Outdoor Fried Chicken for a Crowd

* **YIELD**12 to 15 servings

Sabra Krock for The New York Times

* **8** **pounds (about 21) bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs**
* **About 1 quart buttermilk**
* **¾** **cup loosely packed rubbed sage leaves**
* **¼** **cup Old Bay seasoning**
* **1** **tablespoon kosher salt**
* **⅓** **cup freshly cracked black pepper**
* **2** **cups all-purpose flour**
* **1** **tablespoon baking powder**
* **3** **cups vegetable oil**
* **3** **strips thick-cut bacon**

PREPARATION

1. Put thighs in a large roasting pan or other flat pan that will hold them all in a single layer. Add buttermilk to cover, cover pan tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 12 hours and up to 24, turning once or twice.
2. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Combine sage, Old Bay, salt and pepper; mix well. Remove thighs from buttermilk, drain, then sprinkle on both sides with spice mix, rubbing lightly to make sure it adheres. Put flour and baking powder in a big paper bag and shake to mix. Working in batches, add about a third of the thighs and shake to coat with flour mixture; remove thighs from bag and repeat with next 2 batches.
3. Put vegetable oil and bacon in a 20-inch skillet. Set skillet over high flame; keep an eye on the thermometer because you want to be ready to fry when oil hits about 370 degrees.
4. When oil is up to heat, remove bacon and drain it to eat later. Shake excess flour off 1 thigh and add thigh to oil; there should be intense bubbling. Shake excess flour off half the remaining thighs and add them to pan, skin side down; oil should come about halfway up sides of thighs. Cook until golden brown on the side facing down, about 7 to 9 minutes. Flip over and cook until golden brown on the second side, another 5 to 7 minutes. Remove and drain on a paper towel.
5. Allow oil to come back up to 370 degrees and repeat with remaining thighs. They may take 1 to 2 minutes less per side to brown.
6. Put browned thighs in a roasting pan or a large sheet pan and cook in oven until cooked through with no trace of pink, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven and serve warm, or wait up to 2 hours and serve at room temperature.