

BWASTs

(Bacon Wrapped And Stuffed Thighs)

—Ingredients—

¾ cup uncooked basmati rice
8 chicken thighs
1 pound favorite breakfast type bulk ground sausage
24 slices bacon (about 1 pound) Thick or regular sliced
1 large onion, chopped
3 sticks celery, diced
1 bell pepper (green, yellow or red), seeded & diced
4 large garlic cloves, finely diced
turmeric
salt
pepper
olive oil



2 teaspoons fennel seeds
2 teaspoon caraway seeds
1 teaspoon celery seeds
1 teaspoon mustard seeds
1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
1 teaspoon coriander seeds

—Procedure—

Skin and de-bone the chicken thighs removing any large gobs of fat. (See final thoughts notes about skin, fat and bones below.) Then, using a flat meat mallet; cover each thigh with plastic wrap and pound to flatness. Do not try to enlarge, shape, thin or tenderize the meat; just make each a consistent thickness. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Crumble and sauté the sausage, drain the grease, and set sausage aside.

Sauté the onion, celery, pepper, and garlic in some olive oil until transparent and set aside.

Cook the basmati rice and set aside to cool. (I use a rice ball to cook rice. It cooks in boiling water; then the ball can be lifted out, drain naturally and is ready to use making fluffy rice.)

Using a dry fry pan, toast all the seeds stirring constantly. You know they are ready when slightly darker, aromatic and the mustard seeds dance or pop a little. Cool then coarsely grind all together in a spice or coffee grinder, not too fine, we need some 'chunkiness' here.

—Dressing/Stuffing—

Using a large glass bowl (turmeric stains); combine rice with salt, pepper, and turmeric by **taste** and **color**. You should have nicely light golden color rice when finished. Add all the ground spices, sautéed vegetables, and cooked crumbled sausage. Mix well and add some olive oil if necessary to make the mixture a little bit sticky if necessary and set aside.

—Preparation—

Take a flattened chicken thigh and fill and roll the thigh into a tube with as much stuffing as possible but with the chicken meat overlapping or just touching. Take 2 slices of bacon and wrap around the thigh tube, making the joint of the bacon overlap the joint of the thigh. Each slice should wrap the thigh 1 ½ or 2 times depending on the size of the thighs and amount of dressing. Now take 1 slice of bacon and wrap it lengthwise so it covers both exposed ends where stuffing is visible making the bacon joint in the first 1/3 side of the meat tube. You may need to add or replace some stuffing in the ends as you assemble and let the bacon hold in the dressing. Tie the whole thing twice around with kitchen twine to help hold it together. Refrigerate the completed thighs until ready to cook. Repeat with the remaining thighs.

—Preparation Choices—

1. Arrange all 8 thighs meat joint down in 9"X12" glass dish and
 - a. Place in refrigerator for tomorrow's cooking
 - b. Cook using directions below
2. Individually wrap each raw thigh in plastic and freeze for cooking another day. To defrost, place in refrigerator for 24 hours then follow cooking directions. It's best to defrost in the refrigerator rather than a microwave. You could also cook without defrosting, but I have not tested the cooking time for this method, nor for bacon crispness.
3. Cook what you like and freeze the unused *cooked* thighs individually, leaving the string on. These can be removed from the freezer and placed in a microwave to defrost and warm through then remove the string to serve for dinner. The bacon may not be as crisp, but they are still tasty.

—Cooking Instructions—

Preheat the oven to 450°.

Arrange thighs in a glass cooking dish (9X12 for 6 to 8) thigh joint down, leaving a little space between each thigh side for bacon browning; place in the oven uncovered, and cook for 40 minutes until chicken is done (internal temperature of 165°). If the bacon is not yet crisp, turn the oven to broil and cook for an additional 3 to 5 minutes or until bacon is crisp.

Remove from oven and let stand for 10 minutes.

Clip and carefully remove kitchen string and serve. The crisped bacon should easily hold them together to make a beautiful display on the plate and a tasty treat for the palate.

—Final Thoughts—

If you have dressing left over, you can save it and serve it as a side dish for another dinner. It can even be extended by adding more rice (and turmeric) if needed. It freezes well.

Another thought might be to take the dressing and fill some grape leaves saving that for another day's treat. (Make more dressing if you are sure you want to make several wrapped grape leaves.) To cook the stuffed grape leaves (dolma), place them in a pot with some water and a steamer tray above the water. Drizzle with lemon juice and/or olive oil and steam for 30 minutes. Serve with a yogurt dip with spices added if desired. These can be served warm or cold. I think warm (not hot) is better for finger food. Grape leaves are available in jars for this recipe; an 8 ounce jar has 25 to 28 usable leaves. Before steaming, the stuffed leaves freeze well for use another day as hors d'oeuvre or part of or the main course.

You can save the drippings if you use bacon grease for cooking. Remember though, this bacon grease will be seasoned by the spices added, so you might want to save it separately from your normally saved bacon grease. It does make a wonderful baked potato by smearing the grease all over a cleaned baking potato, wrapping it in foil and baking for an hour as you normally do. (Not a microwave chore.)

If you have much chicken fat and skin from the skinning and cleaning of the thighs, you can make schmaltz (rendered chicken fat) and gribenes (cracklings) for use another day. Look it up on the internet. It is certainly worth doing if you have or have saved much chicken fat and skin, and it tastes wonderful. It's a great butter substitute if you add a little salt.

The thigh bones and attached bits of meat and gristle can be used to make chicken broth!