

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cubed  
Essence, recipe follows  
1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 cup chopped yellow onions  
1/2 cup chopped red bell peppers  
2 tablespoons minced jalapeno peppers  
1 tablespoon minced garlic  
2 teaspoons ground cumin  
1 bay leaf  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon cayenne  
1 cup corn kernels  
1 (15-ounce) can chopped tomatoes and their juices  
1 cup chicken stock  
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves  
Cornbread topping, recipe follows  
1 cup grated cheddar cheese, for topping  
Chopped green onions, garnish  
Chipotle Crema, recipe follows

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Season the chicken with Essence on all sides.

In a large cast iron skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook, stirring, until browned on all sides, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate.

Add the remaining 1/2 tablespoon oil to the pan and when hot, add the onions, bell peppers and jalapeno. Cook, stirring, for 3 minutes. Add the garlic, cumin, bay leaf, salt, and cayenne, and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the corn and cook until starting to color and pop, about 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes and their juices and the stock, and bring to a boil. Cook, stirring until thickened, 7 to 10 minutes. Return the chicken to the pot and cook until cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and discard the bay leaf. Stir in the cilantro and adjust the seasoning, to taste. Spoon the cornmeal batter over the chicken mixture, leaving a 1/2-inch border around the sides.

Bake until golden brown, 15 minutes. Remove from the oven and sprinkle the cheese on top. Return to the oven until melted, 2 minutes. Remove from the oven.

Garnish with the chopped green onions and drizzle with the crema. Serve hot.

Essence (Emeril's Creole Seasoning):

2 1/2 tablespoons paprika  
2 tablespoons salt  
2 tablespoons garlic powder  
1 tablespoon black pepper  
1 tablespoon onion powder  
1 tablespoon cayenne pepper  
1 tablespoon dried leaf oregano  
1 tablespoon dried thyme

Combine all ingredients thoroughly and store in an airtight jar or container.

Yield: about 2/3 cup

Recipe from "New New Orleans Cooking", by Emeril Lagasse and Jessie Tirsch. Published by William and Morrow, 1993.

Cornmeal Topping:

3/4 cup cornmeal  
1/4 cup all-purpose flour  
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup buttermilk  
1 large egg

2 tablespoons bacon grease or vegetable oil

In a bowl, combine the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, and salt.

In a small bowl, beat together the buttermilk, egg and bacon grease. Add to the dry ingredients and mix until just blended, being careful not to overmix. Use as a topping for the Chicken Chili.

Chipotle Crema:

1 cup half and half

1 cup heavy cream

1 tablespoon sour cream

4 teaspoons chopped chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, or less to taste

1/2 teaspoon salt

In a bowl, mix together the half-and-half, cream, and sour cream. Let sit at room temperature for 24 hours to develop.

In the bowl of a food processor or blender, combine the cream mixture with the peppers, adobo sauce, and salt. Process on high speed until smooth. Serve, or keep refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

Yield: 2 cups

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