

Chicken Marsala

This dish is elegant and delicious, yet surprisingly easy to make. The sauce is made from sweet Marsala wine, a fortified dessert wine from the area surrounding the town of Marsala, Sicily.

There are many variations of this traditional recipe... some include onions, others mushrooms; some have chicken stock. I've tested numerous variations and customized this recipe to best suit the palate of my wife Rhonda and I. I believe it will tantalize your taste buds as well! You can also make this with veal if you desire. Serve this for a special dinner and your guests will think you're a culinary genius!

4 servings

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
5 to 6 oz. each (see Frankie's Tips)

3/4 cup all purpose flour
salt & pepper

2 tablespoons canola or vegetable oil

4 ounces pancetta (or thick-sliced un-smoked bacon)—diced in small pieces
(1/4" or smaller)

6 ounces mushrooms—sliced thick
1 large shallot—minced

1 teaspoon tomato paste

1-1/2 cups sweet Marsala wine

1 tablespoon lemon juice

2 tablespoons Italian parsley—chopped

6 tablespoons butter—cut in 1 oz. pieces
1/2 teaspoon salt

1. Place oven rack in middle position; place an oven-proof platter on the oven rack. Heat oven to 200° F.
2. Trim excess fat from chicken. If thinner cutlets are desired, slice thinly or pound out with meat pounder (see Frankie's Tips). Pat the chicken dry and season both sides with salt and pepper.
3. Place flour in a shallow platter or baking dish. Working with one cutlet at a time, coat both sides with flour. Pat lightly with your hands to remove excess flour and place patties single layer on a platter.
4. Heat the oil in a large, flat-bottom skillet over medium-high heat until oil begins to shimmer. Place cutlets in a single layer in the skillet and cook until golden brown—2 to 3 minutes depending on thickness of chicken. Flip the cutlets with tongs, and cook an additional 2 to 4 minutes until firm to the touch when pressed (this indicates doneness). Transfer cutlets to the heated platter and place in oven to keep warm.
5. To prepare sauce, reduce heat to medium-low and add pancetta. Sauté, stirring occasionally with a large slotted spoon to loosen browned bits—until the pancetta is lightly crisped—about 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer pancetta with slotted spoon to a paper towel lined plate.
6. Increase the heat to medium-high and add mushrooms. Sauté, stirring minimally (flip over if necessary for even cooking), until mushrooms turn a beautiful golden brown—about 5 to 6 minutes.
7. Add minced shallot and cook and stir an additional 2 to 3 minutes, until softened. Add tomato paste and the cooked pancetta, and cook an additional minute.
8. Remove from heat while you add the Marsala. Return pan and increase heat to high. Simmer vigorously, scraping the browned bits from the pan bottom (this step is known as deglazing), until sauce reduces to somewhat of a syrupy consistency.
9. Turn off heat. Add lemon juice and Italian parsley. Whisk in butter, one tablespoon at a time. Add salt. Taste sauce and adjust seasoning if needed.
10. Remove chicken from oven. Place cutlets in sauce, along with any juices on the platter. Turn cutlets to coat lightly. Arrange on plates or platter and pour remaining sauce over the top.

Suggested Wine: *Verdicchio*

Marsala sauce is difficult to pair with. We tried many wines which did not work well. But this white wine (pronounced ver DEE key oh), from the coastal region of Marche, east of Tuscany, works very nicely. Castelli di Jesi is a sub-region of Verdicchio.

Frankie's recommendation: *Brunori "San Nicolo" Verdicchio di Castelli di Jesi*



Frankie's Tips:

- ◆ It's important to buy a good quality Marsala for this dish. There are some really cheap ones out there, some of which are produced in the USA, and not even true Marsalas
- ◆ You can use full-thickness chicken breasts with this entrée if desired but personally I like thinner cutlets. In many grocery stores you can purchase thinner cutlets (though you'll pay more). You can also accomplish this two other ways... the first is to slice the breasts thinner with a sharp knife to give you two thinner cutlets. The other is to pound out the meat with a meat pounder. If doing so, cover the meat with plastic wrap to avoid the juices flying around the kitchen.
- ◆ One sure way to ruin this dish is to overcook the chicken. The cooked chicken will be held in the 200° F oven for about 20 minutes while you prepare the sauce so it is best to under cook it just slightly prior to moving to the oven. You can go completely by feel if you are comfortable doing so or you can check the cutlets with an instant read thermometer for doneness. For safety, you want chicken to reach 165° F. Since they will continue to cook in the oven though, you should remove them from the pan when they have reached approximately 155° F.