OVEN SMOTHERED CHICKEN

Smothered chicken is a time-honored tradition in the South. A lot of versions call for shallow-frying the chicken and making the sauce with lard or butter, or even both, but my Granny always did this dish with oil. Decades before everyone became more aware of health and nutrition, Granny was at the forefront. She spent her days as a hospital dietitian, but her life’s work was as a loving wife, mother, and grandmother. When my grandfather began to suffer from heart problems, she immediately took her family’s classic Southern recipes and made them more nutritious. And those are the recipes she passed down to me. This updated version is not only cooked completely in the oven for a perfect weeknight meal, but it’s fall-off-the-bone delicious. All you have to do before serving is smash the garlic and onion to make a light pan sauce to spoon over the chicken — the onion gravy tastes plenty rich and is all the more satisfying without the extra saturated fat.

DIRECTIONS:
1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Mix the onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, and cayenne in a small bowl. Season the chicken generously with salt, then sprinkle with the spice mixture. If you have time, cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours and up to overnight.
3. Toss the onions and garlic in a 3-quart shallow glass or ceramic baking dish. Spread in an even layer and put the chicken skin side up on top. Pour the stock all around. Cover the dish tightly with foil.
4. Bake until the chicken is cooked through - about 1 hour. Uncover and turn the chicken in the pan juices. Arrange them skin side up again. Bake until the meat is fork tender and the skin is lightly browned - about 30 minutes longer.
5. Transfer the chicken to a serving platter. Use a fork to smash the garlic and onions into the pan juices and stir well to form a light pan gravy. Season to taste with salt and spoon all over the chicken.

Note: Chicken thighs may be substituted for legs. Dark meat works better than white meat, because white meat will dry out.

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