

The Record

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Better Living

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Not your ordinary bird bath

Forget water; white wine rules this oven-bound tub

Cooler evenings mark a return to comfort foods. And no comfort menu is complete without roasted chicken, or a dish made

from leftover roasted chicken.

Every chef has a favorite technique, some calling for slow-roasting for hours at 250 degrees,

others for blasting the bird at 550-degree heat. But Alex Gorant, the chef at Axia Taverna in Tenafly, has a tried-and-true technique that's kept a multitude of chefs happy.

"This is how we did it for the family meal at Le Bernardin," said Gorant, referring to the communal meal shared by the cooks and waitstaff at the four-star Manhattan restaurant where he apprenticed after graduating from the French Culinary Institute. "It's so good, and it's not even on the menu."

Gorant's chickens don't get stuffed first. Instead, sliced onions, halved garlic bulbs and other aromatics line the bottom of the pan. They're doused in dry white wine before cooking. The combination of aromatics, wine and chicken drippings combine to partially steam the chicken, as well as help form a strongly flavored sauce.

"You can put potatoes or mushrooms in the pan, too," Gorant said. "It all will pick up that great flavor."

For even more flavor, Gorant says, it's important to season the inside and outside of the chicken with salt and pepper. Massaging the chicken with butter also will add flavor, as well as help crisp the skin. "Slather it right up," he said.

— Bill Pitcher



STAFF PHOTOS BY PETER MONSEES

Alex Gorant, chef at Axia Taverna in Tenafly, uses onions, garlic, salt, pepper, butter and wine to infuse roasted chicken with flavor.

■ Glazed chicken and sweet potato hash

- ¼ pound bacon, about 4 slices, cut into thin strips
- 1 large Spanish onion, finely diced
- Kosher salt
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 medium-size sweet potatoes, cut into 1-inch dice
- 1 medium-size russet potato, cut into ½-inch dice
- 2½ cups leftover chicken
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- ½ cup maple syrup
- Freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Brown bacon in a heavy, ovenproof skillet over medium heat until it crisps and renders most of its fat, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels.

Add onion to bacon fat, sprinkle with ½ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring until the onion softens and starts to brown, about 6 minutes. Add garlic and chili powder and cook, stirring for 1 minute. Add potatoes, sprinkle with about 1 teaspoon salt, and cook, stirring for 2 minutes. Stir in chicken, thyme and maple syrup. Toss well.

Transfer to oven and bake, tossing occasionally, until the potatoes are browned and tender, about 30 minutes.

Fold in the bacon, season with salt and pepper to taste.

Servings: 4.

From: "150 Things to Make With Roast Chicken" by Tony Rosenfeld, Taunton, 2007.

■ Chicken with sage and cornmeal dumplings

For the dumplings:

- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup cornmeal
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 1 large egg, beaten
- ½ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh sage

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

In a large bowl, combine flour, cornmeal, baking powder, salt and pepper. Stirring continually, add milk and egg so an even batter forms. Fold in the cheese and sage and set aside.

Melt butter in a large, ovenproof skillet over medium heat. Add leeks, carrots and celery, sprinkle with salt and cook, stirring, until softened, about 10 minutes. Add the paprika and cook, stirring for 30 seconds. Add the broth and vinegar and bring to a boil.

Reduce heat to a simmer, add chicken and cook until vegetables are completely tender, about 10 minutes. Add heaping 1-tablespoon portions of batter to chicken mixture, leaving space between each addition. Cook about 10 minutes, until the batter begins to firm, then flip each dumpling.

Transfer skillet to oven and partially cover. Bake until dumplings are completely cooked, about 20 minutes. Serve immediately.

Servings: 4.

From: "150 Things to Make With Roast Chicken" by Tony Rosenfeld, Taunton, 2007.

For the casserole:

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 medium leeks, white and green parts, finely diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon sweet Hungarian paprika
- 3 cups low-salt chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 3 cups diced leftover chicken

How to roast a chicken



■ Prepare a large skillet or pan with aromatics, including (but not limited to) sliced onions, lemon slices, fresh thyme, garlic cloves and bay leaves.



■ Cover the pan with aluminum foil and bake in a preheated 375-degree oven for 15 minutes.



■ Cut wings off the chicken and add them to the pan. This will prevent them from burning during roasting.



■ Remove foil and baste with pan juices. Continue to cook, uncovered, basting every 5 to 10 minutes.



■ If you'd like, you can truss the chicken to keep the legs from hanging loose. Rub the chicken with room-temperature butter and season — inside and out — with kosher salt and pepper.



■ After about an hour, remove the cooked chicken from the pan (a thermometer should read 165 degrees), and allow it to rest. Place pan on a stovetop and simmer until the pan juices reduce to a sauce.



■ Place the chicken in the pan. Pour enough dry white wine to cover the bottom (about 1 cup).



■ Place the chicken on a platter. Pour pan sauce over top before serving.