



## The (Cast)Iron Chef

AN OLD FRIEND IN THE KITCHEN MAKES AN APPEARANCE

**2**020. WHAT A YEAR. My former neighbors, Greg and Pat, sent their annual holiday card, beautifully printed with photos of their family. They wrote, “time is precious and should never be wished away.” Yet we all wished for this time of exhaustion and general malaise just to be over. COVID-19 took over the news. It kept us from travel, from restaurants, health clubs, and salons. We turned inward. We became BFF with our TVs. “Have you seen...(fill in the blank)” was a prime and primetime topic of conversation.

But something else happened during these months of isolation. People became friendly with their kitchens. So many men, who now were working from home, approached the stove with a new reverence. I read that cookbooks were flying off the shelves of both online and brick and mortar shops. Meryl, whose husband previously talked about down-sizing, recently hired a design firm to build a state-of-the-art kitchen. They’re pushing out the back of their house to encompass all sorts of new gadgets. Of course. When this pandemic abates, I’ll race over to see it. Of course.

I think if a monument were to be constructed for Cooking 2020, it would be a giant bronze sheet pan. I’ve made sheet pan chicken and vegetables; fish and vegetables; every permutation. Easy and fast.

But here’s the thing. I wasn’t really going anywhere. Cooking didn’t necessarily have to be fast. Easy, OK. Fast? Maybe not. I unburied the old workhorse. My cast iron pan. Hello, old friend. Let’s get re-acquainted.

From the depths of the freezer came some chicken. Of course. Then the trifecta, the triple crown, the Holy Trinity of seasonings. Salt, pepper, garlic. I uncovered some parsley, still green, but past its prime, and a lemon. From the cupboard, panko breadcrumbs. I was in business. I could hear the dish sizzling; the aroma was intoxicating. I was cooking with NOISE. It felt good.

My book club recently met on Zoom. We talked about holiday memories. Most of the stories revolved around food. Cooking can be therapeutic. Nourish yourself. That blinking light at the end of the tunnel gets ever closer. I am so grateful to friends who shared their tales and their leftovers. I cherish both. 



PHOTO: GIRMANTAS URBONAS

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### Cast Iron Cutlets



#### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs, more if needed
- 4 small boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Olive oil for frying
- 2 small cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
- Flaky sea salt
- Chopped flat leaf parsley
- Lemon wedges

#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set out 3 shallow bowls. Place flour in one, beaten eggs in another, and breadcrumbs in the third. Pound the chicken breasts to ¼ inch thick. Season with salt and pepper. Dredge each breast lightly with flour, then dip in eggs, letting any excess egg drip back into the bowl. Coat with breadcrumbs. Set aside in the refrigerator to dry for an hour, or even overnight, covered loosely with plastic wrap. Remove from refrigerator to come to room temperature before cooking.
2. Place a large, preferably cast iron pan over medium-high heat. Add olive oil to a depth of ½ inch. Add the smashed garlic cloves and cook until they are just golden, then remove from the pan. Their flavor will permeate the oil. Cook the chicken until it is beautifully browned and crispy, about 5 minutes per side. Remove from pan to a paper towel lined plate. Sprinkle with flaky salt and chopped parsley. Serve with lemon wedges.