

50 COOL THINGS TO DO BEFORE LABOR DAY

Seventeen

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THIS WEEK IN YOUR CITY



SUMMER GUIDE

Vital gear, hot bikinis, skinny cocktails,
great reads, don't-miss music, life-changing vacations,
and 7 questions for Vegas Playmate Arianny Celeste

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Frank Pellegrino Jr.

When life gives this man lemons, he makes grilled lemon chicken

BY CATE WEEKS

Go ahead, says Frank Pellegrino Jr., cut those corners. Bottled lemon juice? Yeah, it's in his fridge. He's been known to forget to buy fresh lemons. And though he definitely won't argue with a die-hard outdoor chef about the loss of flavor on a gas grill, who wants to coddle the coals when you could be having a conversation?

The fourth-generation co-owner of the Rao's restaurants reminds the home chef that kitchen chops are actually secondary to gracious hosting. "If taking shortcuts means you spend time with friends, family, the people you love, then do it. It doesn't change the taste," he says, then pauses. "Well, maybe [it does], but I don't think anyone is coming to your home to review your food."

His new cookbook, *Rao's on the Grill* (St. Martin's Press, \$35), features tips for entertaining al fresco alongside the recipes from the legendary East Harlem, N.Y., restaurant. Each dish is beautifully photographed by Frankie, as he's known to his regulars. The focus is definitely

Italian, but Pellegrino also slipped in some Southwestern influences found in Rao's Caesars location. Green chilies, for example, are mixed into the mushroom topping for grilled skirt steak.

Pellegrino also tweaked the longtime Rao's staple, Uncle Vincent's Lemon Chicken—named, as you would guess, after his uncle, Vincent Rao. The original gets its char under a hotel broiler, and Pellegrino added a splash of balsamic to his sauce. "It's a pretty perfect dish already," he says, "but I actually prefer to cook it at home on the grill. There's something wonderful about the way the sauce mixes with the charred skin on the chicken."

Pellegrino grills chicken halves until just a bit underdone. He cuts the chicken into serving pieces, adds them to a pan, tops with the sauce and finishes in the pan back on the grill. "The trick is to keep the skin intact [when you cut it]. It'll hold in the juices while the chicken sucks up the sauce."

For side dishes, he recommends a green bean and potato salad (the recipe



is in the cookbook) and a simple pasta with tomato sauce. Another Pellegrino *segreto*: Cook your pasta just short of done before your guests arrive. Toss with olive oil and refrigerate. When you're ready to serve, finish in the sauce. It'll not only save you time, but the pasta absorbs the flavors of the sauce.

Pellegrino's cookbook doesn't come out until May 22, but you can get your own copy during the Vegas Uncork'd event "Italian Brunch with the Pellegrinos" on May 13. Visit VegasUncorked.com for ticket information. 🍷

Rao's Grilled Lemon Chicken

(4 servings)

One 3½-pound chicken, halved lengthwise
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Lemon chicken sauce (recipe at WeeklySeven.com/dining)

1. Preheat an outdoor grill for indirect cooking over medium-high heat (450 degrees).
2. Brush the chicken all over with the oil. Season with salt and pepper. Let stand at room temperature while the grill heats up.
3. To make the lemon sauce, shake all of the ingredients well in a covered jar. Set aside at room temperature.

4. Brush the cooking grate clean and lightly oil the grate. Place the chicken on the cooking grate skin-side down. With the lid closed as much as possible, cook for 4 minutes. Reduce to medium heat (350 degrees). For a charcoal grill, move the chicken to the cooler edges of the grate, not directly over the coals, still skin-side down. Continue grilling until the skin is nicely charred, about 6 minutes more. Flip the chicken and cook until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the breast reads 145 degrees, about 12 minutes more. The chicken is undercooked, but will finish cooking in the sauce. Transfer the chicken to a chopping board and let stand for 15 minutes.

5. Using a large chef's knife or a cleaver, cut each chicken half into 4 pieces (2 wings, 2 drumsticks, 2 thighs and 2 breast halves), then cut each breast half into thirds to make 6 breast pieces total. Arrange the 12 chicken pieces, skin-side down, in a large skillet or flameproof roasting pan. Pour enough lemon sauce mixture into the skillet to come about ¼ inch up the sides. Bring to a boil over high heat.

6. Cook for 3 minutes and turn the chicken in the sauce. Continue cooking, occasionally spooning the sauce over the chicken, until the chicken is opaque with no sign of pink, about 2 minutes.

7. Transfer the chicken to a platter. Spoon the sauce on top and garnish with chopped parsley.