

Seasonal Eating
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Slow Braising: A Perfect Weekend Supper
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Braising is a great technique for weekend suppers. Meats and vegetables are simmered in liquid until fall apart tender and full of flavor. It fills the house with a delicious aroma and is comfort food at its best.

The Rutherford County farmers market opened earlier this month and I finally made it there to pick up some of the spring produce. Our Bedford County market isn't open quite yet, hopefully in the next week or two so watch for the opening announcement. But up in Murfreesboro, collards and other greens were abundant. Collards are one of my favorite greens to cook because they retain some of their texture as they cook down. So what better to go with collards than chicken



thighs? Now I must admit, I'm usually a white meat fan and almost always go with chicken breasts, but the thought of thighs slowly simmered and super tender with the collards intrigued me. They always say that the dark meat has more flavor, so I gave it a try and this recipe might just make me a dark meat fan too. It was fabulous!

Braising usually involves searing the meat in a little oil to get it well browned and then adding liquid about 2/3rds of the way up the meat and covering and simmering until tender. The long cooking time in liquid helps to break down connective tissue and make the meat tender, moist and flavorful. In this recipe we tweak the process slightly because we want the skin to remain crispy. So we don't cover it while it braises. This also lets the juices cook down into a rich sauce for the collards.

The chicken is seasoned with salt and pepper and then the skin is dredged (fancy word for coated with) in flour. The skin side is then seared in hot oil until browned and crispy. The thighs are removed to a plate with the skin side up to keep it crispy and onions, mushrooms and collards are added to the pan with the flavoring of chicken broth, balsamic vinegar and a little bit of crushed red pepper flakes. The chicken is nestled into the greens and liquid with the skin still exposed on top. Now it is braised in the oven for about an hour until the collards are cooked down, the meat is tender and the skin is oh so crispy. Whip up some cornbread to go along side and you have the perfect southern weekend supper, full of comfort and down home goodness!

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (bedford.tennessee.edu) and click on Seasonal Eating.

Braised Chicken Thighs with Collard Greens

4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
Kosher salt
Black pepper
Flour
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped
4 ounces mushrooms, sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flake
12 ounces collard greens
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1 -2 cups chicken broth

Remove any excess fat and skin from the chicken thighs. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, then dredge the skin side in flour. In an oven proof Dutch oven, heat oil over high heat. Place the chicken skin side down and cook until skin is browned and crispy. Remove to a plate with skin side up. Add the onion to the pan and cook for a minute, scraping up any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Add the mushrooms, garlic and red pepper flakes. Strip the collard leaves from the center stems (discard) and slice the leaves. Add to the pan. Cook a few minutes until the mushrooms and collards start to soften. Add the vinegar and 1 cup of the chicken broth to the pan and bring to a simmer. Nestle the chicken thighs down in the liquid with the skin side up and exposed with the liquid just coming up the sides of the chicken. Add more chicken broth, if needed. Place the pan in a 400 degree oven, uncovered, and cook for about 1 hour. Check occasionally and add more liquid if it goes completely dry, keeping the skin above the liquid.