

ITALIAN HERB CRUSTED CHICKEN with SPRINGY SHELLS

I'm LOVIN' having a garden and all the fresh veggies we are harvesting now. Last night I made PIONEER WOMAN's SPRINGY SHELLS along with my ITALIAN HERB CRUSTED CHICKEN. Here's what dinner looked like before my ravenous pack descended upon the food and devoured it.

Below is PIONEER WOMAN'S recipe for the SPRINGY SHELLS. This is my first time to make this recipe and even the he folk around here loved it. There are so many yummy nutritious veggies – zucchini, tender asparagus, peas, broccoli, and even green onions. You can use any variety of pasta. My carton of ricotta was only 15 oz, but I went with what I had and next time I surely would use the larger carton.



- 16 ounces medium pasta shells (or other short pasta)
- 1 pound asparagus, cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces (avoid tough parts)
- 1/2 pound broccoli, cut into small florettes
- 1/2 pound zucchini (about 1 medium zucchini), diced
- 1/2 cup frozen peas
- 3 green onions, sliced (white and light green parts)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 20 to 22 ounces whole milk ricotta cheese
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- Extra olive oil, for drizzling

Cook pasta until extremely al dente—with still quite a bit of bite.

Melt butter with the olive oil over medium-low to medium heat, then add in the garlic.

Add the asparagus to the pan and cook for five minutes. Sprinkle in a little salt. Add the broccoli and cook for one minute, then add the zucchini and cook for one or two more minutes. Add the frozen peas and onions, stir together, then turn off the heat. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, mix the ricotta, eggs, salt, and pepper until well combined.

To assemble, butter a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Add half the pasta, then spread 1/3 of

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the ricotta mixture over the surface. Sprinkle 1/3 of the Parmesan over the ricotta, then 1/2 of the vegetables. Repeat with the rest of the pasta, the rest of the ricotta, and another 1/3 of the Parmesan. End with the rest of the vegetables and the rest of the Parmesan.

Drizzle with a couple of tablespoons olive oil, then bake for 25 minutes on 350 degrees or until nice and hot.

Serve with extra Parmesan cheese!

ITALIAN HERB CRUSTED CHICKEN

- 4-6 boneless skinless fresh chicken breasts
- 2 cups buttermilk

In a large mixing bowl soak chicken breasts in buttermilk at least 20 minutes. While chicken is soaking in buttermilk mix together in a flat dish or pie pan:

- 1 sleeve Ritz crackers – crushed into crumbs
- 1 ½ cups plain flour
- 2 Tablespoons Italian Herb Seasoning
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoons onion salt

Using tongs (I can't stand touching raw chicken UCK!) remove 1 piece of chicken from buttermilk – letting excess buttermilk drain off chicken. Place chicken breast into herb mixture, turning to coat both sides of chicken. Transfer battered chicken to a paper towel or paper plate. Continue breading remaining chicken.

To fry chicken pour vegetable oil into a 12" skillet – enough oil to fill the skillet ½"-3/4" deep. Turn heat to medium high, but not high enough to burn the oil while chicken cooks (about 375 degrees). I have also fried my chicken in my deep fryer – since I have more control over the temperature of the oil. Fry chicken a couple of minutes, then flip chicken over. Repeat this process a couple more times. Plump chicken breast may require longer cooking times between flips. WE DON'T WANT ANY PINK IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR CHICKEN PIECES. However, we don't want to burn the breading on the chicken either. I usually test the thickest chicken piece by cutting into it after removing it from the oil. Usually, 6 minutes of frying over medium high heat will cook most thicknesses and cuts of chicken breasts or tenders.