



# Perfect Fried Chicken

*What could be more patriotic – at least in these parts – than Southern fried chicken times three?*

BY JIM DODSON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY SAM FROELICH

**D**uring my freshman year in college I was one of the most popular guys on my dorm hall owing to a surprising factor.  
My mom's fried chicken.  
The first time I returned from a weekend at home bearing a care package that contained half a dozen pieces of her Sunday fried chicken, the chicken quickly vanished in an instant and I was doomed to have to repeat the process for the rest of my freshman year.

What was so special about her fried chicken? I can't quite put my finger on it. Hers was crispier and darker than conventional fried chicken, bathed in buttermilk and some kind of thickly seasoned flour that sealed in the juices that made the taste buds stand up in patriotic salutation.

Indeed, to most of us, nothing except apple pie may be as "American" as fried chicken – something of an irony since, according to James Beard's seminal work *American Cookery*, fried chicken may have in fact originated as a Viennese dish called "Wiener Backhendl," a favorite in Austria for generations. "The only difference," writes Beard, "is that there is a larger amount of lemon juice in the Viennese recipe, which gives it a more attractive flavor."

Moreover, traditional "Southern" fried chicken did not find much acceptance in the North till the last quarter of the 19th century when a popular 1877 edition of a cookbook for New England cooks mentions a "a simple method for frying spring chicken primarily used by Southern Negro cooks."

Unfortunately, my mom took her popular Southern fried chicken recipe to the grave, confirming food writer Calvin Trillin's wry observation that a great fried chicken recipe, like a fine second-hand bookshop or a bad third world dictatorship, often doesn't survive being passed down to the next generation.

That being the case, and July being the biggest month for America's insatiable fried-chicken consumption – the 6th is actually National Fried Chicken Day – we're blessed here in the Triad with some of the best fried chicken cooks to be found anywhere.

Thus, for your dining or family picnic pleasure, we present a trio of outstanding Triad cooks patriotic enough to share their secret fried chicken recipes.

## Ova the Top

Which came first, the fried chicken or the deviled eggs?

Well, in my childhood picnics, it was the deviled eggs. Not that we were accustomed to midday appetizers, but the sunny ovals — always dusted with paprika — were the perfect overture to my mom's exquisite fried chicken. The egg-chicken combo seemed like a natural progression.

But by the same token, I've always thought of deviled eggs as a gentle intro, a mild-mannered sidecar, nothing more.

Over the years, I've popped many a yolkin-a-boat, and most of them, honestly, have left me clucking. Something about the texture. Too slippery. Too mayonnaise-y. Too bland to the eye and mouth.

But not long ago, I tripped over some attractive-looking recipes online. I confess that it was precisely the look of these deviled eggs that snared me. Bloggers and Pin-sters were dyeing the whites all kinds of snazzy pastels: electric pinks, blues and yellows. They were doing this after the eggs were boiled and peeled, but before they were halved, gutted and restuffed.

These iconoclasts were also revving up the mashed yolks with wasabi, blue cheese and the like. They were garnishing with caviar, pickled ginger, baby shrimp and smoked salmon. And, gasp, they were turning the eggs on end and slicing them short-ways, to resemble little cups, which they filled and tucked back into lettuce-lined hollows of egg cartons, lest they Humpty-Dumpty onto the floor.

In short, deviled eggs were breaking out of their shells. Now, they had my attention. Recently, I took a turn at creating some colorful little devils that would pair well with fried chicken or stand alone as an app. Even my college-age son, who is suspicious of eggs served on any platform other than a fast-food biscuit, nodded his approval.

Like everything else that issues from my kitchen, this recipe is very simple — emphasis on *very* — and not terribly precise. As my husband says, I view measurements as a suggestion.

Here, then, is the basic idea for Maria's Sunny-Side-Out Savory Bacon-and-Eggs.

Step One: Boil and peel six eggs.

Step Two: Squirt about three tablespoons of yellow hot dog mustard into a small mixing bowl, add water, whisk well. Submerge peeled eggs and let sit in refrigerator for a couple of hours. I don't have to tell you what mustard does to white. If you want pink eggs, use the juice from a jar of pickled beets. Blue? I dunno. Mash up some blueberries or use blue dye. This is supposed to be simple, remember?

Step Three: Rinse eggs, slice longways, pop out yolks into mixing bowl.

Step Four: Add just one heaping tablespoon of mayo. This is key if, like me, you detest the puréed consistency of most deviled yolks. Throw in a tablespoon of spicy brown mustard; a healthy dash of sriracha sauce or your fave heat; a wee bit of curry powder; a teaspoon of sweet pickle juice if it's around (if not, don't sweat it); a few twists of ground pepper and shakes of salt; and a rasp or three of Parmesan cheese.

Step Five: Mash it up. It'll be a little chunky. Use a fork to stuff the mixture back into the yolks. Looking for some visual texture here, too, folks.

Step Six: Nuke a slice of bacon. Break it up. Stick a little piece of bacon in each egg. If you have fresh dill, drop a few whiskers on each egg. If not, rain lightly with dried dill.

Wha-lah, as the French say. Stick that *oeuf* in your *bouche*, and share the rest with your picnic peeps. — Maria Johnson



## Lucky 32's Sunday Fried Chicken

"There are few things more traditional than Southern fried chicken for Sunday supper," says Lucky 32's Executive Chef and General Manager Felicia McMillan, who learned her Southern cooking stripes loitering at her grandmother's elbow in Macon, Georgia.

The popular Southern restaurant begins their Sunday family-style fried chicken dinner at 3 p.m. and serves it with traditional collards and cornbread — and other traditional sides — until the chicken runs out. "Our fried chicken is special because, we only fry it in N.C. lard and spices blended in house," says Executive Chef McMillan.

The popular dish is also available for family style takeout and picnics that serves 3-6 folks and comes with three generous pieces of chicken, pints of mashed potatoes, collards, giblet gravy and four pieces of cornbread.

We consider ourselves very "lucky" to have a home version of 32's beloved house chicken.

2 1/2 tablespoons paprika  
2 tablespoons salt  
2 tablespoons garlic powder  
3 teaspoons black pepper  
3 teaspoons onion powder  
3 teaspoons cayenne pepper  
3 teaspoons oregano leaves  
3 teaspoons thyme leaves

Add all ingredients to a large bowl and combine with a whisk until spices are evenly distributed. Store in an air tight container with lid.

Makes — 3/4 cups

\* All of Lucky 32's recipes were originally designed for a much larger batch size. This recipe has been reduced — but not tested at this scale. Please adjust as to your taste and portion size.

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