

Pollo al Mattone ***Chicken Under a Brick***

Weighing down a chicken with bricks seems so ancient. Did the advisors to Roman emperors hatch the slogan, “A chicken under every brick,” to go along with the bread and circus motif?

Brick morphed so naturally from the good earth—add water and high heat (*ecco fatto, terracotta*) and civilization started to build in a big way.

Roman bricks were longer and narrower than present-day bricks, but any brick will do. If you have a few handy, you should wash them, let them air-dry, and wrap them in a few sheets of aluminum foil. Otherwise, you can use a heavy pan of some sort. I’ve used an 8-quart Le Creuset, covering the bottom with aluminum foil.

Serves 4

2 garlic cloves
1 handful of parsley
Zest from 1 orange
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 chicken, 3 to 4 pounds

Marinade: Vinegar, White Wine

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1/2 cup extra- virgin olive oil
1/2 cup white wine

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Mince the garlic and parsley and combine with the zest, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, and salt and pepper. Set aside.

Wash the chicken under cold running water and dry. With poultry shears, remove the wing tips, any excess fat, and cut out the backbone. Put them aside for stock. You may want to remove the ribs and breastbone, too. Mix together the marinade ingredients. Lay the chicken flat, skin side up. Stuff the garlic mixture under the skin, place in the marinade, then cover and marinate for a few hours or, even better, overnight. Turn two or three times.

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a cast-iron pan large enough to hold the chicken (I use a 12-inch cast-iron skillet). Place the chicken skin side down and weigh it down with the two clean bricks wrapped in foil. Cook over medium heat for 5 minutes, then place the skillet and bricks in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes, after which you’ll remove the weights

and turn the chicken over, cooking another 10 minutes or so, until done. Cut into serving-sized pieces.

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