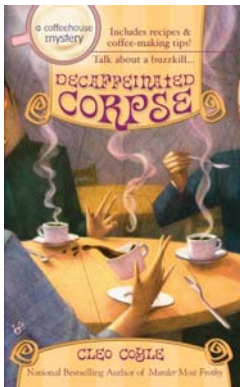


Cleo Coyle's Buttermilk Fried Chicken

Tender and sweet from its buttermilk bath, crispy and crunchy from its dip in hot oil—the perfect fall comfort food.



“My version avoids the overcooked on the outside, undercooked on the inside heartache.”



Fall means comfort food, and in my *Coffeehouse Mystery: Decaffeinated Corpse*, which takes place in October, my “comfort” recipes include *Carne Con Café*—a hearty beef stew based on a traditional Mayan dish and laced with the earthy flavor of coffee. Since that recipe is already available in the back of my book, I’m sharing one today that’s more economical but just as “comforting”.

Fried chicken is a deceptively simple dish. What’s the big deal, right? You flour chicken pieces and fry them. But if you’ve ever tried to make it successfully, then you know a lot can go wrong (at least it has for *me*). This recipe never fails me. My first secret is using chicken wings exclusively. By cutting up the chicken wings and discarding the tips*, you can get 24 pieces of fried chicken out of just 12 wings—an economical meat course for 4 to 6 people that’s both filling and satisfying. Unlike bigger pieces of chicken—which often end up burning on the outside before cooking properly all the way through—chicken wing pieces fry perfectly in about 8 to 10 minutes. These smaller pieces require less oil, too. The buttermilk bath is the second key to a successful batch of fried chicken. The acid in the buttermilk is an excellent marinade for the meat, softening and sweetening the chicken before it even touches flour or oil. **My advice:** Buy a quart of buttermilk, reserve 1/2 cup for my Buttermilk-Apple Snack Cake recipe and use the rest to make this delicious batch of fried chicken. Look for my snack cake recipe next to this one on my Website: www.CoffeehouseMystery.com. Eat with joy!

**The chicken wing tips don’t have to be discarded. I boil them in water with celery, carrots, onions and spices and make a delicious chicken broth. Waste not!

Cleo Coyle's Buttermilk Fried Chicken

Recipe (c) 2008 by Alice Alfonsi who writes
as Cleo Coyle with her husband Marc Cerasini

Serves: This recipe calls for 3 pounds of chicken wings, which is approximately 12 wings.
When cut up, the chicken will yield 24 pieces.

Ingredients:

3 pounds fresh chicken wings
1 quart regular or light buttermilk (Reserve 1/2 cup for my
Buttermilk-Apple Snack Cake recipe.)
3 cups all purpose flour
2 tablespoons McCormick "Original Chicken Seasoning" blend
(or your favorite chicken spice blend)
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon freshly-ground pepper, ground very fine
2 tablespoon sweet paprika
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
Canola oil for frying

Step 1: Cut the wings into three pieces, discarding all wing tips (or you can boil the tips with carrots, celery, onion and spices to make chicken broth). Place cut up chicken in a plastic or glass container. Pour buttermilk over the chicken wing pieces and marinate in refrigerator for up to 3 hours (no more).

Step 2: Mix the flour, salt, pepper, paprika, chicken spice, and cayenne pepper thoroughly in a paper or plastic bag.

Step 3: Remove chicken pieces from buttermilk and discard excess liquid. Shake off loose buttermilk (do not rinse). Drop wing pieces into the bag 2 or 3 pieces at a time. Shake well until each piece is evenly coated.

Step 4: Heat canola oil in a pan or pot deep enough to allow wing pieces to be submerged in oil (at least 2 inches deep). Shake off any excess flour on your chicken wing pieces and slowly place pieces, one at a time, into hot oil. (Note: You know the oil is hot enough for frying when a dough ball made from a bit of buttermilk and flour sizzles when dropped into the pot). Make sure your pan is not too crowded; otherwise, oil's temperature will drop dramatically, and you'll end up with greasy chicken.

Step 5: Fry each batch for 8-10 minutes, turning occasionally until chicken is golden brown and cooked evenly. (Watch oil temperature: This takes patience and practice. Keeping the oil hot enough is the key to good frying. Adding wings will reduce the oil's temp., but turning heat too high will burn them.) I put my finished fried pieces on a metal rack over an old cookie sheet pan to catch excess grease. Put rack in a 220 F. degree oven to dry chicken out and keep it warm until all the pieces are fried.

