



**3.**

**LESSON Nº1**

**CHICKEN  
MOJO  
CRIOLLO**

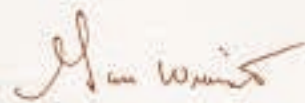


## DEAR STUDENT,

**NATURALLY, YOU WANT TO MAKE RIBS, NOT CHICKEN. POULTRY ISN'T WHAT MOST** of us are hungry for when we fire up the smoker, but this first cook isn't about the meat. It's about learning how to operate your equipment as a low and slow cooker and, more importantly, starting to trust what these cookers can do when you leave them alone. Besides, do you know how many chickens a chucklehead like me had to cook to begin to know what I'm teaching you? Hundreds of chickens have been sacrificed so you can do it perfectly the first time. You shouldn't be able to screw up this lesson no matter how hard you try, but just in case, that's why you're cooking eight dollars worth of chicken instead of fifty dollars worth of ribs.

You'll notice this program is not structured like most cookbooks. Following the list of ingredients for each dinner, the instructions are laid out in a timeline based on when you want to eat. For example, if dinner is at 6:00 p.m., the instructions are to prep the chicken and marinate it about eight to ten hours before dinnertime, or around 8:00 a.m. This allows for four to six hours of marinating time and two hours of cooking time. If there's one idea I want to get across with this format, it's that you can't rely on exact times for low and slow. Times will vary. Be flexible. You'll also find that this format helps you stay organized and serve on time when you're feeding a crowd. But before you even think of risking embarrassment and inviting all of your friends over to celebrate your mastery of low and slow, you need to do each lesson at least two or three times to get the hang of it.

Sincerely,



Gary Wiviott



## CHICKEN MOJO CRIOLLO



*Mojo criollo [MOH-hoh kree-OH-yoh] is a simple Cuban marinade made with garlic, onion, and citrus. As simple as it is to make, you're buying a bottle of it from the store for the first cook. Purists might balk at using a commercial marinade, but I'm telling you to use it for the same reason we're using chicken for your first lesson. It's cheap, predictable, and readily available. (You'll find mojo criollo in the ethnic foods section of most supermarkets and in grocery stores catering to a Latino population.) After your first cook, feel free to use any of the other marinades (including my recipe for homemade mojo criollo) included at the end of the chapter.*

### WSM AND OFFSET

SERVES 4 TO 6

2 whole fryers (3- to 4-pound chickens),  
split in half, legs disjointed (page 50)  
1 (32-ounce) bottle *mojo criollo*,  
Goya or other brand  
1/2 cup olive oil  
1 lemon, cut in half  
Kosher salt and freshly ground  
black pepper, to taste

### KETTLE

SERVES 2 TO 4

1 whole fryer (3- to 4-pound chicken),  
split in half, legs disjointed (page 50)  
2 cups *mojo criollo*, Goya or other brand  
1/4 cup olive oil  
1/2 lemon  
Kosher salt and freshly ground  
black pepper, to taste

### 6 TO 8 HOURS BEFORE DINNER

Divide the chicken halves between two one-gallon zip-top bags so that there are two chicken halves per bag (Use one zip-top bag if using the kettle cooker.) Vigorously shake the bottle of *mojo criollo*, and pour two cups of the marinade into each bag. Pour 1/4 cup of the olive oil into each bag and squeeze half a lemon into each bag. Place the bags in a large bowl or on a rimmed baking sheet to catch drips. Put the bags in the refrigerator and allow the chicken to marinate for 4 to 6 hours, turning the bags once or twice to redistribute the marinade.

### 2 HOURS BEFORE DINNER

Start a KISS method fire according to the instructions for your WSM (page 32), offset (page 34), or kettle (page 36). While you're waiting for the charcoal in the chimney to engage, remove the chicken halves from the bags and pat them dry with paper towels. Brush the chicken with olive oil and season lightly with salt and pepper. When the lit charcoal and wood are ready for cooking, arrange the chicken on the grate.

## HOW TO SPLIT A CHICKEN

Ask the butcher in your grocery store to remove the backbone and split a whole chicken in half, or do it yourself. Here's how.

