



Stave Smoked Chicken Wings with Spinach Dip

Nickel & Nickel Branding Iron Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley

by Executive Chef Trevor Eliason

Ingredients

3–4 pounds chicken wings

1/2–1 pound smoking chips
or barrel staves

10–12 charcoal briquettes

4 cups vegetable oil

Brine:

1/2 gallon water

1/4 cup salt

1/8 cup sugar

1 small carrot

1 celery stick

1/2 onion

1/2 fennel bulb

1/2 leek

1 garlic head

6 black peppercorns

1 bay leaf

5 thyme sprigs

1 lemon, halved

Breading:

1 cup all-purpose flour

4 eggs, beaten

2 cups breadcrumbs

Sauce:

1 bag prewashed spinach

1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt

1/2 cup sour cream

2 tablespoons whole grain mustard

1 tablespoon Champagne vinegar

Salt and pepper to taste

1/2 cup onion, diced

1 garlic clove, minced

1/2 cup cucumber, diced small

1 tablespoon parsley, chopped

1 tablespoon cilantro, chopped

METHOD

To make the brine, you will need a five-quart pot. Add the water and all the brine ingredients to the pot. When it comes to a boil, remove from heat and chill. Add the chicken wings and put in refrigerator overnight.

The next day, remove the chicken from the brine and place on a rack. Dry the wings with paper towels. The drier the wings, the better the smoke will stick to them. If you have a smoker, more power to you, but if not, it is easy enough to do on your grill outside. Place barrel staves or chips on top of the briquettes once they have turned white. Place the chicken wings on the opposite side of the grill and close the top. Smoke for 30 minutes. If the chips flame during the smoking process, you can extinguish the flame with drops of water or wine. After 30 minutes, remove the chicken from the grill and chill the wings.

To finish the wings, you will bread and fry them. Using 3 medium-sized bowls: fill one with flour, one with the beaten eggs and one with bread crumbs. I like to arrange my breading station starting on my left with the chicken wings, then the flour, eggs and bread crumbs followed by a baking sheet.

Heat your fryer to 350°F. Fry the breaded wings until they are golden brown and the internal temperature is 160°F.

To make the spinach dip, start by steaming the spinach until it's wilted and tender. Squeeze the water out of the spinach and put into a food processor. Pulse the spinach with the yogurt, sour cream and mustard until smooth, then add the vinegar, salt and pepper. In a medium sauté pan, sweat the onions and garlic for 2–3 minutes, just to soften and release flavor. Transfer spinach mixture to bowl and fold in diced cucumber, onion, garlic, parsley and cilantro. Taste and adjust with salt, pepper and vinegar to your liking.

Serve hot chicken wings with spinach dipping sauce on the side. Enjoy with a glass of Nickel & Nickel Branding Iron Cabernet Sauvignon.

Serves 5–10