



fried chicken SERVES 2 TO 4

I love, love, love, love, love fried chicken. I order it like a side dish at restaurants or when I get takeout. I will eat the worst fried chicken and love it.

We came up with this dish at the new Noodle Bar, once we had moved up the block. We tried different methods. Buttermilk soaking—the traditional southern way—was okay, but it didn't amplify the natural flavor of the chicken, which took a long time to cook in the fryer. Kevin and Scott experimented with some batters and coatings, all of which were tasty, but none of which was right.

We were using a crazy expensive and delicious chicken—the breed name is poulet rouge—and I wanted to strip away as much excess flavoring as possible. That's when we settled on this method: steam the chicken first, just until it's cooked, then use the fryer just to crisp and brown the outside. We came around to that method in part because of the new kitchen and the new Noodle Bar. At the original Noodle Bar we had just about the worst equipment on the planet: one oven in the basement in which everything was roasted and one tiny countertop fryer that fit maybe two chicken legs at a time. At the new Noodle Bar we have a fancy oven that allows us to cook the chicken at 160°F in a steam-filled chamber and also a big deep fryer in which we could probably fry an entire baby pig.

But it isn't just a gear-driven approach: frying the chicken this way means the chicken spends less time in the oil, so it has a really clean flavor, and because of the sugar in the brine, it browns deeply—quickly. Take it out, chop it up, douse it in octo vin, and there it is: fried chicken dinner.

1. Combine the water, sugar, and salt in a large container with a lid or a large freezer bag, and stir until the sugar and salt dissolve. Add the chicken to the brine, cover or seal, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour and no more than 6.
2. Set up a steamer on the stove. Drain the chicken and discard the brine. Put the chicken in the steamer basket (if you are using a stacking Chinese-style bamboo steamer, put the legs in the bottom level and the breast on the top). Turn the heat to medium and set the lid of the steamer ever so slightly ajar. Steam the chicken for 40 minutes, then remove it from the steamer and put it on a cooling rack to cool. Chill it in the refrigerator, preferably on the rack, for at least 2 hours or overnight.
3. Take the chicken out of the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before you fry it.
4. In a deep skillet, heat enough oil for the chicken to be submerged to 375°F. Fry the chicken in batches, turning once, until the skin is deep brown and crisp, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.
5. Cut the chicken into a few pieces: cut the wing from the breast, cut the breast in half, cut through the knee to separate the thigh from the drumstick. Put in a large bowl, toss with the vinaigrette, and serve hot.

4 cups lukewarm water

½ cup sugar

½ cup kosher salt

One 3- to 3½-pound chicken, cut into 4 pieces (2 legs, 2 breast halves with wings attached)

4 cups grapeseed or other neutral cooking oil

Octo Vinaigrette (page 107)