

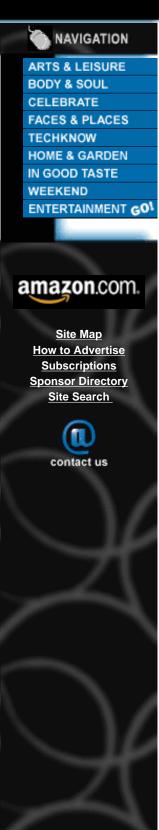
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Surf & turf
By Brad Ellis / QUAD-CITY TIMES

Suppose the Colonel's secret blend of 11 herbs and spices wasn't such a secret. Or how about cutting out the middlewoman in orange shorts and making some hot wings at home?

OK, maybe these aren't the exact recipes for KFC's fried chicken or Hooter's hot wings, but somewhere out there on the Internet, copycat versions of these — and other — signature items can get you awfully close.

Poke around on the Web long enough and you'll come across two approaches to recreating popular dishes at home: restaurant recipes, which typically are submitted to newspapers and magazines by various restaurants, and copycat recipes, which are trial and error attempts by dedicated cooks.

Betsy Couch, half of the "mom and pop shop" Web site Kitchen Link, adds about 1,000 copycat and restaurant recipes each month. This area of her site already boasts more than 11,300 recipes.

At CDKitchen.com, Web site owner Valerie Whitmore also maintains a copycat recipe database, in addition to archives of the newsgroup rec.food.recipes where copycat recipes are popular postings.

Like most recipe sites, both Kitchen Link and CDKitchen offer a search feature to simplify the process of finding a certain recipe.

"People search for particular restaurants like Applebees and Red Lobster. Olive Garden used to be real popular," says Whitmore, who tracks users search requests.

"A favorite is the Red Lobster cheese biscuits. That recipe has gone around for a long time," adds Couch. Also popular on her site are recipes from Kentucky Fried Chicken and T.G.I. Friday's.

"I make it very clear that these are copycat recipes and not an actual Kentucky Fried Chicken recipe," says Couch.

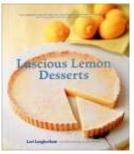
And while copycat recipes often come close, one factor keeps them from cloning the original.

"Some of the restaurant-style ingredients just aren't available to the public," says Couch. "Sometimes they use flavorings and oils that

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regular kitchens don't have access to. You probably can never totally duplicate some of the mass produced items."

For copyright reasons, neither Couch nor Whitmore keep too many copycat recipes on their sites.

"I've gotten cease and desist orders because I used to actually house them on my site," says Whitmore. "So now what I do is I find them elsewhere and I link to them."

One company Whitmore remembers hearing about is HoneyBaked Ham, based in Cincinnati.

In the newsgroup rec.food.recipes, "people had posted these copy cat recipes for HoneyBaked Ham, and they didn't like that. So even though it was all over the Internet already, they were sending out cease and desist orders," says Whitmore.

Craig Kurz, CEO of HoneyBaked Ham, has no qualms about defending the glazing and curing process his grandfather started about 45 years ago.

"You do take it personally when you see an infringement out there," says Kurz. "If somebody is trying to imitate the product and take the knock-off and try to leverage that, that's when you get our attention real quick."

Still, Kurz can understand the motivation behind trying to duplicate a special recipe.

"What that tells me is that the product is widely accepted, although not widely accessible. Those that are being copycatted are probably the top in their category or have a following that's worthy of seeking out that secret recipe or that secret process," says Kurz.

For the most part though, restaurants seem to leave copycatters alone.

"Most of the restaurants, I think, like the free publicity," says Whitmore. "No one is really going to make it like they do."

"I imagine it helps the business in the long run," adds Couch. "With so much talk about a certain recipe and people can't come up with the exact duplicate, they're going to keep going there and trying it."



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