

## **212 – ON THE WING**

YAKITORI  
MALAYSIAN SPATCHCOCKED CHICKENS  
HERB-STUFFED GAME HENS  
GRILLED POLENTA

### **YAKITORI**

Source: How to Grill, pg. 252

Method: Direct

Serves: 6 to 8 as an appetizer, 4 as a main course

For the yakitori:

2 bunches scallions, trimmed

1-1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts

For the yakitori sauce:

1 cup soy sauce

3/4 cup sugar

1/2 cup mirin (sweet rice wine)

1 scallion, trimmed, white part gently crushed, green part thinly sliced

1 clove garlic, gently crushed with the side of a cleaver

1 slice peeled fresh ginger (1/4-inch thick), gently crushed with the side of a cleaver

1 strip lemon zest (1/2 by 2 inches)

Toasted sesame seeds for garnish

You'll also need:

32 small bamboo skewers or 16 double-pronged skewers

Heavy duty aluminum foil folded into thirds, like a business letter, to make a grill shield

Trim any sinews or excess fat off the chicken breasts and discard. Rinse under cold running water, then drain and blot dry with paper towels. Cut the scallions and chicken breasts into uniform 1-1/2 inch pieces and double skewer them (run two bamboo skewers through the meat and scallions). Refrigerate, covered, until ready to cook.

Prepare the sauce: Place the soy sauce, sugar, mirin, scallion white, garlic, ginger, and lemon zest into a nonreactive saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Let the sauce simmer until thick and syrupy, 5 to 10 minutes, stirring often to prevent scorching. Strain the sauce into a nonreactive bowl and let cool to room temperature. Set some aside to serve as a dipping sauce, if desired.

Set up the grill or hibachi for direct grilling and preheat to high. When ready to grill, brush and oil the grill grate. Lay the aluminum foil grill shield parallel to the front edge of the grill. Place the yakitori on the grill, arranging in a line so the exposed bottoms of the skewers are protected by the foil shield.

Grill the yakitori, turning after 2 minutes, to cook the outside of the meat. Begin basting with the sauce, and continue basting and turning until the chicken is cooked, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Alternatively, put the sauce in a shallow dish. When partially cooked, dip the yakitori in the sauce and continue grilling. The sauce should cook to a shiny glaze and the meat should feel firm to the touch when done.

Transfer the yakitori to plates or a platter and sprinkle with the scallion slices and sesame seeds. Although it's not strictly traditional, I like to serve a little reserved glaze in a tiny bowl as a dipping sauce.

## **GAME HENS FLAVORED WITH HERBS AND MUSTARD**

Source: How to Grill, pg. 274

Method: Rotisserie/Spit Roasting

Serves: 4

Advance Preparation: 30 minutes to 2 hours for marinating the hens

4 game hens (1 to 1-1/4 pounds each)

1-1/2 cup loosely packed, stemmed mixed fresh herbs, such as basil, rosemary, oregano, thyme, marjoram, chives, and/or flat-leaf parsley

3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped

1 teaspoon coarse salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

1/4 cup Dijon-style mustard

1/4 cup lemon juice

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus 1 to 2 tablespoons oil for basting

8 whole fresh sage leaves

You'll also need:

Rotisserie; butcher's string

Remove the package of giblets (if any) from the body cavities of the hens and set aside for another use. Remove and discard the fat just inside the neck and body cavities. Rinse the game hens, inside and out, under cold running water and then drain and blot dry, inside and out, with paper towels. Loosen the skin from the meat of the game hens.

Make the herb paste: Place the herbs, garlic, salt, and pepper in a food processor and process to finely chop. Add the mustard followed by the lemon juice and 1/2 cup of the oil to make a nice thick paste.

Holding the hens upright (place in a bowl or pot if necessary), spoon about 1/8 of the herb paste into the space between the skin and the body of each hen; massaging the skin to spread the paste evenly over the hen. Insert 2 sage leaves under the skin of each hen, trying to position a leaf in the center of each side of the breast. Place 1 teaspoon herb paste into the cavity of each hen.

Truss the game hens. Arrange them in a nonreactive roasting pan or baking dish and spoon the remaining herb paste over them. Let the hens marinate in

the refrigerator, covered, for as little as 30 minutes (while you preheat the grill) or as long as 2 hours.

Set up the grill for rotisserie grilling and preheat to high. When ready to cook, skewer the game hens on the spit, remembering to attach one set of grill prongs on the spit beforehand. Attach the spit and turn on the motor. Grill the hens until golden brown on the outside and cooked through, 40 minutes to 1 hour. Brush the hens with the reserved oil as they roast. To test for doneness, insert an instant-read meat thermometer into the thickest part of a thigh but not so that it touches the bone. The internal temperature should be at least 165 degrees.

Transfer the hens to plates or a platter and let rest for 5 minutes. Remove the trussing strings and serve at once.

## GRILLED POLENTA

Source: BBQ USA, pg. 428

Method: Direct

Serves: 4

Advance Preparation: 4 hours to 2 days for chilling the polenta

2 cups coarse yellow cornmeal

6 cups water or good-quality, low sodium chicken stock (preferably homemade)

1 teaspoon salt, or more to taste

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup heavy cream

1/2 cup (2 ounces) Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated, or Taleggio cheese, rind trimmed off, and cheese cut into small pieces

2 to 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, or extra-virgin olive oil

Combine the cornmeal, water, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper in a large, heavy saucepan and whisk until smooth. Bring the mixture to a boil over high heat and boil for 2 minutes, whisking steadily. (You may want to protect your hand with an oven mitt as polenta splatters.)

