

Sure-Fire Roasted Chicken Every Time

By Jodi Liano | January 30, 2015

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New culinary students are introduced to all kinds of cooking methods as they learn their way around a kitchen: searing, sautéing, boiling, steaming, poaching, frying, baking and roasting, to name just a few. As the techniques of each are mastered, a cook builds an intuitive sense for how to make just about anything in the kitchen.

Roasting is the method used most often. It's a "dry heat" cooking method, meaning food isn't cooked in lots of liquid, and the result is a crisp, caramelized exterior, whether you're cooking meat, chicken, fish, vegetables or fruit.

Roasting can be done for a short time at a high heat (usually for smaller items), or a long time at a lower heat (think a whole prime rib). When we talk protein specifically, it's best to look for lean cuts and use higher heat. This keeps the meat moist inside while creating a flavorful seared crust, the trademark sign of something that's been roasted well.

Truth be told, roasting and baking are essentially the same thing, and the method is one of the easiest ways to create incredible food in your own kitchen.

When I say "roast (blank)," what's the first word that comes to mind? Chicken, right? I can't think of a carnivore on the planet who doesn't love the comfort of a perfectly roasted chicken. It should have crispy mahogany skin, and meat that stays juicy no matter which piece you eat. This is Sunday food at its best and every home cook should know how to roast a chicken. If you are cooking for one, it means three or four meals, and if you're cooking for more, roast a couple birds and use the leftovers later in the week.

Every cook I know would probably recommend a different method for roasting a chicken, it's not unlike the battle over how to cook a turkey. Sure you can brine it, spatchcock it, stuff it, bathe it in butter, put it on a beer can, hoist it on a rack or roast it upside down. I've tried them all; some work and some are just pure insanity. I choose to pare it down to the most straightforward method possible.

Hands-on time: 5 minutes

Total time: 2 hours

Servings: 4

Ingredients

- 3 1/2 pound chicken
- Kosher salt
- Black pepper
- [I also added Dr. Gonzo's One Hump Dry Rub [similar to Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning, but this particular mix has Chili Pepper, Garlic, Red Pepper, Sugar, Salt, Molasses], and Amchur Powder [Indian seasoning made from dried unripe green mangos, and adds a slight tang and hint of sourness] on some parts of the chicken]
- Kitchen twine
- Olive oil

First, be sure to buy a good chicken. Know where it came from (please, no factory-farmed birds). You'll see fryers and roasters—size is the difference here and I aim for a bird that is

about three and a half pounds.

Take your bird out of the fridge about an hour before it should go in the oven and generously season it with kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, inside and out. Use enough salt so you can see it—not just a tiny pinch but a good tablespoon or two. Let the chicken sit in a roasting pan with sides that aren't too high—**a cast-iron skillet works too**. High sides trap moisture, creating an environment that will steam your chicken instead of allowing that warm heat to circulate all around it.

Oh, and if you have the time you should use a bit of kitchen twine to tie the legs together—this keeps too much heat from getting into the cavity and drying out the breasts before the legs are fully cooked.

Method

Preheat your oven to 425°. If you have a convection setting, turn it on and opt for 400° instead. Convection circulates heat throughout the oven and will yield the most shatteringly crunchy skin ever—I'm a big fan. Just pay attention: Some convection ovens really speed up the cooking time.

Give your bird a drizzle of olive oil, rub it all over the exterior, then put it in the oven. I'm always asked "how long does it take to cook?" My answer is "until it's done." Every oven is different, and chickens vary in weight so there is no one answer on the time question. It will be somewhere around 45 minutes to 1 hour but the only real way to know is to use an instant-read thermometer.

Once the skin is nicely browned and you begin to see some of the meat pulling away from the ends of the drumsticks, take your bird out of the oven, shut the oven door (or you'll let all the heat out), and insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat between the leg and thigh. When you carve the chicken you're looking for a temperature of around 165°, but your bird will rest 15 minutes so keep in mind that it'll have some carry-over cooking and rise another 5°–10°. So aim for 155° when you take it out. Always better to go low, and pop the bird back in if need be—once it's overcooked there's no going back.

After the chicken has rested, you can serve the whole chicken at the table, cut it in pieces on the bone, or carve it off the bone. Either way, this simple roasting method makes a juicy chicken that you should have on your table at least once a week. When you get the technique down, feel free to play with flavors too: spice rubs, marinades, citrus and herbs in the cavity ... sky's the limit, so roast away!

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