

Lodi-Style Chicken Sausage

Being settled mostly by Volga Germans around the turn of the century (the last century, that is), you would think Lodi would be known for German food. It's not. It's always been pretty much a meat and potatoes town. Our grandmothers from the Dakotas made things like cheese buttons and kuchen, but our farmers and merchants never demanded much of a culinary scene. Having said that, there was ONE world class gourmet food product that Lodians were never without: sausage! My mom usually had a tube of salami from Pure Sausage and Meat Company on Central Avenue in her refrigerator. Lakewood Meats and Sausage made their Dakota bratwurst bursting with garlic and fennel aromas. You could get it in fresh links, smoked, or simply by the handful. In nearby Lockeford, Peter Pettersen struck red gold with his "street fair" smoked Dakota sausage. Lockeford Sausage literally makes tons of it, along with just about any other sausage you could want (Cajun Andouille, Garlic, Hawaiian Luau, Italian, Kielbasa, Knackwurst, Polish, Pesto, Swedish, Portuguese, Bavarian, etc. etc.). People travel as far as a hundred miles or more just to get a few pounds of these unbelievable meats. But you usually have to wait in a long line, especially before holidays.



Though Lockeford is just a few miles away from the ranch, I rarely have the time to wait in line unless I'm hosting out-of-town guests for breakfast. Plus, I've been trying to cut down on pork and beef. I created this tasty homemade chicken sausage that reminds me of Lodi's traditional Dakota Bratwurst, but with less fat and no added nitrates or preservatives. If you have a sausage stuffer, you can make links and grill them. If you have a smoker, you can even smoke them. I usually just make small sausage patties and fry them up with some olive oil and butter for added flavor. The Maillard reaction from the chicken, oil, and the hot fry pan takes the flavor to another level.

Ingredients

2-1/2 pounds boneless chicken thighs
1 TBS salt
1/4 cup dried milk powder
1 1/2 tsp freshly ground white pepper
3/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
1/2 tsp ground mace
1-1/2 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp ground ginger

1 tsp dried marjoram
3/4 tsp mustard powder
1/4 tsp ground cardamom
1/4 tsp ground coriander
1/4 tsp crushed fennel seeds, crushed
3 TBS Lodi olive oil
3 TBS unsalted butter (cut into 1/4 inch thick pads)

Creating the Flavors

Mix all the ingredients except for the chicken, oil, and butter in a small bowl. Grind the chicken in a meat grinder. If you don't have a meat grinder, you can cut the meat into about 1-inch cubes then pulse them in a food processor until the meat is broken up into tiny (1/16 inch) soft pieces. Using the paddle attachment on a stand mixer, mix the meat and slowly add the dry mix. You can also mix it by hand in a large mixing bowl (but wear latex or nitrile gloves). When the mix is uniform, wet your hands and pull out a clump of the mix. Roll it around in your hand to form a ball, maybe a little larger than a golf ball. Pat the ball to flatten it out to about 3/8-inch thick and 3 to 4 inches in diameter. Set the patty on a piece of wax paper with a pan or baking sheet underneath. Repeat this for the rest of the mix.

Cooking the Sausage

Heat a 10-inch fry pan to just below medium heat. Coat the bottom of the pan with a little olive oil. Drop a 1/4-inch pad of butter in the pan and swirl it around to melt and coat the pan. With a spatula, lower two sausage patties into the pan. Cook for 5 minutes, occasionally lifting each patty and letting the juices fill in underneath it. Turn it over and cook for another 5 minutes. Set the cooked patties on a paper towel to absorb any excess liquid. Pour any excess liquid out of the fry pan and repeat for the rest of the patties.



If you made sausage links, you can simply put them on a grill at 350 degrees for about 8 to 10 minutes, turning them occasionally.