



COMPETITION-STYLE CHICKEN THIGHS

Competition teams usually use chicken thighs or legs for their chicken category turn-ins. Thighs are evenly shaped and withstand the heat better than chicken breasts. Cooking competition-style chicken is a bit of a process.

Our team uses a higher cooking temperature because the judges are looking for “bite through” skin. No one likes rubbery chicken skin, so the judges expect to be able to take a clean bite of chicken without the skin stretching or completely pulling off of the chicken. For that reason, we scrape the fat from the back of the chicken skin and then put the skin back on the thighs. To be honest, this is a gross task, and no one on any barbecue team ever wants to do it. The results however, are undeniable.

Most competition teams braise their chicken in butter and butter substitutes to keep it from drying out. I have found that the NMT Bird Shot Poultry Injection, with its buttery, salty, and sweet flavors, is an excellent braising liquid.

Makes: 12 thighs

12 chicken thighs, bone in, skin on, evenly sized

1½ tablespoons NMT Southern Sweet BBQ Rub (page 187)

1½ tablespoons Smokin’ Guns BBQ Hot Rub

3 cups NMT Bird Shot Poultry Injection (page 194), divided

2 cups NMT Honey Bourbon BBQ Sauce (page 190)

½ cup apple juice

½ tablespoon tamarind paste (optional)



1. Trim the chicken. Carefully remove the chicken skins and reserve. Use a sharp butcher's knife to cut through and remove the protruding knuckle bone. Square off the thinner flaps of meat on the top edge. Remove any visible exterior fat, especially on the sides; there will normally be a patch of fat right where you would bite.



2. Scrape the skin. Use a sharp, flat-edged knife to scrape the fat from the backside of the chicken skins. It helps if they are cold so that the fat is firm. Carefully place each skin over a trimmed thigh and tuck the skin underneath the thigh.



3. Season the chicken. Season chicken on top and bottom with the NMT Southern Sweet BBQ Rub and then the Smokin' Guns BBQ Hot Rub.

4. Inject the chicken. Use 1 cup of the NMT Bird Poultry Injection Shot to inject 15cc (1 tablespoon) into each side of each thigh with a meat syringe.



5. Preheat the smoker to 290° to 300°F at the grate level. Fill the water pan. Start preheating hickory and cherry wood splits.

6. Smoke the chicken. Add a split of hickory to the firebox 15 minutes before putting the chicken on the smoker. Alternate between hickory and cherry wood when replenishing smoke wood every 30 minutes. Place the chicken thighs, skin-side up, on a rack over a half sheet pan. Place this in the smoker and cook for 90 minutes. The chicken thighs should be 155° to 160°F after this part of the cook. Keep the sheet pan and rack to use later.

7. Braise the chicken. Place the chicken thighs into two half-sized steam pans, skin-side up. Pour 1 cup of the remaining NMT Bird Shot Poultry Injection into each pan, taking care not to pour it directly onto the thighs but around them. Tightly cover with a lid or foil. Place back in the smoker until the thighs reach an internal temperature of 180°F. Expect this part of the cook to take 1 minute for every degree the temperature has to increase. For example, if the chicken is 160°F, then it should take about 20 minutes to reach 180°F. Remove from the heat.

8. Sauce the chicken. Mix the NMT Honey Bourbon BBQ sauce, apple juice, and tamarind paste in a small saucepan over medium heat until combined, about 10 minutes. Pour through a fine-mesh sieve. Dip each thigh into the sauce and set on the rack and sheet pan from Step 6.



9. Final smoke. Add a piece of cherry wood to the firebox. Place the thighs into the smoker for 10 minutes to set the sauce. Remove from the smoker and serve with traditional barbecue sides.

NOTES/SUBSTITUTIONS

Smokin' Guns BBQ Hot Rub — You can substitute with NMT Southern Sweet BBQ Rub (page 187) mixed with ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, and ¼ teaspoon white pepper.