

(JOHN WAS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THIS)
**VEGETABLE
 TORTILLA STEW**



for the STEW

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 1 large onion, diced
 1 large green bell pepper, diced
 1 large jalapeño pepper, finely diced (include the seeds)
 2 tablespoons minced garlic (about 4 cloves)
 2 tablespoons chili powder
 1 tablespoon ground cumin
 ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
 Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
 2 (15-ounce) cans diced tomatoes in juice
 2 (15-ounce) cans black beans, drained and rinsed
 1 cup cooked rice

for the TORTILLA STRIPPES

4 corn tortillas
 2 cups vegetable oil, for frying
 Kosher salt

for SERVING

Roughly chopped fresh cilantro leaves
 1 avocado, sliced
 Crumbled cotija or shredded cheddar cheese

Childish my god it was hard to not throw chicken into this, but I was dead set on giving my vegetarian lover something even my meat-loving butt could be blown away by. I love every damned thing in this book, but there are some I can actually taste when I write about them or merely look at a photo. This is one of those recipes. Full of veggie goodness and the perfect amount of kick. Thick enough for ship dipping but perfect for a spoonful all up in your mouth. I don't even know how you're still reading this unless you can safely read a hardcover while driving to the grocery store.

MAKE THE SOUP: In a soup pot, heat the oil over medium heat until shimmering. Add the onion, bell pepper, and jalapeño and cook, stirring, until the onion is translucent and a teeny bit golden, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic, chili powder, cumin, cayenne, 2 teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon black pepper and cook, stirring until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add the chicken broth, tomatoes, and beans and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Add the rice and cook until the stew gets nice and thick, about 15 minutes more. Season with more salt, pepper, and spice, if you want.

MAKE THE TORTILLA STRIPPES: Fill a small or medium saucepan with a couple inches of oil and heat over medium-high heat. Stack the tortillas on top of each other and cut them into thin strips using a sharp knife. Test the oil by dropping a tortilla strip in; if it sizzles immediately, you're good to go. A small handful at a time, gently lower the strips into the oil and fry until crisp, 1 to 2 minutes. Pull them out with a slotted spoon, drain on paper towels, and salt 'em up.

To serve, divide the soup among bowls and garnish with cilantro, avocado, cheese, and the tortilla strippies.



8 slices white sandwich bread, torn into pieces
 6 cloves garlic
 8 tablespoons unsalted butter
 1 teaspoon kosher salt
 ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 5 tablespoons finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

In a food processor, process the bread until it forms fine crumbs (you should have about 4 cups crumbs). Transfer the crumbs to a bowl. Add the garlic to the processor and process until finely minced (or do it by hand).

In a large skillet, heat the butter over medium-low heat. When it foams, add the garlic and cook, stirring, until the garlic smells great but hasn't browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the bread crumbs. Increase the heat to medium, and cook, stirring frequently, until toasty and browned, 7 to 9 minutes. Stir in the salt and pepper, remove from the heat, and transfer to a large plate to cool for 5 minutes. Toss in the Parm.

**cheesy garlic
 bread crumbs**

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

**CHEESY JALAPEÑO
 BACON CORNBREAD**

6 slices bacon
 1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, cut into chunks
 1 cup canned cream-style corn
 ½ cup buttermilk, shaken
 3 large eggs, beaten
 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
 ½ cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
 ½ cup sliced pickled jalapeño peppers, chopped
 1½ cups cornmeal
 2 teaspoons sugar
 1½ teaspoons baking soda
 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

We all know those people who are super stuck in their ways because, well, nostalgia. I'm like this with stuffing. I truly don't believe there is a better stuffing out there than Stove Top. I've had it all. The apples. The walnuts. The sausage. AIIIIII your fancy little ways. Nothing ever makes me happier than Stove Top in all its herby, MSG goodness.

John is like this with cornbread. For him, nothing will ever top his box of Jiffy. But oh, I was willing to accept this challenge. Let's just say we are now a Jiffy-free household. (See photograph on page 6.)

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

In a 10-inch cast-iron skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat, turning occasionally, until crisp, about 9 minutes. Transfer the bacon to paper towels to drain, leaving the bacon fat in the skillet. When cool, crumble the bacon.

Add the butter to the hot bacon fat to melt, then pour it into a large bowl and let cool for 10 minutes. (Don't wipe out the skillet.) Stir the creamed corn into the melted fats, then add the buttermilk, eggs, cheeses, jalapeños, and crumbled bacon.

In another large bowl, combine the cornmeal, sugar, baking soda, salt, and pepper. Add the wet ingredients to the dry and stir until incorporated. Pour the batter into the skillet and bake until the top is lightly browned and the center is set, 30 to 35 minutes.

Let the cornbread cool slightly before slicing.

