

FROM THE KITCHEN—*Sarah Stevenson*

# IT TASTES JUST LIKE CHICKEN

“It tastes just like chicken,” said my sister-in-law as we walked out to the rabbit hutches in her backyard. They had been raising rabbits for meat for two years. Some they would keep for breeding while others were headed for the oven. I couldn’t help but think of Hansel and Gretel being fattened up for the stewpot. I was too afraid to ask exactly how these cute little bunnies were killed before they were de-furred and cut into bite-sized portions. I wondered how she had explained to her two young boys that these rabbits were not related to the Easter Bunny. We ate it, though. And she was right. There was a definite chicken flavor.

There is also the rattlesnake. Over twenty-five rattlesnake roundups take place in the United States annually, the largest of which is in Sweetwater, Texas. In Montana there are rattlesnake hunts. The snakes are deaf but are responsive to vibrations. They produce a live litter of eight to fifteen, and live to be about twenty if they aren’t caught and eaten. And yes, I have eaten rattlesnake, and—lo and behold—it tastes just like chicken.

You can buy rattlesnake meat for about \$30.00 a pound but we got ours first hand and free. My husband Rick and I were at a bar in Utica, Montana when a local came in with a five-foot timber rattler he had found in his haystack. The bartender beheaded and detailed it, removed its skin, gutted it, and washed it. Then it was cut into two inch pieces, put on skewers, and cooked on their BBQ. He probably should have boiled it first and de-boned it. It was full of small bones, which made it difficult to eat. Is there Emily Post etiquette for this? Never mind the problem with the poisonous venom that might have been lurking there.

Rocky Mountain Oysters (genitalia cut from a bull to make him a steer) also fall into this category of chicken-flavored morsels. In fact, many of the Western states hold annual festivals dedicated to these land-locked “oysters.” In Broadview, Montana, it’s called the Testicle Festival.



When we went to it we watched as these little fellows were removed from their sacks, dusted with flour, rolled in batter, and deep-fried. If you closed your eyes, blocked every conscious thought from your mind, and opened your mouth, they, too, tasted like chicken.

Then there’s the real chicken, which often hardly tastes like chicken at all. I think I probably have more recipes for this little cackler than any of the bigger more efficient food sources like pigs, beef, or buffalo; so it’s not the size—it’s the taste. There’s chicken marsala, chicken cacciatore, chicken cordon bleu, chicken mu shu, and chicken tandoori, just to name a few of every possible ethnicity. It can be barbecued, baked, boiled, broiled, broasted, roasted, skillet fried, or plopped into a slow cooker. It’s quite amusing that all those other foods want desperately to taste like chicken, but when you cook actual chicken, you’ll do anything to conceal the perfectly lovely true chicken flavor with other, more exotic spices.

Which, on the other hand, is one of the reasons that I really love chicken. It is so easy to dress up—or put dressing inside. In my kitchen I make an American bird taste Indian with yogurt and curry. Or I add chilies and enchilada sauce and the chicken becomes Mexican. A little Marsala wine and Baby Bella mushrooms make it speak Italian. Then I just close my eyes and put on some music of that nationality and I am transported abroad.

I get chickens raised on a local Hutterite colony. They are guaranteed fresh and I like to support local food sources. Often they have a few pin feathers, but the flavor is worth it. Sometimes I stuff a chicken, but my favorite recipe, beloved by my family and my sister’s family as well, is a simple herbed chicken. I prefer thighs, rinsed and placed in a baking dish. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil (now referred to on TV as EVOO) and sprinkle on some tarragon, basil, rosemary, thyme, and garlic powder. I have a large herb garden from which I can pick a wide selection of flavors. If you can find any or all of these herbs fresh rather than dried, that’s even better. Bake the chicken at 350° F. for about an hour. The tops will be crisp, the meat juicy, and yes, it will taste just like chicken!

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*~Sarah Stevenson, a worldly Montana woman, has written for theater, radio, television and record companies. She lost a Grammy Award to Kermit the Frog. Her work is both fiction and non-fiction.*

## SOUTHERN FRIED RATTLESNAKE



- 1 Egg
- 1 tsp Minced Garlic
- 1 tsp Seasoning Salt Mix
- 3/4 cup Milk
- 1 tsp Pepper
- Flour
- 1 Rattlesnake
- Salt to taste

Cut snake meat into 4 inch lengths. Beat egg and milk. Mix spices with flour in a separate bowl. Preheat deep fat fryer with cooking oil. Dip snake into egg mixture and then in flour mixture and place it in hot oil. Cook until golden brown and crispy like fried fish. Serve with french fries.

*Special thank you to Ron “Buzz” Robsin of Geraldine, MT for providing us the rattlesnake to try this unique recipe!*