

# REAL Southern FRIED CHICKEN



## WHERE TO FIND IT & HOW TO MAKE IT

Photography by C.V. Gouveia  
Story by L.J. Gouveia

*Then I walked across the street  
And caught the Sunday smell of someone frying chicken  
And Lord, it took me back to something that I'd lost  
Somewhere, somehow along the way.*

—KRIS KRISTOFFERSON  
“Sunday Morning Coming Down”

**F**RIED chicken has long been one of the South's favorite and most enduring comfort foods. Looks like it's well on its way to becoming the world's favorite as well.

Fried chicken franchises are currently the fastest-growing fast food trend in Britain and China. Especially in areas with lots of young people and/or low incomes. In Britain, fried chicken sales grew 36% from 2003 to 2008 compared to 22% for fast food in general. So many fried chicken stands are opening there, recent stories in the *Guardian* and other papers call for measures such as a moratorium and a “fat tax” on new fast food franchises to curb the boom in “takeaways”—and in waistlines and cholesterol counts.

Meanwhile, popular fried chicken stands continue to proliferate there and across the globe, including the ubiquitous KFC, as well as more independent, locally based ones with amusing names like Euro Fried Chicken, Chicago Fried Chicken, Hollywood Fried Chicken, and Texas Fried Chicken (with a US flag in the logo, bless their hearts). It's popular there for the same reasons it always has been here: it's cheap, satisfying, and quick (if you're not the one making it!).

Another reason it's so popular is that it's actually not so new to most palates. Many cultures throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia already have some form of fried poultry in their culinary history. There's not a clear point of origin for the first fried yardbird. Even the world's oldest known cookbook, the *De re coquinaria* from first-century Rome, has a fried chicken recipe (“Pullum frontoniatum”—frying the whole bird in olive oil with leeks, wine, and spices, then finishing in an oven and serving with fig syrup...hmm...).

There's also early evidence the Scots vastly preferred fat-frying their chicken to boiling or baking it like their English neighbors. The Scots Irish carried these recipes to the American South, where they met the techniques and spices of West African slave cooks, and thus begat Southern fried chicken as we still know it today. It wasn't popular outside the South until the 19th century, when plantation owners began serving it as a quaint local delicacy to visiting dignitaries.

Hog farming played a role in the rise of fried chicken as well. Many hog farmers also raised chickens for food, and had a steady surplus of lard and rendered fat. Developments in cast iron skillet production and stoves with more controllable heat also made fried chicken that much easier for the everyday cook.

Advances in chicken farming, for better or worse, also bred chickens that were fatter and tender and thus more conducive to frying at any stage of life, so fried chicken was no longer limited to the young spring birds.

It became a staple in the African American community because chickens were about the only meat they were allowed to raise as slaves. Then during the years of segregation, many African American families packed it on long trips since it traveled well, could be enjoyed hot or cold, and, well, most roadside restaurants were not a reliable option. That partially contributed to fried chicken's long association with negative black minstrel stereotypes that were further exploited in the early 20th century with restaurants like Sambo's and Coon Chicken Inn. Today, fried chicken has mostly been reclaimed as ‘soul food’ or ‘comfort food’ and is the quintessential Fourth of July picnic feast. But there was still a recent uproar when a well-meaning immigrant businessman naively christened his Brooklyn chicken stand Obama Fried Chicken. Whoops.

With the fast food chains so prevalent the world over, it might seem odd to seek out fried chicken restaurants and recipes. While those big corporate places admittedly do a decent job of it, there's still that certain soulful something that only comes from a heaped plate of yardbird in a small, down-home cafe or kitchen, freshly fried to order by somebody's grandma, if not your own. The mom-and-pop fried chicken cafe is vanishing Americana (or Southernana, if you will), and should be preserved and enjoyed wherever and whenever possible. The following are just a few cherry-picked staff favorites from Austin, Memphis, Lafayette, and New Orleans. Then we show you how to make your own. Yes, it's worth it. It's a cultural thing. ■



A Texas Fried Chicken franchise in London

Tablecloth photo © Jirkajec | Dreamstime.com

# WHERE TO FIND IT



ONE of the most surprising things about this search for fried chicken was how many small mom-and-pop places—at least in the Austin metro area—don't make the stuff anymore. Even the Eastside soul food places don't make it. A few limit their frying to wings or breast patties. In a small kitchen, frying chicken takes up a lot of space and time, so it's hard to justify, especially if it's not a star dish.

