

ON THE GRILL

Grilled Wings

By John Clarke

Fall is just around the corner, and football is in the air—from pee wee to the pros. When our children were in college in the early part of this century (sounds ancient, doesn't it?), we often attended games at Clemson, NC State, or East Carolina. Our daughter attended Emory in Atlanta, but there is no football team at that school so she would join us at Clemson.

One of the very easiest foods to cook at any tailgate is a big batch of wings, especially if you are going to be feeding your son's dorm roommates, as we often did. Of course you can buy wings at many different restaurants but that is too easy, and it takes away from what you can do right outside with the ambiance of smoke from the charcoal wafting through the parking areas. It is a smell you cannot replicate, since so many aromas are mixed in with the variety of items on the grill at any given time.

As you can imagine, everything has gotten more expensive and going to a football game is quite an investment, not only of time, but income—especially if you consider season tickets, parking pass, tailgate supplies (chairs, canopy, music, coolers), and eating at the game. With all that in mind, and our interest in watching more than one game on a given Saturday or Sunday, why travel when all is right here on TV? So let's plan a tailgate in the living room, complete with your favorite finger food: chicken wings.

You can do it simply or you can plan, say on Friday night, to make the best wings ever. Alton Brown, as many of you may know from his food science shows on the Food Network, likes to steam the wings for about 10 minutes and then let them rest for about 30 minutes on a rack sitting on a cookie sheet. To make things even better, follow the recipe for steaming and then place them in the fridge overnight. Quick chemistry note: The purpose of the steaming is to get some of the fat to render out of the meat, which in turn will give you a more defined and crunchy texture. Use a steamer pot or steamer basket in a larger pot with the lid on and place the wings over the steam for about 10 minutes. Place the wings in a single layer and do not overcrowd the pot so that the wings are evenly steamed. Do your wings in batches until you are done. I like to buy the large container of wings and cut them up, yielding an even number of drumettes and flats.

Another method is to use baking powder (not baking soda) such as Rumford brand. Many brands contain sodium aluminum sulfate, but Rumford does not have the aluminum so you should not encounter an unpleasant flavor as has been reported by a few chefs on cooking blogs. I have never noticed the odd taste, but we always buy Rumford anyway. If you get a ten pack of wings, you will have 30 pieces—but toss those wing tips as there is little use for them and they yield basically no meat. Toss the 20 pieces that remain in one tablespoon of baking powder and 1/2 teaspoon of salt, using a large enough bowl to be sure all pieces are well covered. You are not creating a coating for the chicken, but rather changing the pH of the skin so that the wings are drier and will crisp up even better. Place the wings on a rack on a cookie sheet and let them rest for about 30 minutes to an hour in the fridge.

I normally use a kamado style cooker known as a Big Green Egg, but if we were really tailgating, I would be using my large Smokey Senior Weber grill. Regardless, you will want to set your grill so that you can control the temperature at about 250 degrees for 30 minutes or so. After the first 30 minutes, increase the temperature to 400 degrees and cook for an additional 40 minutes. You want to avoid burning the meat, so be prepared to move the coals to one side if needed. If you are serious, get out your temperature probe and test for doneness at 165 degrees.

If you have steamed your wings first, let's get that version cooked. I enjoy using an indirect cooking method so that the fire is offset from the food. In this case, heat up to about 400-425 degrees and then cook for about 20 minutes before flipping to the other side for an additional 20 minutes. I prefer not to flip my wings and instead place them all on the grill rack with the fat side up. Cook them for the

full 40 minutes as noted. My little Smokey Senior has baskets that allow you to keep the coals on one side.

Now for the sauce(s). If the grandkids are in town, they may all report that "Granddad made them too spicy," so you may now have to order them pizza or hold some aside with no sauce for them. I like Frank's hot sauce, and there are recipes on the bottle. Alton Brown likes a simple sauce using 3 ounces of butter, a clove of minced garlic, 1/4 cup of your favorite hot sauce, and 1/2 teaspoon of kosher salt. Melt the butter, add the garlic and stir in the rest of the ingredients. Bring in the wings and toss them all in a large bowl (remember to set aside some for the grandkids or those with a low tolerance for sauces), and then let them cool so they can be easily handled—but serve them warm.

I enjoy a good blue cheese dipping sauce, along with celery and carrot sticks to round out the finger food. Dig through the pantry and see if you have any other sauces worth trying as well.

I am not against saucing while cooking, but be careful as some sauces have too much sugar in them and that will lead to burned food and a flare-up over the coals. You can find good sauces in the store if you study the labels and look for something that has the lowest amount of sugar (less than 6-8 grams). You can be bold and skip all that I described earlier, and just coat your prepared wings with salt and pepper. The salt will penetrate the skin and tenderize the food well, especially if you give it an hour or two in the fridge. You can use Old Bay seasoning for a rather unique taste to the final product. Coat them all liberally in a bowl and then cook as described earlier at 400-425 for about 40 minutes total.

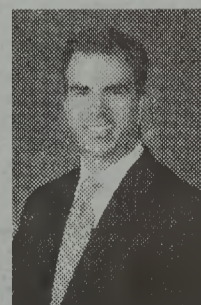
Wings are the quintessential grill food and easy—but practice your recipes as there are lots of football weekends coming with plenty of time to get it right before the Super Bowl in 2019. You can go online and find even more sauces to make up at home, including Asian versions such as teriyaki or Korean style. Practice and make friends with your grill. If it rains, don't give up. You can make all of these in your oven, but as long as I can get the coals going, I like to cook outdoors even if it rains.



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