

Chicken Divine

Rescuing a 1930s classic

BY KATIE WEBSTER

IT WAS ALWAYS a special treat when Mom made her famous Chicken Divan,” wrote reader Marisa Croce of Brooklyn, New York. “My sister and I would devour much more than our little bodies could even hold because it just tasted so great.” After their mother died, the sisters came across the coveted recipe. “Thrilled” at finding it, they were, in turn, “shocked and disgusted” by the high-fat ingredients. “I would love to experience this dish again as an adult, but it needs help,” Marisa wrote.

Indeed, health-wise, Chicken Divan needed help from its inception as the signature dish of the restaurant Divan Parisien in New York City in the 1930s. It began as a casserole of sliced chicken breasts and spears of broccoli baked in Mornay sauce—a béchamel, or white sauce (butter, flour, milk) with cheese stirred in. By the time Marisa’s mother started making it, the Mornay sauce had been replaced by canned cream of chicken soup, a half cup of mayonnaise and Parmesan cheese. It had 528 calories per serving.

The fix was relatively simple: we returned to the roots of the dish and—rather than use that creamed soup—we made our own flour-thickened sauce. Ours is very much like the original Mornay, but even lighter, made with chicken broth and milk. We decreased the mayo (and substituted reduced-fat for regular), increased the Parmesan and added some sherry and sautéed leeks for depth of flavor.



Chicken Divan served over whole-wheat egg noodles

The “rescued” version has fat cut by 66 percent, sodium reduced by 33 percent and calories lowered by 40 percent, and yet it retains its luscious appeal and is true to the spirit of the original dish. We think Marisa’s mother would be happy: her daughters can revisit this childhood favorite with light hearts.

Chicken Divan

Healthy **X** Weight Lower **↓** Carbs

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 1 HOUR

- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups diced leek, white and light green parts only (about 1 large)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 14-ounce can reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup 1% milk
- 2 tablespoons dry sherry (see Note, page 78)
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 2 10-ounce boxes frozen chopped broccoli, thawed, or 1 pound broccoli crowns, chopped
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- ¼ cup reduced-fat mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Coat a 7-by-11-inch (2 quart) glass baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Place chicken in a medium skillet or saucepan and add lightly salted water to cover. Bring to a simmer over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low and simmer gently until the chicken is cooked through and no longer pink in the center, 10 to 12 minutes. Drain and slice into bite-size pieces.
3. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add leek and salt and cook, stirring often, until softened but not browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Add flour; stir to coat. Add broth, milk, sherry, thyme and pepper and bring to a simmer, stirring constantly. Add broccoli; return to a simmer. Remove from heat and stir in ½ cup Parmesan, mayonnaise and mustard.
4. Spread half the broccoli mixture in the prepared baking dish. Top with the chicken, then the remaining broccoli mixture. Sprinkle evenly with the remaining ½ cup Parmesan. Bake until bubbling, 20 to 25 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

MAKES 6 SERVINGS, ABOUT 1⅓ CUPS EACH.

PER SERVING: 312 CALORIES; 11 G FAT (4 G SAT, 4 G MONO); 76 MG CHOLESTEROL; 19 G CARBOHYDRATE; 35 G PROTEIN; 4 G FIBER; 652 MG SODIUM; 402 MG POTASSIUM. **NUTRITION BONUS:** Vitamin C (70% DAILY VALUE), Vitamin A (35% DV), Calcium (30% DV), Folate (19% DV).

CW

Rx results:

Original Version

528 calories
33 grams total fat
7 grams saturated fat

EW Chicken Divan

312 calories
11 grams total fat
4 grams saturated fat