

Low and slow is the way to go with this Greek chicken dinner

By SARA MOULTON
Associated Press

This toothsome chicken dish makes its way into the world via a slow cooker, a kitchen device I've grown to love.

There are several reasons to like slow cookers, even beyond the wonderfulness of being able to toss ingredients into it, head to work and return to a fully cooked dinner in the evening. Thanks to that long, low-temp cooking, slow cookers also are great at reducing tougher cuts of meat to tender goodness. And because they are covered during cooking, moisture doesn't escape and the food stays particularly moist.

The utensil's one drawback (assuming you're using a traditional model) is that you can't brown your meat or vegetables in it. Newer models often have a saute mode, which is handy. But this isn't a deal breaker if you're making a dish that doesn't require browning, such as chicken soup or beans or fish stew. But it'd be nice to have that option when you're making a recipe that depends on browning to build flavor, such as a pot roast or braised lamb shanks.

The first time I prepared this Greek chicken dish, I hoped it would turn out to be one of those throw-the-ingredients-in-the-pot-and-walk-away-from-it-without-a-care-in-the-world miracles. Following the advice of several slow cooker cookbooks, I removed and discarded the chicken skin before cooking it. The theory was that it would end up rubbery and add too much fat to the dish as it cooked.



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Slow cooker Greek chicken.

I also added the onions raw, the garlic smashed, and the rosemary in stalks.

But that approach didn't work out as planned. The finished dish was lackluster and the chicken was dry.

So, back to the drawing board. This time I browned the key components — chicken, onions and garlic — in a skillet before adding them to the slow cooker. I also opted not to remove the skin from the chicken and to dip the chicken in flour before sauteing it. I discarded most of the fat that came out of the skin as it browned, but kept some of it because fat is a conductor of flavor. I reckoned that these two steps would do double-duty: amp the flavor and protect the chicken from drying out.

It worked!

It's worth noting, by the way, that

the skin never became rubbery. It helped that it stuck up above the liquid as it cooked. Also, the chicken's flour coating helped to lightly thicken the sauce. Of course, if you're so inclined, you're welcome to remove the skin just before serving; it will have already done its job.

In the end, the first and final versions of this recipe were as different as night and day. As ever, it's all in the details.

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SLOW COOKER GREEK CHICKEN

Start to finish: 5 1/2 hours (1 hour active)
Servings: 6

- 1 1/2 pounds Yukon gold potatoes, sliced 1/4 inch thick
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- Kosher salt
- 3 pounds bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- Ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup thinly sliced yellow onion
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup chopped pepperoncini (Italian pickled peppers)
- 1 cup pitted Kalamata olives
- 1 whole lemon, cut into 8 wedges
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1/2 cup low-sodium chicken broth or stock

In a large (6-quart) slow cooker, toss the potatoes with 1 tablespoon of the oil and 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Season the chicken on all sides with salt and pepper.

In a large skillet over medium-high, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil. Dip half the chicken in the flour, shaking off the excess, and add the pieces to the skillet, skin side down. Cook until nicely browned on both sides, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer the chicken to the slow cooker, placing it on top of the potatoes, skin side up. Repeat the process with the remaining chicken and flour.

Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of any fat left in the skillet, then return it to medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 8 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Transfer the mixture to the slow cooker. Return the skillet to high heat and add the wine, stirring and scraping to deglaze the pan and loosen any stuck bits. Simmer until the wine is reduced by half, then add to the slow cooker.

Add the remaining ingredients, tucking them among the chicken thighs. Cover and cook on low for 4 1/2 hours or high for 2 1/2 hours. Transfer the chicken and potatoes to serving plates, making sure each portion includes olives, a lemon wedge and sauce.

Nutrition information per serving: 780 calories; 490 calories from fat (63 percent of total calories); 54 g fat (12 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 190 mg cholesterol; 2440 mg sodium; 34 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 2 g sugar; 36 g protein.



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Boost up your broccoli with nutritional yeast

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN
Associated Press

Of all the trendy/healthy/unusual ingredients I use regularly in my cooking, the one I get questions about most is nutritional yeast (which tastes way better than it sounds).

Nutritional yeast — not the same as baking yeast — is a golden, flaky powder typically sold in natural foods stores (usually in the bulk section). It doesn't look like much, but boy does it pack some flavor!

I love nutritional yeast because it has a cheesy, nutty, savory flavor and can be sprinkled liberally on just about any vegetable or savory/salty snack that I make. Freshly popped popcorn or homemade baked kale chips with a bunch of this yeasty, cheesy goodness all over is, quite frankly, snacking perfection.

Nutritional yeast also is my weeknight dinner go-to seasoning for roasted vegetables or veggie purees (mashed potatoes are super tasty!). And

in the mornings, it gets sprinkled on just about every egg white I cook. Plus — bonus! — it's vegan, so if you are cooking for a crowd, it's a safe bet that everyone can enjoy it.

Did I mention it's incredibly healthy, too? Every 2 tablespoons of this stuff adds 9 grams of protein and 4 grams of fiber to whatever you're making, and only 1 gram of fat and 60 calories. Most nutritional yeasts are fortified with B vitamins, making it even better. Plus, nutritional yeast is a naturally good source of iron and selenium.

Please ignore the unfortunate name and try nutritional yeast next time you roast some veggies. And just for fun, in today's recipe I'm sharing a quick stovetop method for making one of my all-time favorites — roasted broccoli. I love roasted broccoli, but sometimes I need dinner on the table in minutes. This recipe makes that happen. So enjoy this double-duty recipe — a new ingredient, and a new technique.