So in Austin, fried chicken has been mostly ceded to the cheap fast-food chains or new hipster hangouts where soul food and '70s/'80s music are currently popular. Several places downtown regularly feature fried chicken as well as Sunday soul food brunches with fried chicken and waffles.

One such place is Frank, a downtown hotspot known mainly for its artisanal sausages and hot dogs, and increasingly for its Sunday soul food brunch. The fried chicken and a few other Sunday dishes have become popular enough to edge their way onto the weekday menu as well.



Fried chicken and waffles at Frank

Frank executive chef Jody Chancey moved here fifteen years ago from Virginia, perfecting his chicken recipe along the way.

Southern cooks are famously tight-lipped about their recipes, especially for fried chicken and soul food. But Jody did tell us he brines his chicken overnight in pickle juice and a "secret spice blend," dredges it in buttermilk and flour seasoned with salt, pepper, sage, and other spices, then deep-fries it in soybean oil. The heart-shaped thigh at the beginning of this article is one of his (with very minimal Photoshop retouching, honest!).

Frank's fried chicken is some of the best we tasted, juicy, with a lot of spice and flavor in the crust.

It's served with thick Belgian bacon-speckled waffles and maple syrup, as a plate or even as a chicken-and-waffle sandwich.

Max's Wine Dive is a downtown wine bar pairing its wines with slightly upscale Southern comfort food. Their bumperstickers and T-shirts proudly

proclaim "Fried chicken and champagne—why the hell not?" Friends and online reviews raved about the fried chicken, even at \$15 a plate.

Their house-made jalapeno and buttermilk batter makes a perfect crust. It's not at all greasy and has a hearty, satisfying crunch fully worthy of the John Wayne portrait hanging over the open kitchen. The jalapeno is more of a faint

afterburn. The chicken underneath is plump and juicy. A little cup of chipotle honey dipping sauce adds some extra zing and sweetness.

Rounding out the dish is an equally hearty mound of coarse mashed potatoes and slightly tangy collard greens.

If you've had only iced tea, beer or soda with fried chicken, you might be pleasantly surprised just how well red wine and champagne actually complement it.

Since it is a wine bar, the douchebag factor can be kinda high, but once you tuck into that chicken, you won't care.

Out east on Airport Boulevard, a small, unassuming chicken stand called Terry's Seafood and Chicken sure gives the big boys and downtown hipsters a run for the money with spicy, crunchy legs, wings, and thighs, always cooked to order so they're never greasy or old. It's a very simple batter but well done, with moderate spice and flecks of pepper. Family packs come with fries, buns, and a dipping sauce similar to Frank's Red Hot. Jalapeños are also available—it's almost the law in Texas to have at least one of those with your chicken.

The seafood looks promising, too: shrimp, catfish, clams, stuffed crab, and po' boys.

A respectful nod also goes out to Arkie's Grill on East Cesar Chavez, for their no-nonsense fried chicken and veggie plate served up in an authentic greasy-spoon diner atmosphere. But get out there early since they close at 2 p.m. weekdays.

About twenty minutes outside of Austin in Bastrop, on the westbound side of Highway 71, is little gem called Shady Oaks Fine Food. Since 1977, the Johnson

family has been serving straight-up, no-frills Southern comfort food, Tex-Mex, steak, and seafood in a homey, easygoing atmosphere. The fried chicken is one of their favorite dishes, and also some of the best we had. No fancy spices, just the traditional salt-pepper-buttermilk-flour crust, thick but flakey and satisfyingly salty. Huge breast/back pieces are almost miraculously juicy inside and perfectly done at the bone. After all the culinary fussery in Austin, it's a nice reminder that often the best comfort food is the straightforward stuff done really well.

The hand-mashed potatoes are buttery, with just the right amount of chunk left, and topped with a thin, savory brown gravy.

Most meals also include a trip to the salad bar, which is very small but besides the standard iceberg/romaine mix, it offers a few tasty homemade bean salads, pasta salads, and, surprisingly, an English pea salad, partially creamed to velvety cool goodness.

