

Bob Hart's Beer Butt Chicken

THE basic idea is simple enough: Take one chicken and a can of beer. Drink a few glugs of the beer and then insert the opened can into the cavity of the chicken. This will allow you to stand the chicken – using the two legs and the can as a tripod – on a kettle barbecue on which it will cook, to perfection, in a little over an hour, depending on the size of the chicken and the heat of the barbie. Simple.



The technique originated, as far as I can establish, in the southern states of the US – probably in Tennessee. And there are a few refinements that I recommend:

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- Using an old-fashioned beer can opener, put a few extra holes in the top of the can before inserting it.
 - If using a Weber or similar barbecue, cook the chicken over a drip tray, by the indirect method. Use wood chips on the charcoal – I like applewood with chicken. But not too much as it is a delicate meat. A touch of hickory is an option.
 - Use an American-style barbecue rub for this dish. I use one I picked up from US barbecue guru Steven Raichlen, whose books I strongly recommend. He combines 1/4 cup brown sugar with 1/4 cup sweet paprika, 3 tbs black pepper, 3 tbs coarse salt, 2tbs garlic powder, 2tbs onion powder (I use neither of these powders but I rub the chicken, inside and out, with a flattened garlic clove and a lemon segment before applying the rub) and 1tsp cayenne. Mix this rub with your fingers and apply, inside and out, to a washed chicken of between 1.8 and 2kg. This quantity of rub is enough for several birds, and will keep. Also, if you like, add some of the rub to the beer in the can.
 - Lower the rubbed chicken onto the opened can, pull the legs forward to form the tripod, and sit it on the hot grill over the drip tray. Cover the barbecue. Check for doneness after one and a quarter hours, but don't cook for more than one and a half. Top up the coals on the Weber after the first hour if necessary, adding a few more wet wood chips, also.
 - Now, the tricky bit: carefully lift the chicken, can still in place, using efficient, reliable tongs, onto a platter. Stand it upright and deliver it to the table in this bizarre position, if you like. Allow it to rest for 10 minutes and then carefully remove the beer can from the chicken but remember, the beer will still be hot so do not spill it on yourself!
 - Split and joint the chicken, or carve it if you like, and serve. The hot beer mixture can be used as the basis of a sauce, but I feel that by this stage, it has done its job and the chicken is sufficiently moist.

