, and place it in a shallow roasting pan that is just large enough to hold it. Season the cavity liberally with salt and pepper. Place the onion and herbs in the cavity. Fold each wing tip back under the first joint of the wing, cross the legs at the ankles, and tie the ankles together using the twine. Rub the chicken all over with oil. Lightly salt the skin.

Place chicken in oven and cook for 15 minutes, reduce heat to 325 degrees and cook for another 65 minutes (1 hour 20 minutes total). Pour off drippings, and tent chicken with foil for 10 to 15 minutes before carving. Separate fat from the top of the drippings. You can serve the drippings on the side or use to make gravy.

Note: I save any leftover drippings, bones and skin from the roasting pan and store in our freezer. When I have enough I fill a stock pot, cover it with water, and simmer it over night. Strain the stock, and simmer it again until it's reduced by half. This reduced stock is great for gravies and sauces.

TARRAGON CHICKEN SALAD

The key to this chicken salad is using roast chicken. The texture is different than that of a salad made with boiled chicken. Also, as my wife points out, you better like tarragon.

1 Roast chicken

½ yellow onion, minced

½ cup chopped celery

½ cup chopped toasted walnuts

1/3 cup mayonnaise

1 tsp. Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon

salt and fresh ground pepper

Spring-Summer Menu 2001

Remove all skin, fat, bone and connective tissue from chicken, and dice all the meat. Place it in a large bowl with the remaining ingredients, and toss with a rubber spatula. Salt and pepper to taste.