

spicy brined chicken tenders

While Nashville hot chicken has been all the rage the last few years, these homemade chicken tenders borrow from a less trendy (but just as tasty!) style of Southern spicy fried chicken to create crispy fried tenders whose heat comes from inside the batter. Made from juicy brined chicken thighs, these almost-addictive tenders carry a sneaky spicy kick that's perfectly balanced with a little ranch dipping sauce.

While I've called for thighs here, you can use your chicken cut of choice. Just make sure you cook your chicken to 165 F at the thickest part, for food safety purposes!

ingredients

Chicken tenders:

- 4 de-boned skin-on chicken thighs
- ¾ cup dill pickle brine
- ½ cup buttermilk
- ¼ cup hot sauce (I suggest Crystal, Frank's Red Hot, or Louisiana)
- 1 cup AP Flour
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- 2 tsp cayenne
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp fresh ground pepper
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- Vegetable/canola oil for frying

Homemade ranch:

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon dried dill
- 1 tsp fresh chopped chives
- 1/2 teaspoon dried parsley
- 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- salt & pepper (to taste)
- 3 tsp freshly squeezed lemon juice (adjust to taste)

preparation

1. Cut chicken into tender shapes and put in bag with pickle brine, brine at least one hour and up to 24 hours.
2. When ready to make chicken, mix buttermilk and hot sauce in one wide shallow bowl and dry ingredients (flour, cornstarch, seasonings) in another. Working one or two tenders at a time, pull chicken pieces out of brine, shaking off excess liquid, place in buttermilk mixture, then dredge in dry ingredients and land on a separate sheet tray.
3. Meanwhile, heat 1-2 inches oil in Dutch oven or deep cast iron to 325 F.
At 2 inches, the tenders will be pretty much submerged, so this is your call in terms of how comfortable you are with shallow or deep frying!
4. Cook tenders in batches about 6 minutes, turning every 1-2 minutes, until crust is a deep golden brown and thickest part of chicken reads at least 165 F.
5. Set cooked chicken on a rack over a sheet tray right after pulling out of oil.
You can add a light sprinkling of salt right when you pull the tenders out of the oil, but I'd recommend doing so conservatively: the hot sauce and pickle brine mean these tenders are already pretty well seasoned, from a salt perspective.
6. For the ranch: Simply mix sauce ingredients together and taste to adjust seasoning.
7. Serve & enjoy!