

## *Cornish Hens with Pecan-Cornbread Stuffing*

- 10 bacon slices
- 1 1/3 cups yellow cornmeal
- 1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 3/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 to 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 1/2 cups pecans
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 celery ribs, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 3/4 cup diced mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh thyme
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh sage
- 3 to 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 8 (1 to 1 1/2 pound) Cornish hens
- Melted butter or margarine

Cook bacon in a 9-inch cast-iron skillet until crisp; remove bacon, and drain on paper towels, reserving 2 tablespoons drippings in skillet. Keep skillet warm. Crumble bacon and set aside. Combine cornmeal and next 5 ingredients in a large bowl.

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Whisk together broth, 2 eggs, and butter; add to dry ingredients, stirring just until moistened. Pour mixture into hot skillet with drippings. Bake at 400 degrees for 25 minutes or until golden around the edges. Crumble cornbread onto a baking sheet; reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees, and bake, stirring occasionally, 15 minutes or until lightly toasted. Transfer cornbread to a large bowl, and stir in crumbled bacon and pecans.

Sautee diced onion in hot oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat 5 minutes or until tender. Add celery, bell pepper, and mushrooms, and cook 3 minutes; stir in thyme and sage. Stir vegetable mixture into cornbread mixture; stir in lightly beaten eggs.

Spoon about 1 cup stuffing into each hen; close opening with skewers. Place hens, breast side up, in a roasting pan. Brush with butter. Bake, covered, at 450 degrees for 5 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 degrees, and bake 50 more minutes or until a meat thermometer inserted in stuffing registers 165 degrees. Remove skewers and serve.

Serves 8.