

Bay Leaf Seasoning

[Penzey's Spices](#) used to put out an herb mix that was great for roasting chicken. Apparently, I was the only one who bought it, because they stopped selling it a couple years ago. Here's how to make it yourself. Aside from the bay leaves, you'll only use a portion of the other ingredients, so you can make multiple batches, or use them in your other recipes. Not



counting the salt and pepper, the total cost today is 16.44.

[1/2 oz bag bay leaves](#) (2.65)

[2 T thyme leaves](#) (2.95)

[2 T rosemary leaves](#) (2.49)

[1 T basil leaves](#) (2.45)

[1 T dried onion](#) (2.95)

[1 T oregano](#) (2.95)

1/2 t ground pepper

[2 T garlic salt](#) (2.95)

1 T plain salt

Grind together in a food processor or spice grinder until it's a course powder.

How to pack okra for pickles



After you've trimmed off a bit of the stem end, and a bit of the pointy end, pack your one pint sterilized jars with okra, first filling the bottom with the enough okra to fill the bottom of the jar, thick end pointing down. Then cram as many more as you can in between them, thick end pointing up. Then tuck in as many tiny okra as you can in and around the top area. 2 pounds of okra should fill about 5 pint jars.

Best Damn Smoked Chicken Recipe, period



This may be the best thing that could ever happen to a chicken.

I get a whole lot of compliments on this one. There are some members of my extended family who insist I bring this to any family gathering, regardless of the time of year. The technique of putting lit coals over top of unlit coals ensures a nice, long burn, and will provide enough heat for the 2-hour long cooking time. This recipe specifically relies on using a

Webber kettle grill. You'll need to further experiment in order to come up with the proper technique for a different kind of grill.

2 whole chickens, 3 to 4 pounds each
2 fist-sized lumps of chunk fruit wood
1 aluminium drip pan, 10×14
20 – 30 charcoal briquettes
cooking spray
1 cup salt
1 cup sugar
7 quarts of water

Take two chickens and cut them each into 8 pieces – 2 breasts, 2 wings, 2 drumsticks, and 2 thighs. Save the rest for chicken stock. Brine the chicken in 6 quarts of water that you've dissolved a cup of sugar and a cup of salt for 30 minutes to an hour. Remove the chicken from the brine and dry with paper towel. Season it with pepper, and spray both sides with cooking spray.

Soak wood in water for 15 minutes. (I've tried both apple and cherry wood, and can't detect any difference in flavor, but do avoid mesquite because it's just too strong a flavor.)

Light half a chimney full of briquettes and let burn in chimney until the top is white with ash. In your kettle grill, put an aluminum pan on one side and fill it with a quart of water. On the other side, put in 20 unlit briquettes, and nestle the wood chunks in it. Close the top and bottom vents of the grill to the halfway point. Pour the lit charcoal over top of the wood and the unlit charcoal, and put on the grill, and let it heat for 5 minutes with the lid on, then clean the grill and put on the chicken, skin side up, and putting the breasts around the outside, over top of the pan of water, furthest from the heat. Put the cover back on, and let the chicken cook undisturbed for 90 to 120 minutes.

Bolognese Ragu

I ended up getting a bumper crop of red plum tomatoes from my garden this week, so I made this sauce. I prepared the tomatoes by peeling the skins off (dip into boiling water for 30 seconds), then cutting them in half, removing the seedy goo inside, and dousing them with a little balsamic vinegar on sheet pans, and then roasting them in a very hot oven. When they were done, I ran them through the food processor. But you could whiz a couple cans of plum tomatoes if you want. The trick about reducing the wine and adding it as a syrup is probably cheating, but it cuts down on the cooking time by 45 minutes. Overall, expect this sauce to take 2 to 3 hours to make. Freezes well.



1 onion, cut into 8ths

½c baby carrots

2 stalks of celery, cut into 3rds

2 T butter

½ lb ground beef

½ lb ground pork

½ lb ground bison (or ground veal)

2 T tomato paste

1 pint whole milk

2 c red wine

3 cans San Marzano plum tomatoes, whizzed in the food processor, or fresh tomatoes, treated as described above.

