

What to Grill in February

By John Clarke

February's NFL Super Bowl game marks the end of football season. We love to watch football games, and this season has led to some ups and downs due to the continuing effects of COVID-19 on players and teams during the bowl games. Both of our alma maters, NCSU and ECU, had their games canceled, and it was a big disappointment. We were actually in Annapolis visiting our daughter's family for Christmas and were planning to go if the weather was nice enough—and were shocked to hear on Sunday (less than 24 hours prior to the game) that Boston College did not have enough players to field a team against ECU. Then a few days later, just a few hours prior to kickoff, UCLA had to cancel the NCSU game. Our grilling that day did not go to waste, but we had definitely been looking forward to seeing the games.

We cooked a goose for Christmas, and it turned out great. Our daughter and her husband have a Big Green Egg grill—and we had a great time on a beautiful Christmas day while enjoying warm sunshine and a nice cocktail.

Looking ahead, the Super Bowl makes for a great weekend to grill and enjoy time with a few friends or family to watch the game.

As you may recall from earlier articles, chicken wings remain in demand, and with the pandemic, their prices have remained high, sometimes over \$25 for a pack of 20-plus whole wings. Food Lion pricing is typically around \$4 a pound, and similar pricing can be found elsewhere around town at the other markets. The demand and the supply markets always will cause price fluctuations, but why worry when you can usually find a great substitute in chicken legs.

For a typical indoor tailgate at-home party, you definitely want a finger food, and chicken legs make a great substitute for wings. If you are going to shop around, Food Lion and Harris Teeter both sell large (10-12) packs of legs. If you are a bit more ambitious and price conscious, you can usually find leg quarters in a 10-pound pack for under \$10. It does not take much effort to split the quarters into a nice leg and thigh, further enhancing your dining options.

With extra preparation, chicken legs can be “fancier” up by making lollipops. Some expert chefs refer to the technique as frenching the leg (removing excess meat from the end of the bone). To do this, take a sharp knife and move up the leg to just where the meat starts to widen. Run your sharp blade around the meat down to the bone, and pull the meat down to the end of the bone (but try to leave the cartilage on the bone). Use a small sharp paring knife or kitchen shears to lift and remove the meat. Further, if you can, pull out the long tendon/bone that leads back up to the top of the leg. You can move your paring knife up under the skin along the bone where the tendon is attached.

If the lollipop will not stand on the fat end now, use a sharp knife to trim the cartilage from the big end of the leg to allow it to do so. It helps in the cooking for them to stand while on the grill. You can watch this technique in a short video at [youtube.com/watch?v=vHQd3n1KbTM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHQd3n1KbTM).

A day ahead of game day, make sure you pat down the chicken pieces and place them in a large bowl. Add a tablespoon of baking powder, sprinkled well over the meat, and stir with your hands to evenly coat. You can also add some of your favorite rubs as well as salt. Let the meat rest overnight on a rack on a cookie sheet in the refrigerator—but a few hours will also work if you are short of time. The idea here is to dry out the legs to produce a crispy skin on the grill.

In the final preparation before putting your lollipops on the grill, wrap small pieces of foil around the meatless end of the leg to prevent the bone from turning black as you grill. It just makes a nicer presentation.

The internet is full of recipes for sauces to make yourself, or you can pull one off the shelf at the market. Take a look at the sauce label, and if there is a significant amount of sugar in the contents, you will want to wait to apply it until near the end of your cook to keep it from burning. On the other hand, eastern NC sauces are all vinegar based with minimal or no sugar, which can be basted liberally throughout the cook. I currently am experimenting with Bachan's Original Japanese BBQ Sauce, which is advertised frequently on the internet.

One cooking option is to place a stick of butter in a disposable aluminum pan and get the grill up to about 275-300 degrees to allow the butter to melt. Place the lollipop legs upright in the disposable pan with the butter and let them cook at about 275. For reference, if the skin tastes rubbery after your cook, the grill was not hot enough . . . move it up a notch to 300 degrees for that excellent “bite through” taste of crispy skin.

Keep the grill at 275-300 degrees, and let the chicken cook for about two hours or until the meat gets to 165-170 degrees. We are not looking for done but to get them ready to be dunked in that final bath of sauce/glaze. Keep an eye on it and you can prevent burning. If you chose to use the cooked-in-butter technique above, you can transfer some of the melted butter to a small sauce pan (or melt about half stick of butter) and add in a half cup of maple syrup and about six tablespoons of Sriracha sauce. Lift the legs with tongs and dip each one in the sauce and return to the grill. To minimize flare-ups, you can place the glaze-dipped legs in an aluminum pan with a grate in the bottom. Keep the temperature to 275 and let the chicken cook for an additional 30 minutes, and dunk them again about 10 minutes before the end time. Sprinkle your lollipops with chives and let rest for about 10 minutes. Serve some of the glaze on the side for those who may want additional sauce.

Coleslaw is a good side dish to go with your delicious chicken. Bon appetite, and enjoy the game.

Pine Knoll Shores

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT

Our *vision* is to provide a quality environment in which our citizens are safe and secure, where individual talents flourish, and everyone enjoys the natural resources of the area.

It is the *mission* of the Town of Pine Knoll Shores to provide for the safety and well-being of all residents and visitor in an efficient and well-organized manner; develop and implement plans for the continuous improvement of the town, its services and its beach; and encourage the participation of residents in service to the town and community.