**CHICKEN
 LETTUCE WRAPS**

for the SAUCE
 3 tablespoons Thai sweet chili sauce
 3 tablespoons hoisin sauce
 3 tablespoons light soy sauce
 2 tablespoons Sriracha
 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 1 teaspoon sesame oil
 1½ tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar
 2 tablespoons minced garlic (about 4 cloves)
 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger

for the FILLING
 1 pound ground chicken
 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
 8 scallions, thinly sliced, whites and greens kept separate
 1 tablespoon minced garlic (about 2 cloves)
 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
 ½ pound white mushrooms, trimmed, cleaned, and finely chopped
 ½ cup finely diced canned water chestnuts
 1 small red bell pepper, finely chopped
 2 heads butter lettuce, leaves separated

I am one lettuce-wrapping son of a gun. Ninety percent of my brain capacity is filled with Rain Man-esque food equations on how I can make something low-carb, or as I prefer to call it, lower-carb. Using seaweed sheets, portobello mushroom "buns," and thinly sliced zucchini actually do the job quite nicely, but lettuce-wrapping is of course the easiest way.

Every single time I make this dish, I find myself burying my head in the fridge all night, scooping and scraping for every chicken bit possible with my bare hands. Filling and healthy and freaking yummy. No bacon. No cheese. No starch. I am almost embarrassed to say I love it.

MAKE THE SAUCE: In a bowl, combine the chili sauce, hoisin, soy sauce, Sriracha, vegetable oil, sesame oil, vinegar, garlic, and ginger.

MAKE THE FILLING: In a bowl, mix 2 tablespoons of the sauce into the ground chicken.

In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of the vegetable oil over medium-high heat. When shimmering-hot, add the chicken and cook, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon, until browned, 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer the meat to a plate and set aside.

Add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil to the skillet, then add the scallion whites, garlic, and ginger and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, until they release their liquid, 3 to 4 minutes. Return the chicken to the pan, then add the water chestnuts, bell pepper, and the rest of the sauce and cook, stirring, until cooked through and the liquid has reduced and thickened slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the scallion greens.

Transfer the mixture to a bowl and set out with the lettuce leaves.

**gimme
 that htness,
 sugar**

Sweet chili sauce is a staple in Thai food, usually served with charcoal-grilled chicken. YASSS. It's basically light syrup cooked down with red chilies and we love this stuff to dip our summer rolls into. As an ingredient, it adds sweetness and spice to sauces, and it's great on a sandwich. These days you can find it in the Asian people part of a regular supermarket.



**JOHN'S
 FRIED CHICKEN
 WINGS
 WITH SPICY HONEY
 BUTTER**

for the CHICKEN AND BRINE
 6 tablespoons Lawry's Seasoning Salt
 2½ tablespoons garlic powder
 2 tablespoons cayenne pepper
 5 pounds chicken wings and drumettes

for the BREADING AND FRYING
 Canola oil, for deep-frying
 4 cups all-purpose flour
 2 tablespoons Lawry's Seasoning Salt
 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper

for the SPICY HONEY BUTTER
 1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
 4 tablespoons Cholula hot sauce (or any, it has to be Cholula)
 2 tablespoons honey
 ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste

special EQUIPMENT

Deep-fry or candy thermometer

In the sea of things John does right, his fried chicken is the ... I dunno ... whatever the king of the sea is, I guess that Little Mermaid guy with the giant fork.

There is nothing in this world I crave more than this eerily simple party staple of ours. Harvesting the crumbs from post-party plates tops the list of things I am not exactly proud of.

I prefer it as little wings and drumettes as I've calculated the skin to meat ratio and determined I get more crispy skin by gnawing on the little guys. And then we decided to start drizzling it with Cholula honey butter.

We have problems.

BRINE THE CHICKEN: In a large big pot or a 2-gallon zip-top plastic bag, combine 10 cups cold water, the seasoning salt, garlic powder, and cayenne. Add the chicken, cover, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours and up to 24.

BREAD AND FRY THE CHICKEN: Fill a soup pot with 6 inches of oil, making sure there are at least 4 inches of clearance between the oil and the lip of the pot. Heat the oil over medium heat until it reaches 365°F on a deep-fry thermometer, or prepare a deep fryer according to the manufacturer's instructions.

In a big bowl, combine the flour, seasoning salt, and cayenne. A few at a time, combine the wings from the brine and toss them in the flour mixture until coated really well, then place on a baking sheet while you coat the rest.

When the oil is ready, turn the heat up to medium-high and carefully slip in the wings, adding just enough so that there's still plenty of space around each wing. (If it feels safer, use tongs to hot the wings, whatever you do, don't just drop them in! Splashing hot oil is bad.) Fry the wings until golden and crispy, about 13 minutes per batch. Drain the wings on plenty of paper towels. Fry the remaining chicken, letting the oil come back to temperature between batches.

MAKE THE SPICY HONEY BUTTER: While the chicken is frying, in a bowl, whisk together the melted butter, Cholula, honey, and salt until incorporated. Taste and add more salt if necessary.

Slosher the wings with the spicy honey butter and eat that chackien!