All the food has that undeniable 'grandma touch'—because it is cooked by the family's grandmother, Barbara.

Dessert is often a cobbler or pie, also homemade, warm, and hearty.

Business is brisk and busy, with a lot of regulars from all across the community. The friendly staff takes the time to chat and laugh with everyone.

Hours can vary a bit, so call ahead. They're also happy to start the chicken for you so it's ready when you arrive.

Fried chicken is a lot easier to come by in Tennessee. Nearly every cafe and gas station offers fried chicken. Some stores even stock bags of fried chicken skins. But for over fifty years, the standout is

still Gus's World Famous Fried Chicken, a small juke-joint-like cafe in downtown Memphis. There's good reason it's caught the attention of *Bon Appetit*, *Saveur*, John T. Edge (who literally wrote the book on fried chicken), numerous food blogs, review sites, and several roaming food television shows. Foodie tourists and regular customers alike gladly endure long waits for the crispy, spicy bird that is soaked in buttermilk, then dredged in flour and fried in peanut oil, then flanked by baked beans, dirty rice or fries and white bread.

Closer to the Gulf, headed toward New Orleans, is one of Lafayette, Louisiana's best-kept secrets. In the kitchen of a downtown Mexican restaurant called La Fonda, a popular couple turn out fabulous fried chicken. It's not on the menu, but they're proud to make it for those in the know. Like most of the other best-loved birds listed here, it's got that buttermilk crust, lightly seasoned and fried crisp. They also serve it over a salad, which is on the menu.

New Orleans' fried chicken has gotten a lot of buzz in the years rebuilding after Katrina, with its most notable rebound story being Willie Mae's Scotch House in the Seventh Ward. This is another iconic restaurant that's garnered devotion from blogs, books, magazines, and TV shows. And with merit. Willie Mae's respected chicken recipe, now made by her grandchildren running the revamped restaurant, is an unpretentious buttermilk crust. They take their time turning out straightforward comfort food that has withstood the test of time and adversity.

Fans of spicier chicken can head up-town to places like Jacques-Imo's, which

is still serving renowned Creole food like the fried chicken made popular by the late great chef Austin Leslie, who is honored on page 29. His signature recipe is on the page before that. It's dipped in evaporated milk, egg, and spices, then in flour, fried in peanut oil, and garnished with garlic, parsley, and dill pickles. Comfort food in style.

So consider this a good start for your anti-'bucket' list—the best real, non-corporate fried chicken to seek out. ■

Frank  
407 Colorado, Austin, TX, (512) 494-6916  
[www.hotdogscoldbeer.com](http://www.hotdogscoldbeer.com)

Max's Wine Dive  
207 San Jacinto, Austin, TX, (512) 904-0111  
[www.maxswinedive.com](http://www.maxswinedive.com)

Terry's Seafood and Chicken  
1805 Airport, Austin, TX (512) 466-3233

Arkie's Grill  
4827 E. Cesar Chavez, Austin, TX  
(512) 385-2986 [www.arkiesgrill.com](http://www.arkiesgrill.com)

Shady Oaks Fine Food  
1392 Highway 71 W, Bastrop TX  
(512) 303-6447 [www.theshadyoaks.com](http://www.theshadyoaks.com)

Gus's World Famous Fried Chicken  
310 S. Front St., Memphis, TN  
(901) 527-4877

La Fonda  
4827 Johnston St., Lafayette, LA  
(337) 984-5630 [www.lafonda1957.com](http://www.lafonda1957.com)

Willie Mae's Scotch House  
2401 Saint Ann St., New Orleans, LA  
(504) 822-9503

Jacques-Imo's  
8324 Oak St., New Orleans, LA  
(504) 851-0886 [www.jacquesimoscafe.com](http://www.jacquesimoscafe.com)

# HOW TO MAKE IT

**F**RYING your own chicken can seem daunting to some home cooks, but it's satisfying and lends itself to almost endless experimentation. Besides, a plate of delicious fried chicken is a point of pride in the South or anywhere else.

There are many different techniques involving many different types of pans and ingredients. But the basics are skillet-frying, deep-frying, electric skillet frying, and oven-crisping.

Countertop deep fryers and electric skillets make it easier than ever to control oil temperature, the most crucial part of frying chicken successfully. These two cookers put fried chicken easily within the reach of even a novice home cook.

