



## diningout

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The Little Hotties are a spicy treat at Take Me Out, Let's Eat Chinese, 1502 W. 18th.

ANDREW A. NELLES-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

# CHICKEN DELIGHT

There's a fried chicken shack in Memphis that I dream about, a place that serves a juicy-to-the-bone bird encased in a crust so crispy the skin flakes and cleaves like flecks of mica when

## No shortage of places to find quality fried bird

you bite it. It doesn't hurt that this same shack serves deep-fried pickles flecked with dill, dripping in

ranch dressing. A religious experience, to say the least.

Until recently, I was sure

Chicago had no chicken like Gus's World Famous in Memphis. And so, few weekends have gone by where

I haven't fantasized about hopping a Megabus and riding for 10 hours for the sole purpose of grabbing an order.

Alas, poultry provenance finally has come to our fair city. Top chefs

and soul-food cooking grandmothers alike have unleashed their talents with hot oil and spices, and there's now a fried yard bird bounty. Even Oakbrook-based McDonald's has gotten in on the fun with their local launch of Mighty Wings, which, while I don't usually celebrate the food of huge franchises, are pretty good. So, without further ado, here's a recap of the best fried chicken around town:

They say you often miss what has been there all along. I never made that mistake with my personal relationships, but I certainly have in my love of fried chicken in not paying closer attention to the venerable local chain **Harold's**.

There is an excuse for my oversight. Not all Harold's are created equal. Some over-fry. Some do not keep vigilance over the quality of the fryer oil (a tasty mix of beef tallow and vegetable oil). I have been a victim of bad chicken at many of their franchises. But after a few years, I have discovered that one location in particular (1361 N. Milwaukee; 773-252-2424) is really stellar.

Though I am usually a dark meat-loving thigh man, I crave one thing from the Wicker Park Harold's: their wings, fried hard (extra time in the oil), smothered in freezer-burnt French fries and two pieces of soggy white bread (the bread and fries I'd probably throw away if my mother's voice wasn't still haranguing my brain about all the starving children in Africa). These wings aren't quite as juicy as the ones in Memphis, but they have a similar crispy skin and a solid peppery finish.

Harold's is good, but maybe the best local mom and pop bird comes from **Mini-Hut** (6659 W. Archer; 773-586-2115), a tiny take-out dive near Midway that serves up "Chicken Boats," two pieces of some of the most buttery fleshed fried chicken in Chicago, along with a soft Parker House-style roll and crinkle-cut fries.

Not all great fried chicken is southern. The Little Hotties at **Take Me Out, Let's Eat Chinese** (1502 W. 18th; 312-929-2509) — chili-, garlic- and soy-coated, lollipop-style chicken drumettes — are just the thing if you're looking to score a nice capsaicin high.

Take Me Out's hotties aren't the only Asian bird in town. **Crisp's** (2940 N Broadway; 773-697-7610) Seoul Sassy fried chicken coated



**Edith's Fried Chicken comes with a side of biscuits at The Boarding House, 720 N. Wells.** | ANDREW A. NELLES-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

in rice flour, pressure-fried and tossed with a ginger, soy and garlic sauce, used to be my unequivocal favorite fried chicken in Chicago. However, I recently checked out a new Korean fried chicken competitor **Dak** (1104 W. Granville; 773-754-0255) in Edgewater that serves up fried Korean chicken wings so big, you'll think they're really from a turkey, that give Crisp a run for their money.

The fried chicken renaissance has come not only from ethnic and casual kitchens, but also from some of the classier joints in town. Alpna Singh's **The Boarding House** (720 N. Wells; 312-280-0720) serves up a fine Southern-style bird with a thick, breaded crumb and a juicy center.

Chef Paul Fehribach, a man on a mission to celebrate the history of traditional Southern cooking, fries his bird at **Big Jones** (5347 N. Clark; 773-275-5725) in leaf lard and butter studded with a ham

hock in a cast iron kettle. The recipe comes from the late and legendary Southern cuisine expert and cookbook author Edna Lewis. This bird is a touch smoky and tastes like it came from a really talented Southern granny's kitchen.

If you can't decide between gourmet, Southern and Asian fried chicken, you might want to try General Jane's fried chicken from **Au Cheval** (800 W. Randolph; 312-929-4580), the dark, upscale gourmet diner in Chicago's West Loop. The crispy skin here is light and wispy, almost like a pork cracklin'. As a freak for American/Cantonese-style Chinese, I can't help but love the sugary and spicy General Tso's-style lacquer; a perfect combo.

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**The Seoul Sassy Chicken at Crisp, 2940 N. Broadway, is tossed with a ginger, soy and garlic sauce.** | RICH HEIN-SUN-TIMES



**General Jane's fried chicken from Au Cheval, 800 W. Randolph, is perfectly sugary and spicy.** | PHOTO BY KARI SKAFLEN