



Chicken-Fried Fake

The origin of **chicken-fried steak** is one big Texas-size myth.

Walk into the Dawson County Museum in Lamesa, TX, and you'll see a framed newspaper story explaining how chicken-fried steak was invented in Lamesa in 1911: The article, printed in 1976, says that Jimmy Don Perkins, a drawbridge oiler turned short-order cook, overlooked the comma in a ticket for "chicken, fried steak" (two dishes), so he fried a steak as if it were chicken rather than admit that he had no clue what chicken-fried steak was. The same tale is perpetuated by the Smithsonian. There's just one problem: Larry BeShaw, a former reporter for the *Austin American-Statesman*, made it up for laughs. "It was so absurd, it never occurred to us that anyone would believe it," he says. Food historians think the dish came from German and Austrian immigrants, but that doesn't stop Texas from standing behind BeShaw's story: The state legislature named Lamesa the legendary home of chicken-fried steak last May, and the town will hold its second-annual chicken-fried steak festival April 27 to 29 (ci.lamesa.tx.us). Can't get to Lamesa? Make the dish yourself with this recipe from Food Network Kitchens.



CHICKEN-FRIED STEAK WITH CREAM GRAVY

ACTIVE: 45 min | TOTAL: 45 min | SERVES: 4

FOR THE GRAVY

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2½ cups whole milk
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

FOR THE STEAK

- 4 beef cube steaks
(1½ to 2 pounds total)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 large eggs
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- Sliced scallions, for topping (optional)

1. Make the gravy: Melt the butter with the vegetable oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Sprinkle in the flour and cook, whisking, until smooth and deep golden brown, about 2 minutes. Gradually whisk in the milk and simmer, whisking to remove any lumps, until the gravy thickens, 4 to 6 minutes. Add 2 to 3 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper. Cover and remove from the heat.

2. Make the steak: Place the steaks between 2 pieces of heavy-duty plastic wrap and pound to ½ inch thick with a mallet or heavy skillet. Season generously with salt and pepper. Whisk the flour, baking powder and 1 teaspoon each salt and pepper in a shallow bowl. In another shallow bowl, whisk the milk and eggs. One at a time, dredge each steak in

the flour mixture, dip in the egg mixture, then return to the flour mixture, pressing firmly to coat. Transfer the breaded steaks to a rack.

3. Preheat the oven to 250°. Set another rack on a rimmed baking sheet. Heat about 1 inch of vegetable oil in a cast-iron skillet or Dutch oven over high heat until a deep-fry thermometer registers 350°. One at a time, fry the steaks until golden brown, turning once, about 5 minutes (return the oil to 350° between each steak). Transfer the finished steaks to the rack on the baking sheet and keep warm in the oven while you make the rest.

4. Meanwhile, reheat the gravy. Stir in some water, 1 tablespoon at a time, if the gravy is too thick. Drizzle the fried steak with the gravy and top with scallions.