Recipes abound online and in cookbooks. Crusts can involve flour, cornstarch, buttermilk, evaporated milk, crushed potato chips, and a world of spices. Some brine the chicken first, others marinate for a while in buttermilk or other liquids, still others go straight from the dredging plate to the pan. Chicken can be fried in peanut oil, canola oil, shortening, bacon grease, olive oil, soybean oil, or even adventurous combinations of the any of the above.

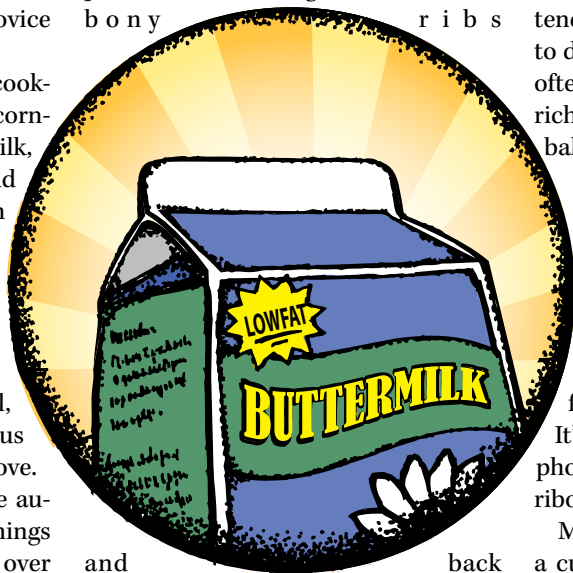
But if you really want to go the authentic, old-school route, the two things that seem to come up over and over among respected fried chicken cooks and venerable Southern meemaws (grandmothers), are cast iron and buttermilk.

Just about any good-sized cast iron skillet will do, as long as it's deep enough to hold a good inch or two of oil, which should come up no higher than halfway up the side of the pan to avoid bubbling over when the chicken is added. But there is an actual cast iron pan specially made for frying chicken, simply known as a chicken pan or chicken fryer. It's a bit deeper than a skillet and lidded, sort of in between a skillet and a Dutch oven. Some cooks say the lid is essential to keeping the bird juicy inside, as well

as cutting down on spattering grease.

There's more information about cast iron skillets and their care in the sidebar on page 28.

Most supermarkets sell chickens also known as "fryers," easily cut into parts for frying. Some cooks even say to look for a chicken with yellowish skin, as they'll be a little fattier and tend to crisp up better. If you have to cut up a whole bird, use a cleaver to cut it apart at the joints into drumsticks, thighs, wings, and two halves of the breast. The back and rib sections can make for huge breast pieces that can sometimes not cook all the way through, so many people cut these in half again or discard the



bonny ribs and back (or use in stock) and keep the thin strip of meat known as a tender for frying as a small nugget.

Next, rinse the chicken parts carefully under cool water and then blot with paper towels. This will help the seasoning and batter stick better. Be sure to trim off any dangling pieces of skin or yellow chicken fat.

Sprinkle salt, pepper, and any other seasonings on both sides of each piece. Salt and pepper is most traditionally used, although paprika, cayenne, sage, and ground thyme are also perfectly good choices.

Then, many old-school recipes call for arranging the chicken in a shallow

dish and pouring buttermilk over them to soak for anywhere from a couple hours to overnight.

While we're at it, just what is buttermilk, anyway, and why use it instead of regular milk?

Because of its name, buttermilk is often assumed to be fatty milk or cream with butter in it. But it's actually the liquid left over after churning butter. Occasionally tiny flecks of butter can be found in it, but for the most part, it's actually leaner and acidic. Most buttermilk today is 'cultured,' made by adding bacteria to regular milk and fermenting 12-14 hours. The naturally formed lactic acid help it marinate and tenderize meat, and also make it easier to digest than milk or cream. It's most often used to impart flavor, texture, and richness to various foods, especially baked goods.

Old wives' tales claimed it could cure some minor ailments, improve the complexion, and even make skin immune to poison oak and poison ivy. That's somewhat doubtful today, but there's no question that buttermilk is lower in fat and calories than milk or cream. It's also a good source of vitamin B12, phosphorus, calcium, potassium, and riboflavin.

