

EAT

Pay Attention to the Details: Cooking with AJ

O2X AMBASSADOR AJ FUSCO OF FORK & HOSE CO.

Fork and Hose Co. began as a way for AJ Fusco to share his culinary creations with friends, family, and other local firefighters. It quickly grew to become a community of firehouse chefs from around the world and has become a platform for them to share meals and recipes from their own firehouse kitchens, with a focus on healthier cooking. Eventually, AJ's passion for cooking led him to enroll at the International Culinary Center in Manhattan, where he learned the basic foundations of cooking.

Since graduating from culinary school, AJ has worked in professional kitchens, continuing to improve on the fundamentals. Fork and Hose Co. has provided AJ with the opportunity to share tips and techniques he learned with his followers and other firehouse chefs, with the goal of making them better cooks in the process. As AJ says, "Stay safe, eat well!"

Pay Attention to the Details!

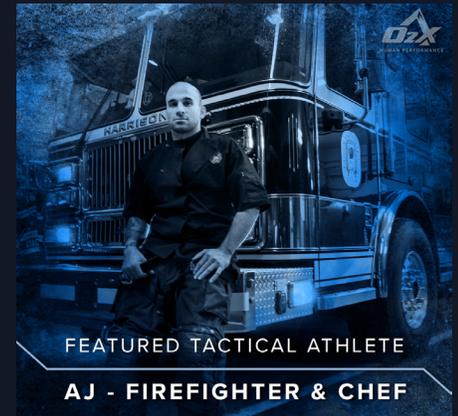
One thing I learned early on in my firefighter career is that the less there is to clean up, the happier the crew. This especially rings true with the rule that the cooks are exempt from cleanup....I like that rule! "One pan" recipes are popular for this very reason and not just in the firehouse. These recipes are also perfect for home cooks who are looking to save time on cleanup and reduce the chances of having a "tornado incident" in the kitchen, and you know exactly what I mean by that. But, just because something is called a "one pan"

recipe doesn't mean you should throw just everything into one pan, pop it in the oven and say a prayer in hopes that it turns out ok. This is where attention to detail will really help you become a better cook.

Taking the time to build layers of flavor, even in a simple preparation, will make your food taste better. A perfect example of this is my Roasted Chicken with Fennel, Oranges and Olives recipe below. Starting with the chicken skin-side down first on the stovetop helps you in rendering the fat before everything goes in the oven. This allows us to achieve the crispy skin we all love. Tossing the sliced vegetables in oil and salt prior to putting them in the pan ensures all the surfaces are covered and seasoned well. This step not only reduces the chances of burning them, it allows us bring out the flavor of the ingredients while they cook.

One thing that many cooks fail to think about is presentation and garnish. Just a simple touch of orange zest not only adds color but a ton of flavor from the essential oils it contains. And the fennel fronds, which usually end up in the trash, can really make a dish pop with color right before serving. Plus, it results in less waste which is always a good thing, especially when you are on a budget.

Taking the time to read through recipes and understanding why certain things are being done are key to becoming better cooks. Anyone can throw a bunch of stuff in a pot and call it a day. But, a true cook learns about their ingredients, treats them with respect, and pays attention to the details. Stay safe, eat well! 🏠





Roasted Chicken with Fennel, Orange, and Olives

RECIPE CREATED BY AJ FUSCO OF FORK & HOISE CO., O2X AMBASSADOR

INGREDIENTS

(Makes 3 servings)

- 6 Chicken Thighs, bone-in and skin-on
- 1 Cara Cara Orange,* zested and thin sliced
- 1 Navel Orange, zested and thin sliced
- ½ Red Onion, peeled and thin sliced
- 2 Fennel, thin sliced and fronds reserved
- 1 Cup Castelvetrano Olives, pitted
(substitute with any green olives)
- 1 Tbs. Chili Flake
- 2 Tbs. Kosher Salt, plus more to taste
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil

*Note: Use any variety of oranges you like. Cara Cara has a subtle sour note, which pairs well against the sweetness of other oranges and cooked fennel.

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 450*. Place a large cast-iron pan or oven-proof skillet in the oven while it preheats and you assemble your ingredients.

Trim chicken thighs of excess skin and fat. Pat dry and season both sides liberally with salt. Set aside.

Using an oven mitt, remove pan/skillet from oven and place on low heat. Add a couple glugs of olive oil and place the chicken skin side down in one layer. Keep an eye on the chicken while you prepare the rest of the ingredients so as not to burn it.

While the chicken is cooking, thin slice the onion and set it aside. Cut the stalks off the fennel bulb and save the fronds. Thin slice the fennel bulb, discarding the root end and any discolored brown bits. Zest your oranges and set aside with reserved fennel fronds, this will be used as a garnish. Now thinly slice the oranges, removing any seeds. Toss sliced onion, fennel and orange in a bowl with a pinch of salt and a drizzle of olive oil.

Remove the browned chicken thighs to a dish. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the oil and grease out of the pan. Pour in the fennel, onion, orange mixture along with the chili flake. Place the chicken on top, skin side up. Arrange some of the orange slices on top. Place the pan in the oven and cook for 45 minutes to 1 hour, or until chicken temperature is 165* F. In the last 10 minutes of cooking, add olives to the pan.

Taste and season if needed.

Garnish with orange zest, fennel fronds and a drizzle of olive oil.

