

SALTIMBOCCA CHICKEN BITES

My first taste of Saltimbocca (the traditional Italian recipe is with veal) was such a revelation of savory red wine-friendliness and I quickly realized why: the sage. Sage is so complimentary to savory red grapes like Tuscany's Sangiovese, and the global favorite, Cabernet Sauvignon. The gamy notes contributed by the prosciutto take this approach over the top, and it's flexible! I wrap pork tenderloin, butterflied shrimp and as this version shows, chicken in this way—and voila! A match for your favorite Napa Valley Cabernet (or Chianti Classico, or Brunello, or...just not Pinot Noir, which is too delicate).

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb chicken breast tenders (*you can also purchase and cut boneless skinless chicken breast halves into tender size, or split them evenly horizontally, and pound to a uniform 1/3-inch thickness before cutting into tenders*)
- 1 3 oz pkg pre-cut Prosciutto di Parma (*fresh-cut is moister and thus harder wrap so save that for your salumi board*)
- 1 T olive oil, plus more for dipping or spraying
- 2 dozen (or so) medium sage leaves (*if you have large, cut them to about 2-inch lengths*)

PROCEDURE

Cut the chicken breast tenders into approximately 2-inch lengths and set aside. On a cutting board, lay out the prosciutto slices and cut each lengthwise into thirds. Wrap the chicken in the prosciutto strips by placing a chicken bite on the end of a prosciutto strip, and folding/rolling until the chicken is encased in a prosciutto ribbon. Repeat to finish all the chicken bites and set aside at room temperature.

To prepare the sage leaves, arrange them on a work surface and spray with olive oil on one side, then turn and spray the other. If you don't have an olive oil sprayer, pour a few tablespoons of olive oil into a small dish and dip each leaf in the oil, allowing the excess to drip off. Arrange the oiled sage leaves on a rack with a baking sheet beneath to catch the drips, and set aside. Preheat the oven to 350F.

Meanwhile, heat a heavy skillet on medium high heat and add 2 T olive oil. When the oil shimmers, add the chicken bites and cook, shaking the pan a little bit to ensure they don't stick (you can add more oil if needed), until the prosciutto begins to brown and crisp. Turn each bite and cook on the other side to crisp the prosciutto, another 2-3 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low and cover the pan, allowing the bites to cook another 2-3 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Meanwhile, place the baking sheet with the sage in the preheated oven and bake (watching carefully as it can cook quickly) until crisp, about 6 minutes.