2 cups chicken stock

Run the vegetables through a food processor until they're chopped quite fine. Put into a preheated, thick bottomed pot (over medium heat) with the butter and cook until softened and

fragrant. Add the meat and break it up with your spoon. You're not really trying to brown anything, just get it all into smaller pieces. Mix in tomato paste. Add the milk and bring it to a boil, then simmer until most of the liquid is evaporated, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, in a separate sauce pan, reduce the red wine to a syrup, then add it to the milk and meat mixture. Add in the tomatoes and then simmer, simmer, simmer. Low and slow, with the lid off. You want it to barely bubble. Stir it often, and cook it until it's thick.

Better Roast Chicken



So it seems pretty straight-forward, but I never actually tried it until last week. A better way to roast a chicken. I've often lamented the fact that the thighs and drumsticks are rarely ever completely cooked to my liking, or if they are, the breast meat is completely overdone. Taking a cue from recipes for roasted turkey, I decided to try twirling the bird.

First, salt and pepper the bird, inside and out. If you want to get fancy, put a couple spoonfuls of [compound butter](#) underneath the skin of the breast. Then put the 3 to 3½ pound chicken on a roasting pan that's preheated in a hot oven (425°), but put it in on its side, and let it cook for 15 minutes. Then turn it on its other side for another 15 minutes. Finally, roast it breast side up for 25 to 35 minutes more, basting the bird every 10 minutes. You should hear the

chicken sizzling the whole time while it's in the oven. (You know it's done when the joints move easily.) Then let it rest outside of the oven for 15 minutes more, covered with foil.

The result is an very moist and completely cooked chicken. What's more, as with other roast chicken recipes, it's just as easy to cook two chickens at the same time, either to feed a crowd or for copious leftovers. And though it's a little more work, and I can't wander far from the kitchen, it's definitely going to be my go-to way to roast a chicken from now on – or, at least until some novel method presents itself.

Eleven Herbs and Spices Revealed?

Ron Douglas, author of [America's Most Wanted Recipes](#), claims he has discovered the secret recipe after lots of chicken, and years of testing. According to [an article in The Guardian](#), the secret ingredients are :

- 1 teaspoon ground oregano*
- 1 teaspoon chili powder*
- 1 teaspoon ground sage*
- 1 teaspoon dried basil*
- 1 teaspoon dried marjoram*
- 1 teaspoon pepper*
- 2 teaspoons salt*
- 1 teaspoon paprika*
- 1 teaspoon onion salt*
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder*
- 2 tablespoons Accent (MSG)*

Unfortunately, it's still pretty difficult to duplicate the

fast food chain's cooking methods, since they use pressure cookers to fry their chicken. However, the home cook does have the advantage of being better able to drain the excess grease from the fried chicken, since we're not cooking dozens of chickens at once. Also, home cooks have the option of buying better quality, organic, free-range chicken if they choose to. The Guardian even claimed to have come up with what they call a superior mix of herbs and spices, that doesn't include MSG. This is their recipe and recommended process, the best I can interpret it from the article, as they only roughly describe the process, but they do give a detailed listing of their choice of herbs and spices. They recommend poaching the chicken in milk to insure the chicken is cooked completely to the bone, but that's a step I've never seen in any fried chicken recipe.

"It's worth noting that chicken marinated and poached in milk has an unbelievably suave flavour and texture, and that the poaching liquid thickens to create the most soothing cream of chicken soup I've ever achieved," says the article.

- 1 half gallon whole milk*
- 1 whole chickens, each cut into 8 pieces*
- 1 tsp smoked paprika*
- 1 tsp mustard powder*
- 1 tsp sage*
- 1 tsp celery seeds*
- 1 tsp sugar*
- 1 tsp dried onion flakes*
- 2 tsp salt*
- 1 tsp ground black pepper*
- 1 tsp ground white pepper*
- 2 cups all-purpose flour*
- peanut oil for frying*

Cut the chickens into 8 parts, splitting the breast in half to allow for even cooking, and saving the backs, necks and wing tips for stock. Marinate overnight in the milk. The next day,

lightly poach the chicken in the milk bath for 15 minutes. Remove from heat, and drain. Use enough peanut oil to make a depth of 1 inch in a frying pan. Bring up to 350° heat. While the oil is coming to temperature, mix the spices with the flour. Coat each piece of chicken with the flour mixture, and let set for a couple of minutes, then re-coat each piece. Fry the chicken in the oil, 6 minutes on each side, or until the coating is golden brown. Remove the chicken to a rack and allow excess oil to drip off.