Most recipes barely use more than a cup or so, but buttermilk will keep up to two weeks in the fridge and can actually freeze up to three months. Divide into cup or half-cup amounts and then place in freezer bags or any other freezer-safe containers. When thawed, it may separate a bit, but easily whisks back together.

Don't have buttermilk? In a pinch, you can substitute the same amount of regular milk or yogurt. Or, if you really need that buttermilk tang, add a tablespoon of lemon juice per cup of regular milk, and let stand for at least ten minutes at room temperature. A teaspoon and a half of cream of tartar will also turn a cup of regular milk into passable buttermilk.

## Lisa's Twisted Fried Chicken and Playlist

1 fryer chicken, cut up	Peanut or canola oil
1 cup buttermilk	1 tsp. each of thyme, paprika, and hot pepper blend**
1 egg, slightly beaten	Salt and pepper
¼ cup beer*	2 cups flour

Wash chicken and pat dry with paper towels. Sprinkle generously with salt, pepper, thyme, and paprika on both sides.

In one bowl, mix egg, beer, and buttermilk. Add at least 1 tsp of each spice.

In a plate or pie pan, put about two cups of flour.

Dip chicken in egg mixture and then dredge in the flour. Arrange the chicken pieces on a plate and chill in the fridge for 15 minutes.

In a cast iron pan, pour oil about 2 inches deep (or in a shallow skillet, halfway up the side) and heat to 350° F. (On an electric stove, this is usually Medium.)

Large pieces like breasts should fry approximately 7 minutes per side.

When golden brown, remove chicken and drain on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt and some of the hot pepper blend.

\*The beer used here was Shiner Bohemian Black Lager. [www.shiner.com](http://www.shiner.com)

\*\*The hot pepper used here was Primo's Peppers Tobago blend. [www.primospeppers.com](http://www.primospeppers.com)

Generally the next step in fried chicken is to mix the buttermilk with a slightly beaten egg and sometimes more spices, depending on the recipe. Some add spices to the milk and egg mixture, others to the flour. It will work either way. Dip the chicken in the egg mixture and then dredge in flour, cornstarch, breadcrumbs or any other breading material. The crust will adhere better during frying if you arrange the dredged pieces on a platter and chill them in the fridge for at least fifteen minutes.

When you're ready to fry the chicken, fill the pan either halfway full or about two inches deep with oil or melted shortening. Some meemaws still swear by their Crisco. Restaurant chefs prefer peanut or canola oil. Heat it to 350°. This is pretty critical. Any hotter and your chicken will be lovely golden brown on the outside but totally raw at the bone. Any cooler and it will absorb too much oil and the crust will fall off in patches.

If you don't have an oil thermometer, one way to tell if the oil is hot enough for frying is to flick a drop of water onto the surface of the oil. It should sizzle and pop and disappear.

Place a chicken breast in the oil first, by itself. If the oil is at the right temperature, it should take about seven minutes on each side to be crispy brown but done all the way through. Adjust the heat if needed.

Next, fry as many other pieces together as will fit without touching. Cover with the lid and check on them every few minutes.

Hot grease does tend to spatter, especially while turning pieces. If some pops out and hits the burner, it can flame up. It will usually burn off quickly. If it doesn't, toss a little flour on it. Whatever you do, don't throw water on it.

If it pops out onto your skin, wash it off quickly, then dab on some burn ointment or even some yellow mustard—some ointments are made from mustard extract. (And it'll be nice and cold.) From time to time, scoop any little burnt pieces of crust out of the oil.

When the chicken is done, drain the pieces on paper towels or (if you really want to be certifiably old-school) on brown paper grocery sacks. Sprinkle with some salt or other seasonings, let cool for a few more minutes, then serve it up!

While you're frying or eating your yardbird, make it a party and check out the links to these songs at [twistedsouth.com](http://twistedsouth.com). Or use this as a start for your own fried chicken playlist. Above all, enjoy!

