

Chicken Pressada

"Pressada", a coined term for chicken pressed between two layers of lavender.

- 6 to 8 chicken breasts or other cuts, bones and skin removed
- Olive oil for brushing
- 5 gallon bucket loosely filled with fresh lavender foliage and flower stalks

Light a fire in a charcoal grill. Meanwhile, rinse the chicken parts thoroughly under cold running water and pat dry. Once the flames are out and the coals are white at the edges, arrange the coals in a uniform layer. Place the grill rack over the coals and set a 10-inch-by-20-inch cast iron pancake griddle on top of the rack. The griddle should be directly above - less than 1/2 inch - the hot coals. Heat the griddle until it is nearly orange hot. When oil dropped on the griddle dances and sizzles, you're ready to begin.

Quickly coat the griddle with the olive oil, which prevents the herbs from sticking and makes cleaning easier. Don't use a brush with plastic bristles as the intense heat of the metal will melt the bristles.

Working quickly, layer up to 2 inches of lavender foliage on the griddle with the stems all running in one direction. Be sure to cover the griddle thoroughly with the lavender and leave no holes. Lay the chicken on top of the lavender, with the lengths of the pieces perpendicular to the lengths of lavender. cover the chicken thoroughly with another 2 inches of lavender foliage. Set a baking sheet on top of the chicken and lavender "sandwich". Stack 5-10 bricks evenly on top of the baking sheet to compress the lavender and chicken.

Because the heat supercharges the volatile essential oils in the lavender, the resulting steam and oil mixture quickly cooks the chicken. The chicken may need only 5 to 10 minutes per side if the griddle was nearly orange hot, 15 to 20 minutes per side if the charcoal wasn't hot enough. When the chicken is done, a knife score shows only white flesh, on one side, remove the bricks and the baking sheet and use tongs to turn the entire sandwich as quickly as possible. The lavender and chicken will usually hold together enough to allow you to turn them as a unified whole. You'll either amaze your guests or have to reassemble the lavender and chicken sandwich while eating humble pie. Practice makes perfect.

When the chicken is juicy but no pink flesh shows when meat is tested with a knife, remove the bricks and baking sheet and the top layer of lavender foliage, and place on a platter. Then remove the lavender and the griddle from the grill rack. Quickly restoke the coals and place the chicken pieces on the grill rack, setting them at a diagonal to the lines of the rack. Briefly brown the chicken on both sides. Transfer to a serving platter.