

Ready for chicken breasts that aren’t bone dry?

By ELIZABETH KARMEI
Associated Press

We’ve all suffered through cardboard-dry chicken breasts. We do it because periodically we commit (or recommit or re-recommit) to healthy eating. And boneless, skinless chicken breasts are a fine and filling lean protein well suited to the job.

Except for one thing... Because boneless, skinless chicken breasts are so lean, they overcook and dry out heartbreakingly fast. Doesn’t seem to matter whether I grill them or bake them or saute them. I always end up with dry, chewy and unpleasant chicken breasts. No wonder everyone gets irritable when they’re trying to eat healthy.

But I have a secret for cooking chicken breasts that produces moist, tender meat every time. In fact, it’s so foolproof and effortless, you don’t even need to watch the clock. Though the chicken takes just 30 minutes to cook, you can let them go for as long as an hour and you won’t risk ruining them in the slightest.

The secret? Poaching the breasts in a blend of stock, wine and seasonings. But my poaching technique is slightly different than what you’re used to. And that’s what makes it so forgiving.

First, I use a flavor-packed wine-infused stock to poach instead of water. The flavor difference is big. Second, I use mostly residual heat to cook the meat. As in, I bring the chicken



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Wine-poached chicken breasts produce moist, tender meat every time.

stock, wine and aromatics to a boil, then add the raw boneless, skinless chicken breasts. I bring the liquid back to a boil, then turn off the heat, put a lid on the pot, then let the chicken cook. That’s it.

This method allows the chicken to cook slowly, absorbing the seasonings and letting the wine in the broth deepen the flavor of the meat. The chicken is never tough and doesn’t taste “boiled,” which sometimes

happens when you put raw chicken in cold water and boil it.

I started poaching chicken in this manner to use in chicken salad. Moist chicken just tastes better in salad than grilled or baked. And because the chicken is so juicy, you need less mayonnaise when you prepare it this way. But now I make poached chicken breasts for many other dishes — on a green salad; sliced and tossed with pasta; chopped and mixed into soup; mixed

with barbecue sauce for an easy “pulled” chicken wrap; etc.

However you use the chicken, be sure to season it with salt before serving, as there is no added salt in the poaching liquid.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pitmaster at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and author of three books, including “Taming the Flame.”

WINE-POACHED CHICKEN BREASTS

- Start to finish:** 45 minutes
Makes: 6 breasts
- 1 1/2 quarts low-sodium chicken stock or broth
 - 3 cups white wine
 - 3 medium carrots, cut into 2-inch chunks
 - 3 stalks celery, cut into 2-inch chunks
 - 2 medium yellow onions, halved
 - 4 cloves garlic, smashed
 - 4 sprigs fresh thyme
 - 6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

In a large (at least 6-quart) stock pot or Dutch oven over medium-high, combine the chicken stock, wine, carrots, celery, onions, garlic and thyme. Bring to a boil, then gently add the chicken breasts one at a time. If the chicken breasts aren’t entirely covered by liquid, add a bit more stock or water. Return the liquid to a boil.

As soon as the liquid boils, turn off the heat and cover the pot. Allow the breasts to poach for 30 minutes, then use tongs or a slotted spoon to remove from the liquid. Chicken can be used immediately, or refrigerated for up to 3 days.

The poaching liquid can be saved for another use. It can be frozen, then thawed and boiled before reusing.

Nutrition information per breast: 150 calories; 30 calories from fat (20 percent of total calories); 3 g fat (0.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 85 mg cholesterol; 55 mg sodium; 0 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 0 g sugar; 27 g protein.

Take a deep dive into the culinary side of NYC

By J.M. HIRSCH
AP Food Editor

NEW YORK — When eating in New York City, breaking out of the Manhattan mindset is tough, at least for visitors.

Because when you mostly are here on business — no matter how frequently — the glut of great eats in Manhattan makes it easy to ignore the wealth of awesome restaurants and bars in what locals call “the outer boroughs.” Shortsighted, I know. But when you are on the ground for just a few days, places like Brooklyn and Queens can feel forever away.

Which is why a native New Yorker friend recently helped me push my boundaries — and my appetite. It was painless, fun and easy, mostly thanks to the No. 7 subway line.