The results were ok. Nothing fantastic. Each piece of chicken was fully cooked, but I didn't really detect the suave flavor and texture described. In fact, some of the skin was a little chewy and flabby. And frankly, the coating did not come near the flavor of KFC, or any other chain-store fried chicken place I've tried. In fact, I'd say it was comparable to cheap grocery store fried chicken.

In the end, my wife and I just didn't think it came close to competing with [my personal favorite recipe for fried chicken](#), which I think is better than anything you can buy. What I may do, though, is use most of my technique from that recipe, but try to spice it up with the different herbs and spices from these new recipes. Look for that in the coming weeks.

Julia's Method for Cheeseburgers

I watched an old episode of *Cooking with Jacques and Julia*, on the topic of beef, and they demonstrated their methods for making hamburgers, so I decided to give Julia Child's method a try for dinner last night. The result was really good.

1 lb. ground beef (85/15)

1 shallot diced

1 tablespoon butter

4 poppy seed kaiser rolls

salt and pepper

optional toppings : arugula, cheese, bacon, sliced tomato, ketchup, etc.

Saute the shallot in the butter until translucent, and set aside. Separate the beef into 4 equal parts. Work each part into a rough, thin patty, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, using a chopping motion with the back of a knife, working in a quarter of the sauteed shallot and salt and pepper. It's not crucial that the resulting patty is perfectly round. Fry the patties on a cast iron griddle for 2 or 3 minutes per side. When you flip each over, you can add the cheese to get it melted. Remove from the heat and let rest. Meanwhile, spread a little butter or oil on the cut sides of the kaiser roll, and toast on the griddle.

Pan-roasting the Best Steak

My wife and I have pretty much stopped ordering steak when we go out, since I seem to be able to cook it better than they can, for less money... granted, I can't say how my steak compares to the really expensive steak houses. They probably have access to better cuts of meat than I can get, so they might have an edge in that department. Still, I'm sure we're saving money, even if it is an extravagant meal, but since I only do it about once a month, it's bearable.

First off, you need to buy the proper steak. It won't do to go to the Safeway, and buy whatever red meat they've got on sale. The cut of steak that you choose is important. It boils down

to three, as far as I'm concerned : filet, strip, or ribeye. My wife prefers the filet mignon, but I usually always go for the strip. I'll only buy ribeye if it's on sale, since it's a substantially fattier cut.

You'll also want to find the best butcher that you can. For me, that ends up being at Whole Foods. Look for good marbelling – little lines of yellow fat flowing through the deep red of the meat. I also like to get one that's an inch thick. I'll sometimes go for the dry-aged steak, which costs \$4 more per pound, but most times, I'll just go for the prime. Recent prices peg that at \$17 a pound, with one steak usually coming in at one pound, and one strip steak like this will feed both of us for one meal. Pricey, yes, but if you went to a fine steak house, there's no way we'd both eat for \$17.

45 minutes to an hour before you're ready to start cooking, take the steak out of the fridge and to let it start coming to room temperature. 20 minutes before you start cooking, set your oven to 300° and let it preheat. 5 minutes before you start cooking, turn a burner on high, and put a cast iron frying pan on it, and let it start getting hot.

Meanwhile, unwrap the steak, and dry the surface off with a paper towel, then liberally coat the steak with salt and fresh ground pepper. You can also put a couple drops of canola oil on one side, and rub it all over that side.

Now turn on the exhaust fan, and open a window a little bit, because there may be a little smoke. Put the steak(s) in the pan, oiled side down, and let it cook for 4 minutes. Then turn the steak over, and cook another 4 minutes. Then move the pan into the oven, and let it roast. The amount of time you let it roast really depends on how thick the steak was. I've found that for a 1 inch thick steak, roasting it another 8 minutes seems to give a good medium-rare.

There's a way to tell how your steak is cooked by touch. Hold

your left hand out, relaxed, and feel the section of skin at the base of your thumb and forefinger. This is how a rare steak will feel when you press it. Now flex your hand, stretching your fingers and thumb out. Press your finger at the fleshy base of your thumb near the palm. This is how a medium steak will feel when cooked correctly. (I can't tell you how to figure out what a well-done steak feels like because I've never done it, and think it's a bit of a sin.)