"Sunday Morning Coming Down" - Kris Kristofferson

"Fried Chicken" - Rufus Thomas

"Southern Fried Chicken" - Hank Penny

"Memphis Women And Chicken" - Dan Penn

"Eight Piece Box" - Southern Culture On the Skids

"Tearin' Up A Yardbird" - The Cornell Hurd Band

"Follow Me Chicken" - Nathan & the Zydeco Cha-Chas

"Fried Chicken" - Eden Brent

"Taste Like Chicken" - Tony Joe White

"The Funky Bird" - Rufus Thomas

"Eat That Chicken" - Charles Mingus

"Funky Chicken" - NY Jets

"Chicken Fried" - Zac Brown Band

"Chicken Lickin'" - Okie Duke

"Fried Chicken and Gasoline" - Southern Culture On the Skids

"That Butt Thing/Chicken On the Run" - Ryan Foret and Foret Tradition

"Chicken Pickin' Time!" - Larry Birdsong

"I Don't Want No Funky Chicken" - Wiley And The Checkmates

"Fried Chicken/Mary, Mary" - The Slackers

"Do The Funky Chicken" - Rufus Thomas



Popular, traditional sides for Southern fried chicken are usually mashed potatoes with gravy, french fries, corn on the cob, coleslaw, or potato salad, and usually a roll or some sort of bread to help with the grease. Some people also add pickles, sliced tomatoes, or a chilled cucumber salad.

Fried chicken usually doesn't need much in the way of condiments, but a good Southern host will set out bottles of hot sauce or pickled peppers. And, of course, plenty of napkins.

The next day, fried chicken can be reheated or even eaten cold straight out of the fridge, a favorite summer lunch for many growing up in the South before microwave ovens.

Or cut it up and mix with some mayonnaise, chopped pickle, and possibly

a few other ingredients for an easy, quick chicken salad.

If your chicken came out a little rare in the middle, you can still save face by finishing it in the microwave...or turning it into another time-honored Southern soul food classic: smothered chicken. Put it in a skillet and cover with gravy (or make the gravy first and put the chicken in it). Cover and simmer for at least half an hour, occasionally checking that the gravy doesn't stick or dry out. Spoon it over the chicken several times throughout, and turn the chicken at least once.

It may take a few times to really get the hang of your own fried chicken, but it is its own reward, and a culinary skill worth cultivating in this overly corporate, fast food world. ■

## CAST IRON 101

### The Other Kind of Seasoning

Cast iron cookware started out as a pioneer necessity and has become an enduring heirloom, collectible, even a more safe and "sustainable" option than some modern cookware.

Concerns about toxic leaching from non-stick cookware, plus a trend back to basics, "slow food," and comfort food, and new pre-seasoned wares have won cast iron new devotees.

Cast iron skillets don't get replaced or thrown into a landfill—they get lovingly handed down. They can cook evenly over any heat source from ovens to open fire, with good retention. The food absorbs beneficial iron. Brands like Lodge are still made in the US. And they've always been handy against burglars and errant husbands.

But cast iron cookware is serious business, from plain skillets around \$30 to upscale enameled beauties costing hundreds. Vintage pieces like the highly sought Griswold fetch so

much on the Internet that collector groups like The Wagner and Griswold Society post web pages on how to spot fakes. The WAGS site has a lot of other great info, links, and photo galleries.

A properly seasoned cast iron skillet becomes naturally non-stick as the oil seals the metal. Just wash with hot water and a stiff brush. No soap, which can strip the seasoning. If food is stuck on (or you're just squeamish about the no-soap thing), boil some water in the pan or use the old campfire trick of scrubbing with a little salt. Dry thoroughly. It helps, especially in a humid climate, to dry it over heat. Wipe with a thin film of oil, and store.

Fried chicken cooks swear by cast iron. Whether it's the heat retention, the weight of the iron, or what, chicken fried in cast iron really does seem juicier and more thoroughly done. And of course, more down-home. ■

Photo courtesy of [www.wag-society.org](http://www.wag-society.org)

## TRIBUTE:



### Austin Leslie's Fried Chicken with Persillade

- 1 ¼ cup peanut oil
- 13-3 ½ lb fryer chicken, cut up
- Salt and black pepper
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup flour

#### Persillade Garnish:

- 4 tbsp. fresh minced garlic
- 4 tbsp. fresh minced parsley
- Dill pickle slices

Heat oil in a cast iron skillet to 350° F. The oil should come about halfway up the sides of the skillet. Adjust the amount in accordance with the skillet size. Combine garlic and parsley (persillade) in small mixing bowl and set aside.

Wash chicken pieces in cool water, pat dry with paper towels and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Set aside.