**1.** Lay the chicken breast-side down on a cutting board. Using heavy-duty kitchen shears or a sharp knife, cut down both sides of the backbone. You're cutting through skin, flesh, and small bones, so it'll take some effort.



**3.** Grip the thigh firmly, then bend or twist the legs on both halves to bust the joint between the thigh and leg. (For atmosphere, I recommend shouting "You're two weeks behind on the vig!" while snapping the leg joints.)



**2.** Flip the chicken over. With the palm of your hands, push against the breast to crack open the chicken. Using kitchen shears or a knife, cut through the middle of the breasts to split the chicken completely in half.

## WSM

PLACE THE CHICKEN HALVES IN A circle, breast-side in, on the top grate, as close to the middle as possible without crowding. Use your tongs to nudge the thigh/leg portion higher onto the breast. (If you must know why, see sidebar on page 54.) Place the lid on the cooker, with the top vent positioned on the side of the cooker opposite the side door.



### TOP/BOTTOM VENTS:

Open. Don't touch the lid for 1½ hours. Seriously No peeking.



### 1½ HOURS INTO THE COOK

Open the lid of the cooker and puncture the thickest part of the breast with a fork. If the juice running out of the chicken is clear, it's done. Most food types tell you to stick an instant-read thermometer into the chicken at this point. I don't recommend using a meat or oven thermometer the first few cooks because you learn to rely on numbers instead of trusting your instincts. However, if you must, the meat is done when the breast reads 155°F and the thigh reads 165°F.

If the juice is still pinkish, or the meat isn't registering the correct doneness, leave the chicken on the cooker. To improve the likelihood of crisping the skin, squirt the chicken skin with cooking spray or olive oil and flip the chicken over, skin-side down.

Check the water level in the water pan. Refill it if it's low.

Replace the lid and fork-test the chicken every 10 to 15 minutes until the juices run clear.

## OFFSET

**PLACE THE CHICKEN HALVES ON** the grate. Place the first chicken half in the middle of the grate with the wing/leg side facing the firebox. Lay the remaining chicken halves away from the firebox. Use your tongs to nudge the thigh/leg portion higher onto the breast. Don't touch the lid for 1½ hours.

### TOP/BOTTOM VENTS:

Open

### 1½ HOURS INTO THE COOK

Open the lid of the cooker and puncture the thickest part of the breast with a fork. If the juice running out of the chicken is clear, it's done. Most food types tell you to stick an instant-read thermometer into the chicken at this point. I don't recommend using a meat or oven thermometer the first few cooks because you learn to rely on numbers instead of trusting your instincts. However, if you must, the meat is done when the breast reads 155°F and the thigh reads 165°F.

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Check the water level in the water pan. Refill it if it's low.

Replace the lid and fork-test the chicken every 10 to 15 minutes until the juices run clear.



## KETTLE

**TUCK EACH WING UNDER THE BREAST** and place the chicken halves on the grate, with the breast-side close to the edge of the grate without touching the side of the cooker. The breast should not face the water pan and bank of charcoal. Use your tongs to nudge the thigh/leg portion higher onto the breast. Place the lid on the cooker with the top vent positioned directly above the chicken.

### TOP/BOTTOM VENTS:

Open

### 30 MINUTES INTO THE COOK

Check the charcoal. If more than half of the charcoal has burned to ash, top the charcoal with one-third chimney of lit charcoal. Check the water level in the water pan. If it is less than half full, add water.

### BOTTOM VENT:

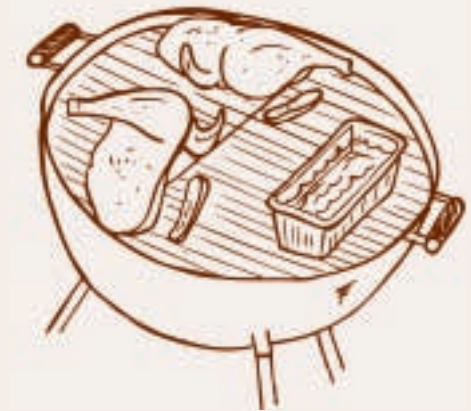
Close the bottom vent by one-third.

