

skillet chicken parmesan

serves 4

1¾ to 2 pounds
(800 to 900 grams) boneless,
skinless chicken thighs
Kosher salt and freshly ground
black pepper
2 large eggs
2 cups (120 grams) panko-style
breadcrumbs
1 cup (100 grams) finely grated
Parmesan, divided
Vegetable or canola oil, for frying
Olive oil
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon dried oregano
Red-pepper flakes, to taste
One 28-ounce (795-gram) can
crushed tomatoes
8 ounces (225 grams)
mozzarella, torn into bite-sized
pieces
2 tablespoons chopped fresh
parsley or basil

A few years ago, when my kids still looked at me with wide-eyed wonder, we went to an old-school Italian restaurant at the Jersey Shore and ordered what everyone else already seemed to know about: the chicken Parmesan that's about the size of the platter it's served on. My kids squealed "Pizza chicken!" with far more fervor than they ever had about Pizza Beans (sigh), and then asked if I knew how to make it. They think I know how to make everything, and since I (and you, capisce?) will not tell them otherwise, I put it on my cooking docket that week.

I think we can all agree that golden, crunchy chicken cutlets burrowed in tomato sauce, covered in cheese, and broiled until bronzed on top are a thing of glory. I love it, but it always saddens me to do so much work pounding, seasoning, three-part dredging, frying, draining, seasoning again, just to smother those cutlets in crisp-eradicating sauce. So I decided to make it right, once and for all. "For the kids," you know?

The first thing I did was eliminate the pounding (but you can pound them, if you wish) by using chicken thighs, which arrive pretty flat and (bonus) rarely dry out when cooking. The second was eliminating the flour component of the classic three-part breading. This is my mother-in-law's method, and the result is so much lighter and crispier. Plus, since they're less work, I actually make them more often. Finally, I make a simple tomato sauce in a wide skillet, but we don't drown the chicken in it. We leave the edges of the chicken exposed, so they arrive at the table in a glorious balance of crispy/crunchy and gooey/rich, and everyone is happy.

Prepare the chicken: Pat the chicken dry. If you'd like thinner cutlets (but I rarely bother), you can pound them flatter between two pieces of plastic wrap with a flat-sided mallet or even the back of a heavy frying pan—I've done it all. Arrange the chicken on a large tray, and season well on both sides with salt and pepper.

Coat the chicken: In one wide, shallow bowl, beat the eggs with a fork until loose. Fill a second wide, shallow bowl with breadcrumbs and ½ cup of the Parmesan. Dip each piece of chicken into the egg, let all excess drip →

skillet chicken parmesan (*continued*)

do ahead

- You can cover breaded but not yet fried cutlets loosely with plastic wrap and store them in the fridge overnight.
- Fried cutlets are at their peak for 1 to 2 days, also stored in the fridge, if you'd like to make the sauce and finish the dish at the last minute.
- Rewarm the chicken before assembling, because you won't be broiling the assembled dish long enough to warm it thoroughly otherwise. I feel like I don't need to tell you that leftover chicken Parm, even when it's not as crispy, is a god-level dish. Rewarm in a 350°F (175°C) oven, and practice your "Leftover chicken Parm? I don't know her" shrug if anyone asks where it went.

off, and then dip the chicken into the crumbs, pressing carefully so that the crumbs stay on. Return each coated chicken thigh to the tray where you seasoned the chicken, and repeat with the remaining pieces.

Fry the cutlets: Pour just about ½ inch of vegetable oil into an 11-to-12-inch frying pan, and heat over medium-high heat until a droplet of water flicked into the pan hisses dramatically, or until the temperature is 350°F (175°C). Place your first few breaded cutlets in the oil—but don't crowd them, or it will lower the temperature a lot, leading to heavier and greasier chicken. Cook the chicken, flipping once, until it's deep golden brown on both sides, about 4 to 5 minutes on the first side and 3 to 4 on the second. Remove the chicken from the oil, letting the excess oil drip off for 10 to 20 seconds, and drain it on paper towels or paper bags. Season right away, while still sizzling hot, with salt. Repeat with the remaining cutlets.

Make the sauce: Drain (and safely discard) the vegetable oil, and wipe out the pan. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Add the minced garlic, oregano, and some pepper flakes, and let sizzle until the garlic is golden, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Add the tomatoes (beware the splatter!), and season with 1 teaspoon salt. Let the mixture simmer over low heat for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until it's a little thicker and saucier. You should have about 3 cups of sauce.

Heat your oven: Heat your oven's broiler, or if there's no broiler, heat your oven to its top temperature.

Assemble the dish: Remove about half of the tomato sauce (a generous 1½ cups) from the pan, and set it aside. Arrange the chicken cutlets in the sauce in the pan, slightly overlapped. Spoon ½ to 1 cup of the reserved sauce on top, leaving some edges of the chicken exposed. Sprinkle with remaining ½ cup Parmesan and all of the mozzarella.

Finish and serve: Transfer the pan to the oven and cook until bubbly and golden on top, 5 to 10 minutes. Finish with fresh herbs, and serve with the remaining sauce on the side.