We had friends over for dinner. They don’t eat beef. No longer a problem. We don’t barbecue much beef any more. Some of them don’t even eat chicken. Also not a problem. Mostly I hate chicken. So we put together a dinner of Cajun blackened salmon (because I like the fish) and Cambodian Ginger Honey chicken (because I like the photography).

But first, we learn a horrible lesson about cleaning the grill! Everyone knows that after you finish smoking you do not just put the cover on a wet smoker! Everyone knows that first you empty the water! Yes, it is a good idea to scrape the crust off the pan at the bottom of the smoker if you have been using a sweet sugary rub, or if you have just cooked salmon. Everyone knows you don’t clean off the smoky black crud, which is seasoning the grill, and you leave the walls of the smoker as crusty as you can. But you make sure your smoker is going to stay dry before you cover it. Or you come back and the entire inside is covered with scary green mold.

But everyone knows you do not clean a gas or charcoal grill after grilling burgers, or dry rubbed Cajun Blackened rib eyes, or even a dry rubbed Jamaican jerk piece of fish or chicken. There is no liquid to drip all over the inside and sustain mold. The zillion degree open flame reduces fat drippings to carbon powder. And you want the grill black, just like you want a cast iron griddle black. Again, we call that seasoning the grill. You work hard to get your grill seasoned. And you remember the lesson: You don’t screw with a well-seasoned grill!

New lesson. Wet rubbed chicken is not the same as dry rubbed beef. Wet rubbed chicken is not even the same as dry rubbed chicken. On the 11th I served a significant amount of wet rubbed chicken. I ran the grill for a little bit after I finished cooking, to clean the gratings. And today I came back to a green grill. A moldy grill. A green and moldy grill. How is this possible? Wet rub accumulates in thick and safe-looking crust on the pan under the grill. Is it safe? It looks safe. Things are not always as they seem. It is not safe. Worse yet, it is a harbinger of even scarier things. There is a large drip pan in a grill that captures all the thin runny liquids. A pan of chicken juices is not a good thing to keep in your grill. A grill that sits moist between uses is not a good thing. So when doing wet grilling you have to treat a big flat grill as if it were a wet vertical smoker. Throw out the disposable aluminum drip pan, or at least throw out the liquid in it. Remember the new lesson: Wet is wet. Get rid of the wet stuff.

But enough. What about dinner? First I prepared the Cambodian rub, with ginger, garlic, honey, soy sauce, and fish sauce. As before, I boned the chicken legs. And as before I put the legs and the marinade in zip-loc bags in the fridge for 24 hours. This time I pureed the garlic and ginger, rather than coarsely chopping it. This is not a good idea. The flavor is the same, but the texture can seem a bit slimy. This is most noticeable in the pockets inside the boned chicken thighs. The meat cooks completely but the marinade inside the pockets does not entirely dry out. The texture of pureed ginger and garlic is not quite as nice as the coarser texture when the ingredients have been chopped. And the fermented fish sauce combines with the almost slimy rub to create nasty thoughts in your imagination.
There are two ways to use this information. (1) Go perfectionist, chop the ingredients, bone the thighs, and carefully assemble the boned legs around a dollop of perfectly prepared sauce. Or (2) puree the ingredients, don’t bone the thighs, and marinate the legs a little longer because the surface area is less when you have not created an interior pocket for the sauce. Since there is no marinade in a protected pocket, all the ginger and garlic will crisp. I’ll try plan-2 next time.

To start I used the grill more as a traditional gas oven than as a grill. I slow baked the chicken over indirect until it was mostly cooked through. Then I took a piece of salmon, well coated with a dry Cajun rub, and blackened it over direct high heat.

Then I put the chicken back on the grill, this time over direct heat, to crisp it. Finally, I put both the salmon and the chicken back on the grill to make sure both were warm and both were crisp.
Jean prepared a marvelous salad of couscous, garbanzos, asparagus, and craisins, with an oil and vinegar dressing, and a second salad of the vanishing supply of fresh Jersey summer tomatoes, onions, and blue cheese. She also made a cake of fresh plums, baked into an upside down cake. Delightful. And the cappuccino machine was happy to do its thing. A good evening.

Our friends had not met. One couple was a proper Bostonian married to a Chinese woman, and the other was a pair of well-traveled Indians. Turns out they had overlapped in lots of places, but had not met before. More interesting conversationally than I was. And I guess that’s a good thing. I got to focus on cooking.

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