



BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary
Bucket List One Dish at a Time

By Emily Banks Wooten

*“A recipe has no soul.
You as the cook must
bring soul to the recipe.”*

— THOMAS KELLER

Taste of the Middle East

*“You don’t have to cook fancy or
complicated masterpieces — just good
food from fresh ingredients.”*

— JULIA CHILD



The thing I’ve probably been asked the most since starting this food page is suggestions for quick and easy weeknight meals. And trust me, no one likes finding these Holy Grails more than me. When your family is running in multiple different directions for editorial meetings, press conferences, faculty meetings, afterschool NHS meetings, part time jobs, etc., it really is imperative to have several of these type dishes in your back pocket to pull out when you need to.

So when I recently saw a headline online that said, “It Took Just 4 Ingredients and 20 Minutes to Make the Best Chicken Dinner,” of course I had to take a peek. The recipe was for Za’atar Chicken Thighs with the choice of broccoli or cauliflower. If you’re not familiar with za’atar, it is a pungent, strongly aromatic herb that is native to the Middle East and tastes like a blend of marjoram, oregano and thyme. It is often mixed with olive oil and salt and drizzled over hot bread or used as a dip for bread. It can also be sprinkled over meats and vegetables as a seasoning. I happened to have some za’atar on hand, left over from a Geoffrey Zakarian recipe so I thought why not give it a try. I picked up some fresh lemons, broccoli and boneless, skinless chicken thighs on the way to pick up Daughter from school and then came home and got busy.

This recipe truly came together quickly and easily and tasted wonderful. We opted for the broccoli instead of the cauliflower. I didn’t use the optional tahini for serving or the chopped fresh parsley leaves for garnish. I served it with a simple green salad and we thoroughly enjoyed it. This one will definitely go into the rotation. By the way, I’m not sure if za’atar is available locally or not at this time. I couldn’t find it previously and ended up ordering it from Amazon. Try this. I really think you’ll be surprised at how flavorful it is. ■

Za’atar Chicken Thighs

From yahoo.com

- 2 medium lemons, divided
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon za’atar, divided
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs (6 to 8)
- 2 medium broccoli crowns or 1 medium head cauliflower (1½ to 2 pounds)
- Tahini, for serving (optional)
- Chopped fresh parsley leaves, for garnish (optional)

• Finely grate the zest of 1 medium lemon into a medium bowl. Juice the zested lemon until you have 3 tablespoons. Reserve 1 tablespoon lemon juice; add the remaining juice to the bowl of zest. Cut the remaining 1 lemon into wedges and reserve for serving.

• Add 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, 3 tablespoons of the za’atar, 1 teaspoon of the kosher salt, and ¼ teaspoon black pepper to the bowl of zest, and stir to combine. Add 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs and rub all over with the za’atar mixture. Let marinate at room temperature while you prep the vegetables and heat the oven, at least 10 minutes.

• Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 425 degrees.

• Cut 1 medium broccoli crown or 1 medium head cauliflower into ½ -inch thick pieces and place on a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with the reserved lemon juice and remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil. Season with the remaining 1 teaspoon za’atar and ½ teaspoon kosher salt, and use your hands to toss until evenly coated. Push the vegetables to the sides of the baking sheet in an even layer to make room for the chicken. Place the chicken in a single layer on the baking sheet.

• Roast until the chicken is lightly browned, cooked through, and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part registers at least 165 degrees, 20 to 25 minutes. Squeeze the reserved lemon wedges over the chicken. Drizzle some tahini all over and garnish with chopped fresh parsley leaves if desired.