

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Last Minute Menu

As you may have noticed in my scribblings over the past few years, one of my favorite mini-adventures is to create a meal from whatever's in the pantry or fridge. Not big on advance menus. Then, however, there are times, midday usually when the question arises, "What's for dinner tonight?" Answer may be paramount but a basic idea may be sufficient to start the process. Final dash of this or that may not happen until the stove's turned on. This particular Saturday, decided by events, was one of those.

AJ had had a bit of upset tum the day before which engendered intakes of baking soda/water and a trip out for ginger ale. We'd been planning for some time to take in the annual downtown art festival here in Englewood and as next day, Saturday, rolled in weather was gorgeous. Warm, gentle breeze, hint of jasmine in the air. AJ's a trooper, doesn't let much stand in her way, so by 9:30 we were wandering the crowded booths. Enjoyed paintings, pottery, photography, sculpture and the unbelievable creativity of artists. Blows me away every time I go to one of these shows. AJ managed to stay away from the food kiosks while I just had to sample 'Best Soft Ice Cream in SW Florida' (it was) and an exceptional dog offered by a new downtown restaurant. By necessity in that order. Upshot was by noon the big question had surfaced. Recovery was imminent, appetite had returned. Best decision and compromise was chicken.

Back home, AJ soon brought out a recipe garnered from "Cottage Living" and we proceeded to read it through. Lentils and some herbs didn't pass muster. So, over the course of the afternoon, and an exceptional back country cruise in the skiff, some ideas began to take shape. Fresh basil, rosemary, and celery were substituted for the herbs and baked potatoes for the lentils.

This chicken recipe may at first seem a bit involved; however, it's really quite simple and well worth the results. If for nothing else try it for what I've discovered is a better way to roast chicken than the old breast-up method. Everything on the bird seems to cook at the same pace.

Menu (*may serve 2 or 4*)

Herbed Split Roasted Chicken

Baked (small to medium) red potatoes
Roasted elephant garlic
Sautéed baby spinach and romaine lettuce
Good hearty chardonnay

All Ingredients:

+/- 2 1/2 lb., fryer size, whole chicken
Ground salt and pepper
Fresh basil

Celery stalks (few w/leaves) (2 per person)
Chopped dried rosemary (fresh if available)
Regular olive oil
Chives if available
Baby spinach (1 to 2 bags)
Romaine lettuce
2 (at least) heads elephant or regular garlic
Good chicken broth
2 med.-large heavy frying pans

Lay Chicken on a cutting board backbone side up. With a sharp (chef's) knife, cut down backbone on both sides and pull away. Turn over and the breasts, legs and thighs will be on top. In a large frying pan, preferably cast iron, put in a large dollop of regular olive oil and spread. Coat the chicken with olive oil. Salt and pepper. Place the chicken in the pan breast, legs, and thighs up.

Add 6-8 stalks young-ish celery, at least two-a-piece around the chicken. Cut top off one or two whole elephant or regular garlics and set wherever there's room on the chicken. Place in a 425 degree oven for 30 minutes along with the potatoes. (Potatoes may want to go on a small baking sheet or metal pan). Remove chicken and garlic to a baking sheet, leave celery. Cover chicken with aluminum foil and place a towel over. Check potatoes, if not done crank oven back up to 450 degrees and keep checking every 10 minutes.

Pour 4+ oz. of good chicken broth into pan along with a handful of chopped basil, 1 tablespoon chopped rosemary and some chives if available. Reduce liquid by 1/2. Pull the herbs to one side, return the chicken and spoon the liquid over. By this time potatoes should be done. Cook chicken for another 15 minutes at 425 degrees. Remove from oven and allow to rest 10-15 minutes in pan.

Place potatoes in paper towel lined bowl and dish towel over to retain heat.

Using the second large fry pan on medium-high heat, add 2 tablespoons olive oil (for two, 3 for four people), 1 bag per two people washed baby spinach and 4 chopped leaves romaine lettuce per two and two minced garlic cloves. Sauté down using more chicken broth as needed. This can be done as chicken is initially roasted and just reheated.

When chicken is rested and ready to serve, separate the thighs and breasts. Serve a portion of each per plate along with the celery and roasted garlic. Spoon any remaining liquid over. Serve potatoes and spinach/romaine on same plate. You'll find the celery will have soaked up the fabulous herb sauce and garlic flavors and will literally explode the taste buds. I did a bite of celery with a bite of chicken. Wicked.

I hope you enjoy your evening as much as we did. Paul Newman's wine debut happened to be that week and we savored a bottle of his new chardonnay.

Lee S. Wilbur