

Spicy Chicken Salad with Toasted Fennel and Celery

Serves 4

If you came here looking for mayonnaise, curry powder and dried fruit, LOL you are in the wrong place. There is nothing wrong with the aforementioned ingredients, I just will not be combining them together with shredded chicken and writing a recipe for it. Think of this as more of a salad, with chicken.

The recipe is pretty flexible as long as you have the three main components: a mess of crunchy vegetables and herbs (thinly sliced celery or fennel, cilantro/parsley/dill, little gems or romaine), the “dressing,” which is really just a riff on the toasted fennel oil from Nothing Fancy (that one includes anchovies, which would be great here but didn’t want to lay it on too thick), and of course, the “chicken,” which here is poached chicken, but you can also use any leftover chicken you have (from a whole bird you roasted, a rotisserie chicken you picked up or any leftover parts from last night’s dinner, etc.).

FYI this is a three asterisk recipe, meaning three elements have an asterisk, indicating you’ll need to make that ingredient, but all are optional (except the chicken). Plus, I’ll give you instructions for each one, making this really like...5 recipes in one. The deal of the century!

FOR THE DRESSING

½ cup olive oil
2 tablespoons fennel seed
1 tablespoon crushed red pepper flakes, plus more
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
Flaky sea salt

FOR THE SALAD

Poached chicken* (or whatever chicken of your choosing, cooked however you want to cook it), shredded into bite-sized pieces
Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper
4 stalks celery, 1 small fennel bulb, or some combination of the two, thinly sliced
2 heads little gem lettuces or 1 head romaine, torn or cut into large bite-sized pieces
2 cups fresh herbs like cilantro, parsley, or dill
1 lemon, halved
1-ish cup salty yogurt**, should the spirit move you
2 jammy eggs***, halved, if you’re so compelled

FOR THE DRESSING

1. Heat oil in a small pot or skillet over medium heat. add fennel seed, crushed red pepper flakes, and garlic and as soon as you see the slightest suggestion of sizzling, turn the heat alllllll the way down. If you have a fancy stove, this will be VERY low, and if you, like me, have a kind of shitty one, then it won't be that low but that's fine.
2. Cook 5–8 minutes until the garlic is a very pale golden brown and completely softened. Depending on your red pepper flakes, this oil might turn bright orange and it might not. Either way, it's going to be great!
3. Let the oil cool completely and season well with salt. Taste it; add more crushed red pepper flakes if you feel like it can be spicier.

FOR THE SALAD

1. Toss the chicken in a small bowl with a few large spoonfuls of the dressing. Season with salt, pepper and more dressing as needed— it should be so good already that you almost want to eat the whole bowl of shredded, poached chicken (but you won't— there is a salad to be made).
2. Toss celery, herbs and lettuces in a medium bowl with a very generous squeeze of lemon; season with salt and pepper.
3. Spoon some of the salty yogurt onto the bottom of a plate or the bowl, then top with the celery mixture and bits of chicken. Pop a half a jammy egg in there, if you like, spoon more dressing on and around it all.

***POACHED CHICKEN**

Bring a medium pot of well-salted water to a boil. add one quartered onion and one sliced lemon, let it simmer for a few minutes to season the water appropriately. Add about 1 1/2 pounds of boneless, skinless chicken breast (about 3 medium breasts) and reduce the heat to a bare simmer, like just a few tiny teeny bubbles. No boiling, please! Gently poach for 15–20 minutes (mine were on the smaller side of medium and took 16 minutes, so adjust based on the size of yours). Using tongs or a slotted spoon, remove chicken from the liquid and let cool on a plate or baking sheet.

Use the leftover liquid as the base of some very lemony soup, drink it straight as a restorative broth, or use it to cook beans (that's what I did, and they turned out very tangy and almost too salty, which is to say, they were my dream beans).

****SALTY YOGURT**

Combine yogurt (I use full fat or 2% greek) in a medium bowl and season with salt. Make it salty, as the name suggests. You can also season this with lemon juice if you find your yogurt could use more tang.

*****JAMMY EGGS**

There are lots of ways to make jammy eggs, and this is how I make mine. Take it or leave it! Bring a small pot of water to a boil and carefully lower in 4-6 large eggs. Set a timer for six minutes (seriously, set a timer! I never set a timer and even I set a timer for jammy eggs) and let them boil for six whole minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and run them under cold water until they're cool enough to handle. Peel and eat or refrigerate for later.