### 1 HOUR INTO THE COOK

Remove the lid of the cooker and puncture the thickest part of the breast with a fork. If the juice running out of the chicken is clear, it's done. If the juice is still pinkish, or the meat isn't registering the correct doneness. I don't recommend using a meat or oven thermometer the first few cooks because you learn to rely on numbers instead of trusting your instincts. However, if you must, the meat is done when the breast reads 155°F and the thigh reads 165°F. To improve the likelihood of crisping the skin, squirt the chicken skin with cooking spray or canola oil and flip the chicken over, skin-side down.

Check the water level in the water pan. Refill it if it's low.

Replace the lid and fork-test the chicken every 10 minutes until the juices run clear.



## ★ IF YOU MUST KNOW WHY... ★

**WHY CAN'T I JUST THROW THE CHICKEN ON THE GRATE?** you ask. Because the breast is more susceptible to drying out. Arranging the chicken on the grate with the breast away from the hottest zone on the grate protects the breast, and the meat cooks more evenly. On a WSM, the perimeter of the grate is hotter because heat flows around the water pan and up the sides. The chicken breasts should face the middle of the grate on the WSM. On a kettle grill set up with a two-zone fire, the heat is more intense at the center of the grate. The chicken breasts should face “out” on a kettle. Offset smokers are hottest closest to the firebox, so the chicken breasts should face away from the firebox.

Incidentally, we're off to a bad start if you're already thinking of and asking these types of questions. Just follow the directions and you'll have your barbecue epiphany soon enough.

## ★ THE SMOKE RING ★

**IN BARBECUE, THE SMOKE RING**—the bright pink layer just under the surface of the meat—is one of the signs of a successful low and slow cook. But some people get nervous when their chicken is pink. If you fall into this category of people, rest assured, this pink does not mean your chicken is undercooked. The smoke ring is the result of a chemical reaction between the wood smoke and the meat, and you want it there.

## DEAR STUDENT,

**CONGRATULATIONS! YOU SHOULD HAVE A PLATTER OF TASTY, PERFECTLY SMOKED** Chicken Mojo Criollo in your hands. Now, do a little victory dance around your cooker in the backyard. Because you followed the instructions exactly, didn't you?

What's that? You incorporated some tips you saw on the Virtual Weber site? You had a half bag of leftover charcoal briquettes and figured, Why not use it up? You smoked bologna instead of chicken?

I have a stock letter for transgressors of my Program. It goes like this:

*Dear [Name of the Damned Withheld],*

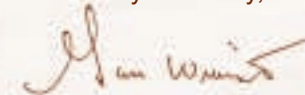
*Stop reading the Virtual Weber site. It's a great resource, but if you pick up techniques and methods from Web sites and try to incorporate them into the Program, things get confusing and don't work well. Virtual Weber and I have very different philosophies on barbecue. The site is populated by engineers who tend to put too much emphasis on things like time charts and ambient temperature. My Program cares about none of that. Start the fire, put the meat in the cooker, and leave it the hell alone.*

Now, go take that damn thermometer out of the vent. Not only is the thermometer blocking airflow, which causes smoldering (which leads to creosote-flavored food), but these thermometers are meant to be inserted in food. They don't measure the air temperature in your cooker, so you'll never get an accurate reading. Repeat after me: we don't care about no stinking temperature. Remember, you're learning to read fires and meat, not thermometers.

Also, do not reuse charcoal. Ever. Charcoal is an absorbent. It drinks moisture and odor from the air, which is why it's often used as a filter. Moist charcoal cooks slow and transfers off flavors to your food. And let me guess: you used regular briquettes instead of natural lump charcoal? Do I have to remind you that briquettes contain a witch's brew of chemicals, while lump charcoal is a natural product?

Okay, now try Lesson #1 again, but ditch the thermometer and the briquettes and buy some natural lump charcoal. If you are still interested in continuing this program . . . great. If I come on too strong and you think I'm full of soot, and you wish to discontinue, that's perfectly understandable. No hard feelings. But the deal is this: please follow instructions exactly or drop out of the program.

Cordially but firmly,



Gary Wiviott