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BUTTERMILK FRIED CHICKEN WITH CHEDDAR WAFFLES & BALSAMIC-SPIKED MAPLE SYRUP

Serves 4-6

Fried chicken is a powerful force, a thing that people obsess over, and crave all day long. Fortunately for our little restaurant in a far-flung corner of Brooklyn, it's also a dish people will travel for. At Buttermilk Channel, fried chicken outsells our other entrees three to one.

The world's eaters, from Seoul to Savannah, are all looking for the same qualities in their fried chicken: a crispy-crunchy crust surrounding juicy, tender meat. This recipe takes a few extra steps to ensure those desired results, and these steps do take some time and forethought, but we think they're worth it.

First, the chicken takes an overnight bath in buttermilk, which adds its tangy character while altering the meat to allow it to remain juicy. It rests again after it gets its flour coating, an interval that gives the flour and buttermilk time to form a more perfect union. Most importantly, the chicken must be fried twice, first at a lower temperature to cook the meat, and then at a higher temperature, bringing the crust to the desired crunchy, deep golden brown.

INGREDIENTS

For the Cheddar Waffles

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 3 teaspoons fine sea salt
- 2-1/2 cups buttermilk
- 1 cup whole milk
- 6 large eggs
- 10 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 4 cups shredded cheddar cheese



For the Maple-Vinegar Syrup

- 1 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup maple syrup

For the Fried Chicken

- 2 (2-1/2-to 3-pound) free range chickens
- 4 cups buttermilk
- 7 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons fine sea salt, plus more to taste
- 2 tablespoons black pepper
- 4 quarts canola oil
- Special Equipment
- Candy or deep-fry thermometer
- Belgian waffle iron

DIRECTIONS

Cheddar Waffles

In a mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, and salt. In another bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, milk, and eggs. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and stir until completely integrated. Stir in the melted butter, then the cheddar. Cook the batter in an electric waffle iron following the manufacturer's instructions. Hold the waffles in a low oven until it's time to serve, or make them ahead of time and cool completely, then reheat in the oven or a toaster.

Maple-Vinegar Syrup

Pour the balsamic vinegar into a saucepan and simmer over medium heat to reduce by half, about 10 minutes. Stir in the maple syrup. Keep warm to serve.

Fried Chicken

Cut each chicken in half with a sturdy knife or cleaver, discarding the backbones or saving for chicken stock. Separate the breasts from the legs. Cut the breasts in half



across the middle, and cut the legs in half to separate the thighs and the drumsticks. Your two chickens should yield 16 pieces total.

Put the chicken pieces in a large container and pour in the buttermilk, tossing so that all the pieces are coated. Cover the container with plastic wrap or a lid and leave the chicken to marinate in the refrigerator for 24 hours.

Combine the flour, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Dust a rimmed baking sheet (large enough to hold all the chicken) with some of the seasoned flour. Remove the chicken pieces from the buttermilk one at a time and dredge them in the bowl of flour, coating them on all sides, then lay them out on the baking sheet. Wrap the pan tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate the chicken for at least 1 hour or overnight. Cover the remaining flour mixture and refrigerate.

Pour the canola oil into an 8-quart stockpot and heat it over high heat until it registers 325°F on a candy thermometer (see note). Dredge four chicken pieces again in the reserved flour, shake off the excess, and carefully drop them, one at a time, into the hot oil. Using a slotted spoon, move the chicken pieces around to prevent them from sticking together. Fry the chicken until it's light golden brown, about 10 minutes, then use the slotted spoon to transfer the pieces to a baking sheet lined with paper towels. Repeat with the remaining chicken, dredging and frying in batches of four pieces.

Raise the temperature of the oil to 350°F. Fry the chicken again, in batches of four pieces at a time, until it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F, about 8 to 10 minutes depending on the size of your chicken pieces. Transfer the chicken to a baking sheet lined with fresh paper towels and salt immediately and thoroughly. The crust of this chicken does a great job of holding the heat in, so it will still be piping hot after 10 minutes at room temperature. If you need more time, you can hold the chicken in a low oven until you're ready to serve.

To Serve

Arrange the cheddar waffles on a platter and pile the fried chicken on top. Serve with the maple-vinegar syrup on the side.

Note: *An electric deep-fryer may be used for this recipe, following the manufacturer's instructions on how much oil to use and your own judgment on how much chicken can be fried in each batch.*



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