

Dan Ralston's Kitchen

Uncle Persh's Barbecued Chicken

Serves 8

I grew up in central Ohio with a large extended family on my Dad's side. Most of the relatives lived in a smaller town than ours about eight miles to the east. That's where Uncle Persh lived. He was actually my Dad's first cousin in-law, but all of us kids called him Uncle Persh. He was a big jovial Italian and could he cook. Our family gatherings always centered around food and Persh was always at the center of the food. He did the planning, preparing and cooking. My favorite gatherings were in the summer and most of those were at Uncle Persh and Aunt Maxine's house. It was a pretty, white, clapboard, Victorian house literally on the edge of town. On one side were other houses and on the other were fields and woods. We would often use his house as the rendezvous for hunting in the fall. All you had to do was cross the road to be in open country. Behind the house was a little chicken coop that had been converted to a play house for my cousin Susan, and a large white barn. But also in the backyard was some of Persh's handiwork. He was kind of a renaissance man of cooking. He not only cooked, with all that cooking entails, but he grew the vegetables, canned the pickles and peppers and built the masonry grills and rotisseries necessary to cook enough food to feed such a large clan. Below a huge old sugar maple there was a stone fireplace that could be used as an oven and a grill and a stove top. Next to that was a six foot long, three foot high rectangular stone cooking pit. The pit could accommodate a whole pig on a spit or dozens of chickens on grills.

I remember arriving in our Falcon station wagon and seeing big jovial Persh behind that grill with a paint brush in hand, slathering his buttery barbecue sauce over halves of chicken that covered every bit of the long grill. My Dad was there too, (the men would go early, in their pickup trucks, to help out, and drink beer) and Uncle Earl, both with long handled tongs constantly turning the chicken halves.

The back yard was full of picnic tables, one or two of which would be covered with dishes brought to accompany the chicken; mustardy potato salads, creamy cole slaws, gooey baked beans, deviled eggs and jars of homemade pickles. But two of the best accompaniments were from Persh's garden; sweet ears of corn and his "goodie salad." On the stove top of the outdoor fire place there was a huge, old fashioned, copper steamer. It was oval and had wooden handles and a wooden grate in the bottom. It would be full of the sweet corn. The silk was removed then the corn was wrapped back up in its' own husks and steamed in the big kettle. The "goody salad" was a green salad without the lettuce. Persh would coarsely chop vegetables from his garden and mix them in a large tub with his own vinaigrette. The Salad was full of ripe red beefsteak tomatoes

and sweet yellow tomatoes and cucumbers (without the wax) and green peppers and sweet red peppers, sweet purple onion and green onions and crunchy celery and carrots.

When my sister and I scrambled out of the Falcon to greet our cousins I could smell the chicken grilling. The tart smell of the vinegar and garlic wafting out with the charcoal smoke meant that great food was coming soon. Every time I grill chicken this way I think about those summer days, and family, and honest food, and Uncle Persh. This recipe is from a man who kept in shape by working hard. He worried more about taste than fat; so I recommend you go ahead and use the butter, leave the skin on the chicken and just enjoy it. When the fat guilt over takes you, go to your local home improvement store, pick up a bag of cement and walk around for an hour or so to salve you conscience.

4 chickens, halved
1/2 cup (1 stick butter)
2 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup white vinegar
1 Tsp. mixed Italian herbs
2 or 3 dashes Tobasco sauce
2 Tsp. Sweet paprika
salt and black pepper to taste

Prepare a charcoal grill so that the fire is medium and the coals are covered with white ash. Melt 2 Tbs. of the butter in a sauce pan and sauté the garlic until soft. Add the remaining butter and melt. When the butter is melted add the remaining ingredients and bring to a boil, stirring. Remove the sauce from the heat. Grill the chicken, basting with Persh's sauce and turning often, until juice runs clear and a leg moves easily in the socket when turned.

Persh's Bar-B-Que Chicken Sauce

1 pint vinegar
1/4 pound butter
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon black pepper
1 teaspoon red pepper
2 teaspoon paprika

Cook over low heat. Do NOT let come to a boil.

www.menuswithfriends.com