Once your steak is of the proper doneness, you're still not ready to eat. You have to let the meat rest. Let it sit on a plate for 15 minutes, loosely covered with foil. This lets the piece of meat relax a little, and allow all the juice that's been forced into the center of the cut to redistribute.

Bonus : You can do this same method on a charcoal grill. Follow the instructions for preparing the meat, but instead of preheating the oven and the pan, prepare your charcoal grill as you normally would, but keep the coals only on one side of the kettle. (In a gas grill, if you only light one element, you should be able to replicate the same cooking conditions.) Grill the steak over the hot side, similar to above, at 4 minutes a side. (You could even cook it 2 minutes, then turn the steak a quarter turn, and cook it for another 2 minutes. This will give you those professional looking grill marks.) Once that's done, move the steak to the cooler side of the grill, and put on the lid. There's no telling how long you'll want to cook it this way, since it really depends on how hot your coals are. You can try telling by touch, or by using an instant read thermometer.

On an instant-read thermometer, your rare steak should read about 110° in the center, before resting. Medium rare, 120°, and medium, 130°. If you must eat your steak well done, you'll be ok if you get it up to 145°.

Portion Control and Plate Size

I've never been much on the importance of plate presentation, and I've got no scientific proof to back it up, but I can tell you that if you're looking to lose weight, one of the first things you could do is get rid of all your plates and bowls. My wife and I are trying to lose weight – she's using an organized program, and when she first started, I would dish out her evening meal, and it would sit, lonely, in the vast emptiness of the plates we had. Not long after, I bought a bunch of plain, white salad plates from a discount housewares store. These plates are probably 8 inches across instead of the 12 inches of our old plates. Now when I serve up our servings, the plates seem more overflowing. I also bought smaller bowls. These hold about a cup or so of liquid, half as much as our old bowls. If nothing else, it helps us both feel like we're not skimping on our meals, and I do believe we both feel more satisfied, and less likely to opt for seconds.

Why are people afraid of pressure cookers?

Don't let your grandma's tale of kitchen

terror dissuade you from using this great time-saving device.

(I realize I've been talking incessantly about my new toy, so I hope you'll indulge me a little longer...)

Aside from the rattle of an old-fashioned pressure cooker, and the escaping of steam, there's really nothing on the face of them that make them any different from a regular pot and lid. Except for the possibility of them exploding. And you might even have some family lore that would justify the fear.

The pressure cooker was invented back in the early 20th century, and was used as a method for industrial canning. They didn't make it to the home market until the late 1930's, and were thought to be completely safe. (They were even used on early transcontinental airline flights to provide hot meals for passengers.) Then came World War II, and the US government was hungry for the aluminum that the pressure cookers were made from. Companies that manufactured them were retooled to make military equipment, like airplane engine parts. Housewives were encouraged to donate their pots and pans for the war effort. After the war, the swords returned to ploughshares, and companies retooled once again to make household goods. But the quality of the pots and pans weren't that great. Production methods favored quantity over quality. Tons of cheap, poorly made pressure cookers hit the market in the late 40's and early 50's, and they had the reputation – rightfully so – of exploding under the higher than normal pressures. So if you were a lucky enough cook not to personally experience an in-kitchen detonation, chances are you were wary enough of them to tuck the pots in the deepest depths of your cupboards – only to have them be resurrected by your heirs in the 70's, who also experienced the same disastrous results.

These days, however, the newer pressure cookers are designed

with safety features – pressure regulating systems, and durable, high-quality stainless steel construction. There's little reason to fear them now.

And there's certainly no reason to splurge on the electronic gadgetry that mesmerized me recently. Although I've used it for some aspect of every meal I've made since I bought it – either for the main course, or for a side dish – you can certainly make do with a less expensive, more conventional model. It'll just require a little more attention and care, but you'll save a lot on the price. A good 6 quart [pressure cooker](#) can be had for as little as \$40.

One thing I've really noticed while working with mine is that pressure cookers seem to eat up garlic. No matter how many cloves of garlic I add, the flavor just vanishes.