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Healthy Herb How-To

Za'atar is a special combination of dried herbs, lemon juice and sesame seeds used as a marinade rub. This easy, yet exotic blend can turn ordinary chicken breast into an inspired dinner. Sesame seeds add a little fiber, iron, magnesium and heart-healthy fats. Chicken is a good lean protein source and an excellent canvas for trying out different herbs and spices. Pair with a leafy green salad for a delicious meal.

Za'atar Chicken

- 2 Tbsp. sesame seeds (use unhulled, if available)
- 1 Tbsp. dried oregano
- 1 Tbsp. dried thyme
- 1/2 tsp. sea salt
- 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil, mild and fruity
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 4 chicken breast halves (1.5 lbs total), with the rib, skinned

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

For za'atar, set cast iron or other heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add sesame seeds to dry, hot pan. Lift pan and hold it just above burner, moving it to swirl seeds until they start popping and color lightly, 2-3 minutes. Immediately spread toasted seeds on a plate to cool.

Place fully cooled sesame seeds in a mortar and pestle and crush lightly. Add oregano, thyme and salt, and work mixture just to blend. Mix in lemon juice then oil. Or, seal sesame seeds in plastic sandwich bag and crush using rolling pin, then place in small mixing bowl. Adding herbs, rub them between your fingers, a teaspoon at a time, and crumble them into bowl. Add salt, lemon juice and oil.

In baking dish just large enough to hold chicken pieces, spread onion slices over bottom. Make 2 diagonal slits in each chicken breast, cutting almost to the bone. Arrange chicken in baking dish. Using your fingers, coat chicken with za'atar, pushing some into slits. Cover baking dish with foil, sealing edges.

Bake chicken for 30 minutes, or until an instant-read thermometer registers 160 degrees F. Let baked chicken sit for 10 minutes, or cool until warm or room temperature before serving.

To serve, place a chicken breast on each of 4 dinner plates, accompanied by onions. Pass pan juices separately, in a pitcher. Or, cool chicken and serve it in slices, with cooled onions and reserving liquid for cooking vegetables or for a flavorful addition to soups and sauces. Or tear it into pieces for chicken salad.

Makes 4 servings.

Per serving: 258 calories, 12 g total fat (2 g saturated fat), 6 g carbohydrate, 30 g protein, 2 g dietary fiber, 304 mg sodium.