Main dishes / United States

Southern Buttermilk Fried Chicken

Bone-in chicken soaked long and slow in seasoned buttermilk until the acid tenderises every fibre, then dredged in spiced flour and fried in a cast-iron skillet in shallow lard until the crust shatters like a cracker and the interior runs with its own juice.

Time 300 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 1400 g Bone-in chicken pieces (thighs, drumsticks, breasts, wings)
- ☐ 480 ml Buttermilk (full-fat)
- ☐ 300 g All-purpose flour
- ☐ 60 g Cornstarch
- ☐ 10 g Smoked paprika
- ☐ 6 g Garlic powder
- ☐ 6 g Onion powder
- ☐ 4 g Cayenne pepper
- ☐ 15 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 6 g Freshly ground black pepper
- ☐ 6 g Baking powder
- ☐ 600 g Lard or peanut oil for frying (enough for 4 cm depth in skillet)

Let's make it.

01 Whisk 1 tsp of the salt and a good grinding of black pepper into the buttermilk. Submerge all the chicken pieces in the seasoned buttermilk, pressing them under the surface. Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, ideally overnight. The acid in the buttermilk tenderises the surface of the meat and the moisture helps the dredge adhere in a thick, shaggy crust.

02 Whisk together the flour, cornstarch, paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, cayenne, remaining salt, black pepper, and baking powder in a wide, shallow bowl. The baking powder creates small CO2 bubbles during frying that puff and shatter the crust. Taste a pinch — it should be clearly, aggressively seasoned, because the chicken below is thick and needs the crust to carry the flavour.

03 Lift a piece of chicken out of the buttermilk, letting the excess drip back — but not shaking it bone-dry, you want a wet surface for the flour to grab. Press it firmly into the seasoned flour, turning and pressing several times so the dredge adheres in thick, uneven clusters. For the most shattering crust, drizzle a teaspoon of the excess buttermilk over the floured piece and press again — those wet spots create ragged, craggy bumps that fry into dramatic shards. Rest on a wire rack for 10 minutes before frying.

04 Heat the lard in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet to 175°C / 345°F. The fat should be 3–4 cm deep. Lower the chicken pieces in carefully, skin-side down, without crowding — fry in two batches if necessary. Maintain the oil at 160–170°C throughout (it will drop when you add the cold chicken; this is normal). Fry thighs and drumsticks 12–14 minutes per side, breasts 8–10 minutes per side, wings 6–8 minutes per side. Turn once, carefully, when the underside crust is deeply golden and releases freely.

05 Drain the fried pieces on a wire rack set over a baking sheet. Do not crowd them or stack them — each piece needs air circulation on all sides to stay crisp. Season immediately with a light pinch of fine sea salt while the crust is still glistening from the oil. Rest for at least 5 minutes before serving; the internal temperature will continue to rise and the juices will redistribute. The crust will remain shatteringly crisp on the rack for at least 15 minutes.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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