

Francisco's Fried Chicken Tenders

Known for his cheerful, friendly demeanor, Francisco Vásquez López, a cook at our Oakville location, brings a smile to anyone he comes across. These mind-blowing fried chicken tenders are one of his superpowers. The secret is to brine the tenderloins in buttermilk, then dredge them in a well-spiced flour mixture before deep-frying them to a crunchy finish. If you're lucky, there will be a side of Francisco's house-made salsa (page 213) for dipping, though he's also partial to ranch dressing.

MAKES 4-6 SERVINGS

3 cups buttermilk
¼ cup plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1½ lb chicken breast tenderloins
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon smoked paprika
2 teaspoons garlic powder
2 teaspoons onion powder
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste (optional)
Canola oil, for frying
Francisco's Tomato Salsa (page 213) or your favorite dipping sauce, for serving

In a large nonreactive bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, ¼ cup of the salt, and the lemon juice until well blended and the salt has dissolved. Add the chicken, stir to coat, cover, and let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Drain the chicken into a large, fine-mesh sieve, discarding the buttermilk brine. Set aside.

In a wide, shallow bowl, whisk together the flour, paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, black pepper, cayenne (if using), and the remaining 1 teaspoon salt.

Pour the oil to a depth of 1 inch into a large, wide sauté pan or deep frying pan (no more than half full) and heat over medium-high heat to 350°F on a deep-frying thermometer. Set a wire rack over a sheet pan and set the pan near the stove top.

When the oil is hot, working in batches to avoid crowding, dredge the chicken tenderloins in the flour mixture, shaking off any excess, and add to the hot oil. Cook, turning once or twice with tongs, until crispy, golden brown, and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Transfer to the rack to drain. Repeat to cook all the chicken tenders the same way. Serve right away, with salsa on the side.