Reduce the heat to a gentle simmer and stir in the cream, and if desired, 2 tablespoons melted butter or oil. Simmer the polenta gently, uncovered, until the mixture thickens enough to pull away from the sides of the pan, 30 to 40 minutes. It should be the consistency of soft ice cream. You don't need to whisk the polenta continuously, but you should keep a careful eye on it, giving it a stir every 5 minutes. As it thickens, you'll need to switch from a whisk to a wooden spoon. Add the cheese, and stir until melted and incorporated. Correct the seasoning, adding salt and pepper to taste; the polenta should be highly seasoned.

Pour the polenta into a nonstick jellyroll pan or cake pan and smooth the top with a spatula. The polenta should be about 1/2 inch thick. Let cool to room temperature, then cover loosely with aluminum foil and refrigerate until firm, at least 4 hours, or as long as 2 days.

Preheat the grill to high.

While the grill is heating, cut the cold polenta with a knife or cookie cutter into squares, rectangles, or fanciful shapes no more than 3 inches across. Use a spatula to remove them from the pan to a large plate. When ready to cook, oil the grill grate. Brush both sides of the polenta pieces with 2

tablespoons melted butter or oil. Arrange the polenta on the hot grate and cook, turning with a spatula, until sizzling hot and nicely browned on both sides, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Serve immediately.

## KELATAN SPICY GRILLED CHICKEN

Country of origin: Malaysia

Method: direct grilling

Advance preparation: 1 to 2 hours for marinating the chicken

Serves: 2 to 4

Kelantan is Malaysia's northeastern-most province—a lush hinterland famed for its rice paddies, fishing villages, and above it its Thai-influenced cuisine. (Thailand lies just to the north.) Not surprisingly, the local grilling reflects a marked Thai influence in the form of marinades enriched with coconut and chilies. (Of course, you'll also taste lemongrass, shallots, and fresh turmeric—ingredients popular throughout the entire Malaysian peninsula.) There's one technique here you may not previously have seen—dry-frying the grated coconut to give it a toasted flavor. I've made the process optional, but the chicken will definitely be richer because of it. Here's how a Kelantan chef working in Kuala Lumpur named Fandi prepares it, and if you've ever found grilled chicken to be bland or mono-dimensional, this one will light up your mouth like an Independence Day sky.

1 chicken (3-1/2 to 4 pounds)

For the marinade:

¼ cup grated coconut (fresh or dried)

6 cloves garlic, peeled and rough chopped

2 shallots, peeled and rough chopped

2 stalks lemongrass, trimmed and rough chopped

2 inches fresh ginger, peeled and rough chopped

2 hot red chilies, like jalapenos or horn peppers, seeded and rough chopped

(for spicier chicken, leave the seeds in), or 2 tablespoons Malaysian chili paste

1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon turmeric powder

2 teaspoons salt

2 tablespoons diced red or yellow bell pepper (optional)

2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds (optional)

Fresh calmonsis or lime wedges for squeezing

1. Spatchcock the chicken. Make 2 deep slashes to the bone in each leg and thigh. Fold the wingtips back behind the wings. Place the bird in a non-reactive baking dish just large enough to hold it.
2. Make the marinade. Place the dried shredded coconut in a dry cast iron or stainless steel skillet (not nonstick) and cook it over medium heat until browned and fragrant, stirring with a wooden spoon to prevent scorching. Transfer the coconut to a bowl to cool.
3. Place the garlic, shallots, lemongrass, ginger, chilies, coriander, cumin, turmeric, and salt in a heavy mortar and pound to a paste with a pestle. Pound in the toasted coconut and about 3/4 cup cool water—enough to obtain a thick but pourable paste. Alternatively, puree the marinade ingredients in a food processor. Again, add water as needed to obtain a thick but pourable paste. Spoon this mixture over the chicken, forcing it into the slits in the legs, turning the bird to coat well on both sides. Marinate the chicken for 1 to 2 hours in the refrigerator.
4. Set up your grill for direct grilling and preheat to medium. Brush and oil the grill grate.
5. Drain the chicken and arrange it on the grill grate bone side down. Grill until golden brown and cooked though, 15 to 20 minutes per side, turning half way through. Move the chicken as needed to dodge any flare-ups. To check for doneness: use an instant read meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh but not touching the bone: the temperature should be about 170 degrees. Alternatively, make a cut in the chicken meat where the thigh connects to the body: there should be no traces of red at the bone.
6. To serve, transfer the chicken, skin side up, to a platter. Sprinkle the top with sesame seeds and diced bell pepper (if using). Serve with calamansis or lime wedges for squeezing and Malaysian Peanut Sauce if desired.

Note: you can also indirect grill the chicken—a processes which, although, not traditionally Malaysia, has the advantage of eliminating all risk of flare-ups. Set up your grill for indirect grilling and preheat to medium. Place the chicken skin side up in the center of the grate over the drip pan. Indirect grill the chicken until browned and cooked through, 40 to 60 minutes