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk egg, evaporated milk and water. Season with salt and pepper. Place flour in a separate bowl. One piece at a time, starting with heaviest pieces, dip chicken into egg wash, squeeze, dip into flour and place gently in skillet. Do not overcrowd skillet.

Maintain temperature of 350° F. Use tongs and long fork to turn chicken often for 7-8 minutes. Remove chicken from oil with tongs, pierce with fork and squeeze. Place chicken back in oil approximately 7-8 minutes. Chicken is done when no longer hissing and juices run clear. Remove from oil and place on paper towels. Immediately top with a sprinkle of garlic and parsley mixture. Continue until all the chicken is cooked. Garnish each piece with a slice of dill pickle.

Photo by Jason Perlow

## REMEMBERING AUSTIN LESLIE

Much respect has been paid to a white-suited colonel in Kentucky, but one of fried chicken's most beloved chefs was a man in a captain's hat in Louisiana



Austin Leslie was born in New Orleans in 1934. His first job, at age 9, was delivering fried chicken via bicycle for a neighborhood cafe. He later became a cook there and perfected his chicken at a succession of restaurants, including his aunt's Chez Helene, which he took over when she retired. Other ventures included a Chicago location, a few short-lived franchises, and even a cooking show on Danish television.

He returned to New Orleans, where he enjoyed renewed popularity at Jacques-Imo's and inspired producer Hugh Wilson and actor Tim Reid to create their 1987 TV show *Frank's Place*. Reid starred as Frank, based on Leslie, who was also the series consultant.

In 2000, Leslie published *Austin Leslie's Creole Soul: New Orleans' Cooking with a Soulful Twist*. He later moved to the Seventh Ward restaurant Pampy's to mentor new cooks and greet guests in his trademark captain's hat and rhinestone crab necklace.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters trapped Leslie in his attic for two days until he was rescued and evacuated to Atlanta. A few weeks later he was hospitalized with a high fever and died September 29 at age 71. His was the first jazz funeral in New Orleans after Katrina. The procession marched with the Hot 8 Brass Band from Pampy's to the original Chez Helene location. Some footage appears in the opening credits of HBO's *Treme*.

His cookbook is still available on Amazon and in many New Orleans area shops. Food blogger Jason Perlow graciously shares his memories and photos of Austin Leslie here. —LJG

**M**Y fondest memory of Austin Leslie was the time I took the last known photo of him, when he was the chef at the late Pampy's restaurant in New Orleans in late May of 2005, just a few months prior to when the flooding following Hurricane Katrina destroyed the restaurant and many other parts of the city, and displaced and rendered homeless countless of the city's citizens. I never thought this would be our "Last Supper" with Austin, but it was.

My wife and I were joined at this meal with Brooks Hamaker, one of the founders of Abita Brewery. Austin was dressed in his full white chef's regalia, complete with his signature captain's hat. Earlier in the week we had eaten there as well with Upperline's Jo-Ann Clevenger, one of the most prominent matriarchs of the New Orleans restaurant community, who had first introduced us to Austin at Jacques-Imo's a few years earlier.

While Austin is best remembered for his fried chicken that he cooked at Jack Leonardi's Jaques-Imo's restaurant, the man was capable of so much more, which is why the loss of this man to the Louisiana and New Orleans culinary community was so tragic.

If Willie Mae's Scotch House is the ultimate expression in soul food minimalism, and Dooky Chase's the definitive Creole, then the food that Austin cooked at the short-lived Pampy's was the successful fusion of these two essential New Orleans yin/yang forces—here both soul food and Creole cuisine, the culinary legacy of poor African-Americans in Louisiana, was elevated to the highest of highs.

If anyone ever thought that Austin Leslie was nothing but a glorified fry chef, they would be wrong—dead wrong, as you can see from the photos of food we had at Pampy's on my blog, *Off The Broiler*.

He was a chef's chef, in every way, and didn't believe in taking shortcuts with his food. For example, he'd only use fresh, never frozen chicken for his fried chicken, a detail that he believed was critical in the successful implementation of the dish.

I still miss him and his beaming smile, and his wonderful cooking. —Jason Perlow

Visit Jason's blog at [OfftheBroiler.wordpress.com](http://OfftheBroiler.wordpress.com)