The 7 line — and its beautiful, spanking-new Hudson Yards station at 34th Street and 11th Avenue — is an easy way for visitors to explore funky and authentic Queens neighborhoods on the rise. Brooklyn is better-known as the city’s hipster destination, but Queens is catching up. It already has multiple Michelin-starred restaurants, including Casa Enrique, M. Wells Steakhouse and Zabb Eleee.

So on a Tuesday afternoon, for \$2.75, we caught a 7 express train and in 35 minutes we were in Flushing, Queens. It felt nothing like Manhattan, but it was the start of what would feel like a culinary United Nations.

Emerging on Flushing’s Main Street, we found ourselves in a swirl of Chinatown: a woman making fresh tofu on the street here, a window of barbecue-bronzed poultry and ribs there. You could spend a day on Main Street alone, poking through the warrens of shops and eateries. But we headed across the street to the New World Mall, a place with enough hard-core foodie cred to have once earned Anthony Bourdain’s attention.

The mall basement is where you’ll find a food court like nothing you’ve seen in the suburbs. A couple dozen stalls offer everything from freshly pulled ramen to delicate filled dumplings to — and here’s the money shot — freshly filled rice rolls (balls). Start at Lan Zhou Hand Made Noodle for ramen that will be pulled and shaped and tossed as you watch. You can get the noodles with nearly anything; we went with lamb.

Just don’t eat too much. This is a



AP Photo/J.M. Hirsch

An Oct. 13, 2015 photo shows the eatery Tao Rice Rolls in the New World Mall in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens. The glut of great eats in Manhattan makes it easy to ignore the wealth of awesome restaurants and bars in what locals call “the outer boroughs.”

marathon, not a sprint.

Now head across the hall to Tao Rice Rolls, where you select your fillings, then watch as the chef masterfully encases them in a ball of lightly seasoned sticky rice. We chose mushrooms, sausage, nori seaweed and dried pork. The result — for a mere \$3.50 — was crunchy, sweet, warm and meaty.

For a delicious visual overload, head upstairs to the JMart, a sprawling Asian supermarket that transports you to lands where duck feet and live turtles are common fare. There are tamer options too, but resist the urge to load up: You have multiple bites and subway stops to go as you eat your way back to Manhattan. (Note: A \$31 MetroCard covers unlimited subway rides, good for seven days.)

Jump back on a Manhattan-bound 7, and get off at 69th Street. At 71-28 Roosevelt Ave., in the working-class, multi-ethnic Jackson Heights neighborhood, you’ll find one of the Michelin stars — Zabb Eleee, which specializes in northern Thai cuisine and also has a Manhattan outpost. The decor is simple, the food is not. Get the beef larb, minced meat salad potent with scallions, chilies and lime. This is what they are known for. But you might also get som tum, a green papaya and crab salad that gets oomph from fermented fish sauce. Wash it down with a lychee martini.

It’s a few blocks to Papa’s Kitchen, 65-40 Woodside Ave., considered one of New York’s best Filipino restaurants. It’s small, intimate and you will be asked — repeatedly — to partake in karaoke. We passed. But we didn’t pass on the Shanghai dynamite (crisply fried spring rolls stuffed with pork and vegetables), nor the pork loin slowly simmered in coconut milk and serrano chilies.

Hop back on the 7 train at the Woodside-61st Street station. Head to the Vernon Boulevard-Jackson Avenue stop for another star-worthy meal, this time at Casa Enrique, 5-48 49th Ave. Up to now, everything has been deliciously down market. Casa Enrique, in the gentrifying Hunters Point-Long Island City area, scales up. Beautifully rustic, it has a relaxed but happening vibe. In good weather, sit on the back covered patio. It feels like another, better, world.

My friend got a mango caipirinha, I went with a chili-spiked margarita. Both were delicious and a great complement to our ceviche and skirt steak tacos. We wanted to order more, but we were stuffed. Stuffed, that is, until I foolishly Googled other eateries and noticed Burnside Biscuits, a new-ish place specializing in biscuits and fried chicken at 32-07 30th Ave. in Astoria. We couldn’t resist.

To get there, we could have taken the 7 from Vernon Boulevard to Queensboro Plaza, then changed for the N to Astoria-Ditmars. Forgive us for succumbing instead to a passing taxi. We were feeling a bit bloated.

