

It Takes a Chicken

Written by Debbi Covington
Tuesday, 24 January 2017 11:14



I had the most fun with my column in the last issue! Thank you, Beaufort folks, for emailing, calling and stopping me in the grocery store to reminisce about fatback, streak o'lean and souse meat. More often than not, in these Eastern North Carolina foodie conversations, the one thing I heard over and over again was, "You know what I really miss? Chicken and Dumplings. I never learned how to make them like my grandmother used to."

Well, it started me thinking. When I was growing up, Mama used to make homemade pastry for her chicken and dumplings. She rolled out the dough and cut it into long wide strips. I remember flour being all over the kitchen counter. I'm sure that I've mentioned this before – My maiden name is Baker, but somehow the actual "baking" gene skipped right over me. Always looking for a delicious shortcut, I've found frozen dumpling dough, actually made in Ayden, NC, so it's still Eastern NC-style, that I use when I make Chicken Pastry. Chicken Pastry, Chicken and Dumplings, Chicken Slick, Chicken Wiggle – it's all the same thing, just depends on which part of the state you grew up in. My 80 year-old Aunt Peggy uses the frozen dumplings these days, too. That cinches it. It's gotta be okay. I made a big pot of Chicken Pastry last week and sent some of it up to Florence, to Vince's mom and brother. This is not a recipe that you want to make unless you plan to share. It's comfort food at it's finest and likes to stick right on your thighs, if you know what I mean. I only make it once a year. I'm amazed at how I ate Chicken Pastry almost every Sunday growing up and didn't get fat. Metabolism, I guess. Wish I still had some.

The second recipe this week is a country cousin to Chicken and Dumplings. I realize South

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Carolinians are serious about their rice but it's not something that we ate a lot in NC. I never knew that there was another type of rice except for instant. (I also never knew that mayonnaise was different from Miracle Whip, but that's another column.) Chicken and Rice was a weeknight dinner on cold school nights. It was good and filling comfort food that we never really gave much thought to. About fifteen years ago, I was in Raleigh, working on my family genealogy at the NC Archives building. The closest place for lunch was in the cafeteria at the Legislative Building, just down the street. That's where I discovered Lemony Chicken and Rice. It just sounded too bright and delicious not to try. Lemon makes so many dishes better. It was fabulous. Quite a few years later, when I was learning about Greek cooking, I discovered Avgolemono, which is basically chicken and orzo soup with lemon. Copying from the Greeks once again, I figured out a way to incorporate the fresh lemon into the chicken and rice of my youth. The rest is history. I hope you'll love it as much as I do.

Chicken Pastry (Chicken and Dumplings)

1 whole chicken, cut up

Water, to cover

1 (1½ pound) box frozen flat dumplings*

Salt and pepper, to taste

Rinse the chicken pieces under cool water. Salt and pepper each piece generously on all sides. Place chicken in a large stock pot. Fill with just enough water to cover the chicken completely. Heat over medium-high heat until water is boiling. Turn heat down to medium-low, cover, and continue cooking until the chicken is cooked through and the meat is falling off the bones. Remove from heat and let cool until chicken is cool enough to touch. Remove chicken from the chicken stock. Pull meat from the bones and put in a bowl until ready to use. Discard chicken bones and skin. Pour chicken stock through a sieve into a large stock pot. Discard whatever's left in the sieve. Heat chicken stock over medium-high heat until it's boiling. (Use all of the chicken stock. There's no real measurement but you're going to need every drop.) Follow dumpling package directions about thawing. Add 6 to 8 dumpling strips to the boiling stock and cook until the stock begins to boil again. Add 6 to 8 more dumplings. When stock begins to boil

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again, add 6 to 8 more dumplings. Continue until all of the dumplings have been added to the pot. Cook through until dumplings are tender. Gently fold in cooked chicken and heat through. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serves 8. *(I like Anne's Old Fashioned Flat Dumplings. They're made in Ayden, NC and are the closest to homemade that I've ever eaten. Publix on Lady's Island has them in the frozen food section. Red box/yellow label.)

Lemony Chicken and Rice



1 whole chicken, cut up

Water, to cover

5½ cups fast-cooking (instant) rice

¼ cup fresh lemon juice

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2 eggs, lightly beaten

½ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Salt and pepper, taste

Rinse the chicken pieces under cool water. Salt and pepper each piece generously on all sides. Place chicken in a large stock pot. Fill with just enough water to cover the chicken completely. Heat over medium-high heat until water is boiling. Turn heat down to medium-low, cover, and continue cooking until the chicken is cooked through and the meat is falling off the bones. Remove from heat and let cool until chicken is cool enough to touch. Remove chicken from the chicken stock. Pull meat from the bones and put in a bowl until ready to use. Discard chicken bones and skin. Pour chicken stock through a sieve into a large bowl. Discard whatever's left in the sieve. Place 6 cups of chicken stock in a medium stock pot. Bring to a boil. Add 5½ cups instant rice to the chicken stock. Stir to combine. Cover and remove from heat for 8 to 10 minutes or until the rice has absorbed the broth. Place ½ cup of the cooked rice in a small bowl. Stir in lemon juice and 2 beaten eggs. Add rice mixture back to the pot of rice and stir well to combine. Gently stir in 2 cups of the reserved chicken meat. Season, to taste, with salt and pepper. Stir in fresh parsley just before serving. Freeze remaining chicken and chicken stock. Serves 6 to 8.



The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of two cookbooks, Gold Medal Winner of the Benjamin Franklin Award, Celebrate Everything! and Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com. She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at dbc@cateringbydebbicovington.com.