



BRAISED CHICKEN WITH FENNEL AND DRIED FIGS

Dried figs and fennel, both important flavors in the cooking of the eastern Mediterranean region, are often paired in sweets like candies and cakes. Here I take liberty with the combination and pair them in a simple braise of chicken. As they slowly cook the dried figs absorb the heady chicken and fennel laced broth and becoming juicy and succulent.

1 fennel bulb, about 12 ounces
8 ounces dried Calimyrna figs, stems trimmed, 12 to 14 figs
1 whole chicken, about 3-1/2 pounds, cut into 8 serving pieces,
excess fat and skin trimmed
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 medium or 1 large leek, roots and green tops trimmed,
soaked in warm water, rinsed thoroughly, cut into 1- inch lengths
2 medium carrots cut into 1- inch lengths
1 garlic clove, grated
1 teaspoon fennel seeds, bruised with a mortar and
pestle or the side of a heavy knife
1 cup chicken broth
1 cup dry white wine

1. Trim the stem end and the dark green tops from the fennel; reserve a few fronds for garnish. Cut fennel bulb lengthwise into quarters; cut across into 1 inch pieces. Chill in a bowl of iced water 20 minutes; drain.

2. Place the figs in a small bowl and cover with boiling water; let stand 10 minutes; drain and cut in half.

3. Sprinkle the chicken with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large deep skillet or sauté pan until hot. Add the chicken, a few pieces at a time and cook until lightly browned, about 5 minutes per side. Remove the chicken to a side dish as it browns. Leave a thin film of oil in the bottom of the pan: discard

remaining oil.

4. Add the fennel, leeks, and carrots to the pan. Cook, stirring, until the vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Add the figs and fennel seeds to the pan. Cook, stirring, until the cut sides of the fig are lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic; cook, stirring, 1 minute.

5. Add the chicken broth and the wine. Heat to a boil; boil, uncovered, over high heat until reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Add the chicken and the juices to the pan. Cover and cook over medium low heat until the chicken juices run clear when pierced with a fork, about 15 minutes.

6. With a slotted spoon transfer the chicken and vegetables to a warmed serving platter; cover to keep warm. Boil the juices over high heat until reduced and slightly thickened, 1 to 2 minutes. Pour the juices over the chicken; garnish with fennel fronds

Makes 4 servings