Burnside Biscuits shone like a beacon from its spot on a bustling commercial strip. This is no hole in the wall. This is a place to linger with friends. The decor — gleaming open kitchen, deco tiles, brick oven — is classy and casual all at once. And the biscuits? Killer.

By now it was dark. Our stomachs ached. We’d sampled a world of food in six hours. Total cost for two people (with several drinks along the way): \$170.23.

Alas, the 7 train was not nearby, but the elevated N train platform was, so we took that into Manhattan (where you can switch from the N to the 7 at Times Square).

It was enough to make me think maybe there is a food world beyond Manhattan, and it really does deserve a visit. Or 10.



AP Photo/Richard Drew

This 2015 photo shows Baijiu brands, from left, Zhen Pen, Kweichow Moutai, Honk Kong Baijiu, Shui Jing Fang and Lu Zhoulao Jiao at Lumos, a Baijiu bar, in New York.

Chinese liquor baijiu takes a shot at the U.S. cocktail scene

By MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press

Think bourbon is hot? It’s got nothing on baijiu.

Yet chances are good you haven’t even heard of baijiu, the high proof, pungent, spicy, savory, sweet traditional liquor of China. It packs a fiery punch. It also happens to be the world’s best-selling liquor by volume, a drink with a pedigree stretching back centuries, and was poured to toast the warming of U.S.-Sino relations during Nixon’s historic 1972 visit.

Now, producers are making diplomatic overtures to an entirely new audience — the U.S. craft cocktail scene.

“We feel that it has incredible potential,” says Yuan Liu, senior vice president of business development for Los Angeles-based CNS Imports, the largest importer/distributor of baijiu in United States.

Baijiu is sorghum-based, though it also can contain wheat, rice and corn. An it’s not a uniform product; it’s a class of spirits with many categories. Think whiskey with its range from smoky Scotch to mellow bourbon. But unlike whiskey, which is fermented in a liquid distillate, baijiu is more or less dry fermented inside in-ground pits. It then is steam distilled several times in goose-neck stills, aged in massive terra cotta vessels, then finally blended (itself a complex and labor-intensive process.)

It generally is bottled at around 100 or 120 proof (well above the typical 80 proof for vodka, gin, etc.) and is classed by aroma, such as “light,” “rice,” “strong” and “sauce” — labels which aren’t all that helpful to Westerners. Typical reactions from first-timers are that it smells and tastes like blue cheese, mushroom or soy sauce — not the most alluring descriptors.

“This is not a spirit you can just pour into a martini glass and enjoy,” says New York bartender Orson Salicetti.

But introduced more gently as part of a cocktail? That can work, says Salicetti, co-founder of the Lumos bar, which focuses on the Chinese spirit and has a menu of more than 60 baijiu cocktails.

A popular option at Lumos is the “sesame colada,” which includes caramelized pineapple juice, white sesame paste and agave syrup.

Lumos carries a full range of baijiu, including the No. 1 brand, Kweichow Moutai, recognizable by its distinctive packaging of a white bottle with a red and gold label. Other major players include Wu Liang Ye and Shui Jing Fang. A newer brand is HKB, designed with cocktails in mind and bottled at a relatively mild 86 proof. There also is a U.S.-produced baijiu, from Vinn, a distillery just south of Portland, Oregon.

Most of the \$23 billion baijiu market stays in China, though there’s been growing interest in exporting. Most of the baijiu imported to the United States goes to Chinese restaurants and shops. But about two years ago, CNS Imports decided to expand their reach.

They’ve moved slowly, introducing the spirit to bartenders and learning, from experience, to work with rather than mask the unique flavors. “Instead of trying to mask the spirit and make it into something it isn’t, like vodka, they’re essentially creating and building a cocktail around the spirit,” says Liu.

Chinese traditionalists wouldn’t dream of drinking baijiu anything but neat and in very small glasses, which is how Kathy Fang serves it at her family’s FANG restaurant in San Francisco’s bustling SOMA district. Meant to go with food, baijiu pairs well with savory bites, such as Fang’s fried pork confit eggrolls, and it’s been a surprising hit with tech workers who tend to be open to new tastes, says Fang.



AP Photo/J.M. Hirsch

In an Oct. 13, 2015 photo, produce is for sale at JMart, an Asian grocer in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens.