DIRECT · MEDIUM

Chicken tabaka on the kamado: poussin pressed in cast iron, crisp skin

The Georgian poussin that is split down the breast and pressed under a second cast-iron pan, as I cook it on my Big Green Egg Large: direct fire, the whole skin against the metal and garlic with adjika to finish.



PREP	COOK	SERVINGS	TEMPERATURE
25 min	**50 min**	**2**	**220 °C**

Ingredients

- **2 ud** poussins of about 500 g each
- **1 cdta** freshly ground black pepper
- **30 g** butter
- **1 ud** large red pepper, for the quick adjika
- **1 cdta** ground coriander seed
- **1 puñado** fresh coriander, chopped, to serve
- **15 g** coarse salt (12 g for the birds, the rest for the adjika)
- **3 cda** sunflower or mild olive oil
- **6 ud** garlic cloves (4 for the sauce, 2 for the adjika)
- **2 ud** fresh red chillies, deseeded
- **1 cda** white wine vinegar
- **2 ud** flatbreads (shoti or lavash), to serve

Method

1 SPLIT AND FLATTEN THE POUSSIN

Pat the poussin dry with kitchen paper and set it on the board breast up. Cut along the breastbone with a sturdy knife, open the bird out like a book and press down with your palm until the ribs crack and it lies flat. Tuck the wing tips back behind the shoulders. Salt both sides with 6 g per bird, add the pepper and leave it uncovered in the fridge for 30-60 minutes: the salt dries the skin, and dry skin is the skin that crisps.

2 QUICK ADJIKA

While the poussin takes the salt, put the chopped red pepper, the two deseeded chillies, two garlic cloves, the ground coriander, half a teaspoon of salt and the vinegar in the blender. Blitz to a coarse paste, not a smooth purée, and taste: it should have heat without burying the pepper. If you would rather use a jar, choose a red adjika without tomato and skip this step. Keep it in a covered bowl until serving.

3 LIGHT THE EGG FOR DIRECT COOKING

On my Big Green Egg Large I fill the firebox to half height with lump charcoal, light it with one firelighter in the centre and leave the dome open for ten minutes; a dense charcoal such as Jealous Devil's white quebracho is the kind that lasts both batches without a top-up. No deflector: this is a direct cook. I close it with the bottom vent open two fingers' width and the top vent half open, and wait for the dome thermometer to settle between 220 and 230 °C with the smoke running clean. That usually takes about 20 minutes from closing.

4 PREHEAT BOTH PANS

Set the Petromax FP35 on the grate, centred, and inside it the 26 cm Lodge, with its long handle resting over one of the FP35's loop handles and pointing towards you: it stands above the rim, and it is what you will grab with the glove to lift it out. Close the lid and give them ten minutes: iron takes time to load up with heat, and that stored heat is what will brown the skin without the pan cooling when the bird lands. When a drop of water dances and vanishes instantly on the FP35, it is ready. Lift the Lodge out with a thick glove and rest it on a surface that can take the heat.

5 SEAT THE BIRD AND SET THE WEIGHT

Brush the oil onto the skin side of the poussin rather than pouring it into the pan: on iron that already makes water dance, a pool of oil smokes and can catch over the coals. Lay the bird skin down, fully opened out, pushing the thighs down against the base of the pan. Set the hot Lodge on top, its base resting on the bird, and close the kamado lid completely. Not cracked, not ajar. Leave it 12-14 minutes without opening: the iron does the work on its own and the fat the skin releases gathers in the free ring of the pan.

6 BURP AND TURN

Before opening, burp the lid: lift it 5 cm, wait about five seconds and open fully. With a glove, take the Lodge off and set it aside, its job is done. Turn the poussin with tongs: the skin should be a deep golden brown and lift cleanly off the iron; if it resists, give it two more minutes. Close the lid again and leave it 8-10 minutes skin up, now without the weight, so the bone side finishes.

7 CHECK FOR 74 °C IN THE BREAST

Burp again and measure with the DOQAUS instant thermometer: probe in from the side into the thickest part of the breast, without touching bone. You want 74 °C there, and the thigh above 80 °C. If the breast is two or three degrees short, close up and give it three more minutes; if the thigh is lagging, rotate the bird so the legs sit over the hottest part of the pan. Move the poussin to a warmed platter.

8 GARLIC IN THE FAT AND THE SECOND BATCH

Spoon the fat left in the FP35 into a small saucepan away from the kamado, without scraping the pan. In the saucepan, on the hob, melt the butter with the four finely chopped garlic cloves for 30 seconds and add three tablespoons of hot water: it comes together as a cloudy garlic sauce that goes over the poussin. The FP35 stays inside and hot: brush the second poussin with the rest of the oil, return the Lodge to the pan, close the lid for the five minutes the first bird rests, and repeat from step five.

9 REST AND SERVE

Give each bird five minutes before cutting it into four, down the breastbone and between breast and leg. The first waits uncovered, skin up, on a warmed platter: under foil the steam softens the skin you have just earned. The flatbreads are toasted at the end, in the emptied FP35 with the last of the fat, a minute a side with the lid open, while the second poussin rests. Spoon the garlic sauce over each bird, put the adjika alongside, not on top, and finish with fresh coriander. Eat with your hands, crisp skin up.

Editor's tips

- The weight has to fit inside the pan, not rest on the rim: the body of the 26 cm Lodge fits in the 35 cm FP35 with room to spare and its handle stands above the rim; a square 28 cm griddle plate has a 39.6 cm diagonal and would sit on the handles without touching the bird. If you have no second pan, a small cast-iron pot or a brick wrapped in foil does the same job.
- A flattened poussin covers almost the whole base of the 35 cm pan. Do not force two birds into one: they overlap, the skin that is not touching iron stays soft and the weight flattens neither. One per batch: two 35 cm pans will not fit on the Large's 46 cm grate, and the first waits uncovered on a warmed platter.
- Skin crisps when it is dry. After salting, leave the poussin uncovered in the fridge and pat it dry again with kitchen paper before it touches the oil: damp skin steams against the iron instead of frying.
- The fat in the pan is not for throwing away. It carries the garlic, and a spoonful over flatbread toasted on the coals is worth the whole batch on its own.

Gear for this recipe

Big Green Egg Large

This is the kamado I cook this recipe in, and the size matters: the Large's 46 cm grate takes a 35 cm pan centred with space around it for hot air to rise up the sides and for the dome to hold its temperature. The thick ceramic acts as a second heat store behind the iron, so when you open to turn the bird the temperature does not plummet. All the lid handling I describe, fully closed while the fat works and burping before opening, has been tested on this cooker. In a smaller kamado the FP35 will not fit, and even the 61 cm grate of an XL will not take two 35 cm pans side by side, so the second poussin always goes in a second batch.

mikamado.es/en/kamados/big-green-egg-large

Jealous Devil 100% White Quebracho lump charcoal 15.8 kg

White quebracho is one of the densest woods used for charcoal, and density is what you want when cooking with cast iron over direct fire: the pan draws heat from the bed for close to an hour across two batches, and dense coals take that pull without collapsing or needing a top-up halfway through. It also responds quickly when you open the bottom vent to get back to 220 °C after turning. If the lumps are large, it is worth breaking a few to fill the firebox to half height without gaps. Aroma is secondary here: the pan shields the food from the smoke, and what you are after is a steady fire.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/jealous-devil-quebracho-lump-charcoal

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Petromax FP35 Cast Iron Fire Skillet 35 cm with Handles

A 35 cm cast-iron fire skillet with two short handles is the format tabaka asks for in a kamado: with no long handle, it sits centred on the Large's grate and the lid closes without touching anything. The 35 cm give room for a flattened 500 g poussin plus the free ring where the fat from the skin collects, and the thickness of the iron is what stops the pan cooling when the bird goes in. At the end, the fat left behind in it is the base of the garlic sauce, and the emptied pan toasts the flatbreads. The handles get as hot as the base: a thick glove is compulsory for moving it.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/petromax-skillet-fp35

Lodge L8SK3: pre-seasoned cast iron skillet, 26 cm

In this recipe the Lodge fries nothing: it is the weight. Its 26 cm diameter fits inside the 35 cm FP35 leaving a free ring, which a square 28 cm griddle plate cannot manage because its diagonal is over 39 cm and it would sit on the handles. Being cast iron it is heavy enough to flatten the poussin and force every bit of skin onto the metal, and preheated in the kamado alongside the big pan it cooks the bird from above instead of stealing its heat. Away from tabaka it is an everyday pan that handles direct fire without complaint.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/lodge-sarten-hierro-fundido-26cm

DOQAUS instant-read thermometer, folding probe, 3-second read

There is no leave-in probe here: the bird is pressed under another pan and the only reading possible is a spot check, when turning and at the end. A folding instant thermometer such as the DOQAUS gives the figure in around three seconds, according to the manufacturer, which is about how long it takes to probe the breast from the side and get your hand away from a pan at 220 °C. The rule is 74 °C in the thickest part of the breast and over 80 °C in the thigh, and in a poussin the two are a hand's width apart, so both get measured in the same lid opening. Folded, the probe fits in an apron pocket.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/doqaus-termometro-instantaneo-plegable

Full recipe at: mikamado.es/en/recetas/pollo-tabaka-georgiano-kamado

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