

CHICKEN RIGGIES

Serves 6 to 8.

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from a dozen recipes.

Virtually unknown outside of Utica, New York, this dish is a variation of the many Italian-American versions of macaroni and sauce. This is made with chicken breast and roasted peppers for a Southern Italian, Sicilian flavor. The name comes from rigatoni, the pasta used in this meal. The dish's popularity led to an annual cook-off, Riggiefest. The best way to make this is with the freshest ingredients.



Ingredients:

2 tablespoons butter (more as needed)
2 tablespoons pure or cooking olive oil (save the extra virgin for flavoring later) (more as needed)
4 ounces (113g) fresh mushrooms; sliced (cremini are customary, but shiitake are good too).
4 to 5 shallots (about 2 ounces/57g); thinly sliced
4 to 5 cloves garlic; minced or crushed with a garlic press
1 cup (237ml) chicken stock, preferably homemade
3 chicken breasts; cubed into ¾-inch (2cm) morsels
2 to 3 fresh variety of peppers, such as bell peppers, green, gold, and red
1 or 2 fresh Anaheim chillies (these are sweet; substitute hot, such as jalapeño, if desired)
1 pound (454g) rigatoni pasta
¼ cup (59ml) Marsala (or dry sherry or dry white wine)
½ teaspoon smoked paprika
¼ teaspoon ground red pepper or ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (I substituted 2 tablespoons chorizo)
2 anchovy fillets (optional)
2 cups (about ½ liter) marinara; preferably homemade
½ cup (118ml) heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 chicken breast; cut into long strips
¼ cup (59ml) extra virgin olive oil

Optional for garnish (any combination of the following):

Black olives or other variety; sliced
Chopped fresh parsley
Fresh basil, about 6 leaves; chopped or cut into chiffonade
Freshly grated Parmesan or Romano cheese

Directions:

Heat the oil and butter in a skillet and sauté the mushrooms until tender and slightly browned. Remove from the pan and set aside. Sauté the shallots until lightly caramelized, 5 to 6 minutes, adding more fat to the skillet if necessary. Add the minced garlic. Cook 1 minute. Then remove from the heat and set aside.

Heat chicken stock in a heavy saucepan until boiling. Lower the heat and simmer until reduced to about half its original volume. Add the cubed chicken, bring to a boil, cover, and cook the chicken only until it begins to look thoroughly cooked. Cover the pan and remove from the heat. Set aside.

Slice peppers into long strips, discarding the seeds and white membrane. Sear on a hot griddle (500°F/260°C) to add dark bar marks (black marks will add a smoky flavor) or roast in the oven until tender and lightly browned. Let cool, then chop into ¾-inch (2cm) pieces. Set aside.

Remove the chicken from the stock and set aside. Heat stock with Marsala, paprika, red pepper (or chorizo), and anchovy fillets to boiling and simmer to reduce to a slightly thickened sauce. Add the marinara and all the cooked ingredients. Heat thoroughly and remove from the heat. Stir in the heavy cream. Mix well. Cover and keep warm. (Can be made a day in advance.)

Boil the rigatoni according to package directions, until *al dente*. Drain and return to the pot. Dress with a little olive oil or butter.

While the pasta is boiling, grill the chicken strips on a hot (500°F/260°C) cast iron stove top griddle (or in a hot skillet) to brown with bar marks. Turn and cook the other side only until thoroughly cooked without overcooking. The chicken strips could also be browned under a broiler. Do not overcook.

Plate the cooked pasta (either individual servings or in one large bowl) and ladle the sauce mixture over the top. Drizzle the extra virgin olive oil on top. Garnish with any combination of the garnish ingredients above. Place 1 or 2 grilled strips of chicken breast along one side. Serve immediately.

The step-by-step photos were removed. See the video for the preparation.