STOVETOP-ROASTED BROCCOLI WITH NUTRITIONAL YEAST

Start to finish: 10 minutes
Servings: 4

- 3/4 pound broccoli florets
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced or pressed
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- 1/4 cup low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock or broth
- 1/4 cup nutritional yeast
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

Heat a large, heavy saute pan or Dutch oven over high until very hot. While the pan heats, in a medium bowl, toss the broccoli with the olive oil until well coated. Place the florets in the hot pan, in a single layer, lightly pressing with a spatula to maximize contact with the hot surface (you should hear sizzling). Cover and cook for 1 1/2 minutes, or until the bottoms of the broccoli have some browning and char.

Uncover and flip the broccoli with the spatula, then press gently again. Cover and cook for another 1 1/2 minutes. Uncover and stir in the garlic and red pepper flakes. Once fragrant (about 1 minute), add the stock and cover, allowing the broccoli to steam for 1 minute. Uncover and sprinkle on the nutritional yeast and vinegar, then stir. Let cook until all the liquid evaporates. Season with salt.

Nutrition information per serving: 80 calories; 25 calories from fat (31 percent of total calories); 3 g fat (0 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 160 mg sodium; 10 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 7 g protein.

Visiting the Aran Islands in Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way

By MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press

KILRONAN, Ireland — Give up Paris, the Irish poet W.B. Yeats told fellow writer J.M. Synge, and go to the Aran Islands in order to "express a life that has never found expression."

The budding playwright took the advice and traveled to the Aran Islands off Ireland's West Coast. He returned full of ideas, incorporating island ways and dialect into works such as his lyrical play, "Riders to the Sea."

Things have changed a bit since Synge made his pilgrimage in 1898, but even today this rocky outpost in Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way remains a place to find respite from modern life and move to a simpler rhythm.

Many visitors treat the islands as a day trip, taking the ferry or flight from Galway. But to really experience the islands' charms, consider spending a few nights. Multiple B&Bs offer reasonable rates.

There are three islands. Most visitors go to the largest, Inishmore. The other two, Inisheer and Inishmaan (the latter is the setting for "Riders to the Sea"), are smaller and less-visited, and can be reached by ferry for day trips from Inishmore.

Here are some basics on planning your trip.

Set the mood

Synge's "The Aran Islands," a book of essays, is fun to dip into. Another classic is the 1934 fictional documentary, "Man of Aran," which took some liberties with historical accuracy. More recently, island scenery was featured in the opening to the '90s sitcom "Father Ted," which is commemorated by the annual Tedfest, held each February.

Need an adrenaline rush with your research? The Red Bull Cliff Diving series has twice held events at Inishmore's Serpent's Lair.



Michelle Locke via AP

In this Sept. 13, 2015 photo, waves pound the naturally formed pool known as the Serpent's Lair on the island of Inishmore in Ireland. This pool has twice been the site of the Red Bull Cliff Diving tour.

Getting there

Aran Island Ferries run from Rossaveal, a one-hour drive from Galway, and take about 45 minutes for the crossing. There's also ferry service from Doolin near the Cliffs of Moher on the west coast of County Clare. Aer Aran offers short flights from Connemara with shuttle service from downtown Galway to the airport and a shuttle on the other end to the village of Kilronan. However you go, book in advance.

Getting around

You can rent a bike at the harbor in Kilronan and go your own way. Or you can take a minivan tour; vans meet the ferries. For a more leisurely approach, try a pony trap tour.

If you have enough time, there's a lot to be said for simply walking and stopping to smell the wildflowers — and say hello to the occasional sheep. The islands are strewn with ruins and miles of stone walls. Be prepared for all types of weather: Bring layers and waterproof outerwear. It may pour in the morning, then turn sunny and warm by afternoon.

Sightseeing

The big attraction on Inishmore is Dun Aonghasa (aka Dun Angus), a prehistoric cliff-top stronghold with four sets of dry stone walls and a "chevaux-de-frise," a band of jagged upright stones meant to deter attackers (open daily 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. in winter and until 6 p.m. in summer, admission, about \$5).

Also worth a look is Dun Duchathair, the Black Fort. Not much is left of the fort but it has a breathtaking coastal setting. The Serpent's Lair, of Red Bull fame, is a naturally formed pool connected to the ocean by an underwater channel. The rocks can be slippery; wear shoes with good soles.

The Aran Sweater Market in Kilronan sells garments knit in the famous Aran pattern as well as yarn and patterns for the crafty.

In Inishmaan, you can visit the cottage where Synge stayed.

Food

The quality of the food may come as a pleasant surprise. You'll find delicious fresh fish and hearty specialties like Irish stew and Guinness chocolate cake. Popular spots on Inishmore include Teach Nan Phaidi and Ti Joe Watty's, which has live music week-ends and throughout the summer. The economically named The Bar pub serves a stew that will restore you if you've spent the day hiking. The Pier House Restaurant has an elegant dining room with a view.

Accommodations

The Aran Islands Hotel has rooms with balconies and views, starting at around \$85. The Seacrest B&B has rooms with baths for about \$60 a night including a full Irish breakfast. Seacrest co-owner Thomas Faherty gives excellent pony-and-trap tours of the island.

Will your stay in the islands awake your inner genius? Hard to say. But you may find yourself feeling the way Synge did one evening as he strolled along Galway Bay and looked westward.

"The sort of yearning I feel towards those lonely rocks," he wrote, "is indescribably acute."



Michelle Locke via AP

This Sept. 13, 2015 photo shows a pony-and-trap awaiting its rider on Inishmore in the Aran Islands in Ireland. A cart tour is a good way to take in the sights of Inishmore in sunny or stormy weather.