

Beer Can Chicken

I guess by now nothing should surprise us. A half-filled beer can inserted into the south end of a north bound chicken is quite a conversation piece on the grill and given that image it had better taste good.

I've heard a host of theories as to how this all came to be and my favorite is the paranoid husband who was sneaking a beer out on the deck while barbecuing. He hears the wife approaching. He panics as he looks for a place to hide his brewsky. The rest is BBQ history and the fodder for legends among grill jocks all across the United States.

I don't want this week's column to come off as a joke given the results this peculiar technique produces. You see...the chicken really does turn out wonderfully. The meat is deliciously flavored and lip smacking moist and the whole process is incredibly simple to pull off.



Here's the scoop:

Beer Can Chicken

(serves 4)

- 1 (4-pound) whole chicken
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons of dry spice rub
- 1 can beer

Spice rub: 1 teaspoon paprika, 2 teaspoons dried thyme, 2 teaspoons dried sage, 2 teaspoons dried rosemary, 1 teaspoon red cayenne pepper, 1 teaspoon savory

1. Remove neck and giblets from chicken. You may want to use them at a later time for stock or a special puppy treat. Rinse the chicken thoroughly, inside and out, and pat dry with paper towels.
2. Rub chicken lightly with oil then rub inside and out with salt, pepper and dry spice rub. Set aside.
3. Open the beer can and take several gulps, enough to reduce the can to half filled. Place beer can on a solid surface and grab the chicken by both legs. Place the chicken over the beer can so that it goes well into the body cavity. The chicken should be able to sit upright, supported by both legs and the beer can like a tripod.
4. Transfer the chicken to your grill and set it upright just like it sat on the counter. You will be using the indirect heat method on your medium-high grill. This means there should be no coals or gas flame directly under the bird during cooking. This is accomplished by using only one burner in your gas grill or by placing your hot coals around the bird in a charcoal grill. Put your grill lid down and cook your bird for about 1 ¼ hours or until the internal temperature reaches 165°F in the breast area and 180°F in the thigh. The thigh juice should run clear when it is pricked with a sharp knife. Remove from grill and let rest for 10 minutes before carving.

There are special metal contraptions being sold on the market to hold your beer can and to support the chicken. I have no idea if they make a big difference in your results but they are kind of nifty. (I love nifty cooking gadgets!) Another observation is that you may want to wrap small pieces of foil around the wing tips and ends of your drumsticks to prevent them from charring. It would be more for appearance but that certainly does count for something in your presentation.

I wanted to suggest side dishes for your chicken that put your fresh produce to good use and I've found a couple of ideas that are fun and unique. The first one comes to us via Paula Dean's great country recipes taken from the heart of the South.

Georgia Cracker Salad

(serves 6)

1 sleeve saltine crackers
1 large garden tomato, finely chopped
3 green onions, finely chopped
1 ½ cups mayonnaise
1 hard boiled egg, finely chopped
Sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper

In a medium sized bowl, coarsely crush the crackers with your hands; you should still have some big cracker pieces. Add the remaining ingredients, mix well, and serve immediately over whole pieces of bib lettuce. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

To round out your menu we'll take advantage of those heavenly Vidalia onions we're still getting at the market along with fresh cucumbers. I don't know about you, but we're getting a huge harvest from our cucumber plants this year. Here's how to make good use of a few:

Onion & Cucumber Salad

(serves 8 to 10)

3 medium to large cucumbers

2 medium Vidalia onions

1 ½ cups sour cream

2 teaspoons dried dill weed (if using fresh, you'll need 4 teaspoons)

Sea salt

- 1) Peel and thinly slice your cucumbers. Place them in a large bowl.
- 2) Peel and thinly slice your onions. Add to the cucumbers.
- 3) Add sea salt to taste. Followed by dill then sour cream. Mix everything until cucumbers and onions are well coated. Cover and chill for at least 30 minutes before serving. (Gets better for 2 or 3 days if kept chilled.)

I always like to suggest something from the wine cellar to accompany the recipes we present and this week I would like to suggest another solid summer selection from Germany, the 2002 Jakob Schneider Riesling Kabinett. This delightful white from the Nahe Region offers pleasant tones of bright, crisp apple and a clean citrus tang in the finish.

The wine is imported as part of the stable of great wines from Terry Theise and is offered in those jumbo 1 litre bottles perfect for entertaining. It would be a superb compliment to grilled chicken and the focused fruit does not interfere with the flavors from your salad selections.

Have a great week and let us know if you'd like additional information at 888-288-0668. You can also visit us on the web at www.winedog.com. Cheers.