

Cuban Grilled Mojo Chicken...Sí!

I'm not sure if you noticed this past week but one of the news items out was Forbe's list of wealthiest individuals in the world. One of the names that caught my eye was Cuban Presidente for life Fidel Castro who was listed as being personally worth \$900 million. That's more than Queen Elizabeth (\$500 million) and certainly not in keeping with Fidel's vow of poverty that he touts every time he points fingers at the decadence of the United States.

I guess that's just one more tidbit you can file away in the "Facts Stranger Than Fiction" folder. Who would have ever thought that being a communist leader would pay so well?

I got to know a whole other group of Cubans while I lived in Miami and that's the real story this week. They were a wonderful, warm group of individuals who have embraced their opportunity to become part of our country and brought with them some terrific traditions and to die for recipes that I grew to love.

Some of you will recall from earlier columns the barbecue secret weapon I have mentioned called Mojo Criollo, which is a Cuban/Caribbean marinade and grilling sauce made from citrus juices, garlic, ground cumin and oregano. I generally buy the marinade premade and have had great success with the Goya brand Mojo. (I get it from Jungle Jim's by the case.)

As the bottle points out this is a terrific seasoning for cooking fish, seafood, pork and all kinds of poultry. One of my all time favorites is Cuban grilled chicken and I wanted to explain to you prior to grilling season just how this dish is prepared and urge you to give it a try one of those times that you fire up your grill. It can be successfully prepared on a gas grill but you really miss some of the subtle flavors if you don't use hardwood charcoal. I use hickory charcoal and have been thrilled with the results.

Pollo Loco Grilled Mojo Chicken (one chicken feeds two adults)

Prepare your grill about 45 minutes before you want to begin cooking and allow the coals to fully ignite and reach that stage when they are mostly powdery white and at their peak as far as heat output. When



you place your hand six inches over the coals you should not be able to hold it there for more than a second.

Prepare your whole chicken for the grill by first removing the breastbone from the chicken with good quality poultry shears. Open the chicken up and press it flat on your cutting board. Place the whole chicken in a plastic or glass container and liberally douse it with Mojo Criollo marinade. Cover it and allow it to marinate refrigerated for an hour or more.

Put two cups of marinade in a bowl before you start grilling and have a mop or brush handy. Prep your grill surface with spray on Pam or a little olive oil brushed on before placing the chicken skin up on the grill grate.

This is not a grill it and forget it process and you will have to stay ready with tongs and a misting water spray bottle should you have a problem with flair ups. Add more charcoal if needed and hang in there as great results will take a little time. Flip the bird over skin side down after about 10 to 15 minutes. Time will vary according to temperature and the size of your bird. The best way to know that your chicken is ready to come off of the grill is when the skin is dark golden brown and the meat will easily pull away from the bone. It should be very moist and “fall off the bone” tender when you serve it.

A very hungry adult can usually handle half of the bird and I like to cut it up into serving size pieces using the poultry shears.

Traditionally, this dish is served with black beans and rice (Moros Y Christianos) on the side along with fried ripe bananas. As summer comes around a great pasta salad recipe is excellent on the side with your Cuban chicken and even though it is not traditional this one is easy to make ahead of time and a favorite with children and adults alike.

Italian Bow Tie Salad

(8 to 10 servings)

1 package (16 ounces) Barilla Farfalle (Bow Tie Pasta), prepare as per instructions

8 ounces Mozzarella Cheese, buffalo style packed in brine, cut into ½-inch cubes

1 cup Italian Vinaigrette dressing, adjust amount according to your taste

1 cup black olives, coarsely chopped

1 medium yellow bell pepper, diced into ½ inch squares

3 medium Roma tomatoes, sliced and coarsely chopped

2 tablespoons fresh sweet basil, finely chopped

Romaine Lettuce leaves, cleaned and dried (one per serving)

Sea salt & fresh ground black pepper, to taste

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients except for Romaine. Taste and add salt and black pepper to your personal preference. When serving lay one Romaine Lettuce leaf on your plate and top with one and one half cups of the pasta salad. Toss salad gently from time to time when serving to keep dressing well distributed.

This recipe also makes a great stand alone main course during the summer either as is or with one pound of boiled, shelled and de-veined medium shrimp tossed in with all of the other ingredients.

Summer is a terrific time to enjoy a really well chilled glass of Italian Pinot Grigio and the 2004 Morea Pinot Grigio is an inexpensive, well-made choice that I'm sure will fill the bill. The wine has a nice mild fruit level with enough fresh citrus to keep it refreshing and an ideal choice when the temperature starts to climb.

Some of the best choices for most occasions this summer will be a really well made German Riesling, a crisp Sauvignon Blanc, one of the seriously made Rose wines coming onto the market, perhaps a Shiraz Rose, and a mellow, fruit focused Chardonnay. I've been making suggestions for a number of readers who are getting stocked for summer and am always glad to assist you.

Call if you have any wine questions or comments on our recipes at (888) 288-0668 or visit us on the web at www.winedog.com. Hope you have a wonderful Mother's Day this weekend! I love you, Mom! Cheers.