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CHICKEN DONE RIGHT

Club chefs share their top secrets for cooking this American favorite. You'll never call it 'rubber' again.



HONEY ANCHO GLAZED CORNISH HENS (see recipe page 51)

WHAT'S FOR DINNER TONIGHT? DESPITE THE BEEF Board's commercials, it usually isn't beef. There's a good chance it's chicken — the No. 1 animal protein consumed in America.

As my wise grandmother (a great cook herself) once said, "A homemade roasted chicken will never let you down." But that's not the way many families feel when they are being served predictable chicken for dinner *again*.

Home cooks often feel equally jaded with chicken recipes that turn out dry or chewy instead of the expected juicy and mouth melting. We've all had our share of boring chicken breasts, also dubbed "rubber chicken" on the banquet circuit. Inquiring cooks want to know: How do professional chefs consistently create super chicken that is magically moist, tender, and tasty?

Executive chef Brent Ruggles of **Las Colinas Country Club** near Dallas reveals a few secrets. ►►

BY ROBIN BARR SUSSMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG MILANO

It is important to continually add moisture and fat before and during the cooking process.

"It is common to overcook chicken unless you use an instant-read thermometer," Chef Brent says. After it's cooked, he recommends letting it sit for about 15 minutes before cutting or carving so you can retain the natural juices for basting or making sauces. "This is a good rule of thumb for any protein," he adds.

There's no denying that chicken — America's favorite entrée — is a sustainable resource, based on its healthful profile, cost-effectiveness, and adaptability to many preparations. And talk about leftover potential. Precooked chicken is ideal to add to salads, soups, tacos, spaghetti, and casseroles.

Marinades are a no-brainer for adding moisture and complex flavor to fajitas, chicken-veggie kebabs, and Chinese stir-fry far in advance of cooking. Pour it on, close the fridge, and forget about it. But Chef Brent's favorite way to cook chicken or turkey is to use a brine, a water bath including salt and sugar in which to steep the poultry, usually overnight. "This is different than a marinade, which is usually composed of oil and an acid like citrus or wine," he says. "For plump, juicy chicken, I slowly grill or roast it over low heat after it has been in the water brine."

Many of the pros also utilize glaze, a thin sauce made with a savory and sweet combination of ingredients, usually including honey. The glaze can be used before, during, and after the cooking in order to concentrate the flavor, moisten the meat, and provide a beautiful, shiny finish to the chicken.

At **Barton Creek Resort & Spa** in Austin, Texas, executive chef Phil Bouza's mantra is "baste, baste, baste!" He says, "Baking, grilling, and roasting all have the ability to yield a moist bird. However, it is important to continually add moisture and fat before and during the cooking process." Chef Phil also likes to put herb butter under the skin and massage additional aromatics and olive oil on top of the skin prior to roasting to keep the meat succulent.

"Stuffed chicken holds moisture especially well," says executive chef Randy Aprill of **Silicon Valley Capital Club**

in San Jose, California. Like many chefs, he serves organic free-range chicken on his club menu described as "farm-raised airline breast." The trendy cut is a boneless breast with the first wing bone attached.

You've probably heard lots of hype about organic and free-range chicken. But is there a difference in the flavor of standard-raised chicken and organic or free range? "Personally, I cannot detect any difference in flavor," confides Chef Randy, "and haven't seen any scientific proof that organic or free range is healthier either. If we all switched to organic, chicken would become expensive instead of economical."

Grilling outdoors lends a delicious smokiness to chicken and is the perfect remedy to slaving over a hot stove. However, stir-frying chicken produces a fast, crisp-cooked dinner with the addition of veggies. Everything is prepped in advance so all you need is a heavy nonstick pan, high heat, and someone else to wash the dishes, right? Executive chef Dan Wozniak of the **Skyline Club** near Detroit suggests "pounding the chicken breasts to an even thickness so that they cook evenly." Or, skinless, boneless breast meat can be purchased as tenders, ready for the wok. For more flavor (and yes, more fat), seek legs and thighs — great also for braising, baking, or grilling.

Chicken provides a neutral slate easily enhanced by myriad cultural flavors. So take a bold culinary trip around the globe — from Jamaica to India, Italy, and the Mediterranean — with these inspired recipes provided by club and resort chefs. To paraphrase grandma, they won't let you down.

After weeks of testing chicken recipes, Robin Barr Sussman is actually looking forward to having chicken for dinner — yes, again!

CURRIED CHICKEN SALAD >

Here's a tantalizing twist on the typical chicken salad as featured at **Knollwood Country Club** near South Bend, Indiana.

- * 4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
- * 1 cup water or white wine for poaching chicken
- * 1/2 cup coarsely chopped toasted pecans
- * 1/2 cup thinly sliced celery
- * 1/2 cup chopped green onions
- * 1 cup green grapes, halved
- * 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- * 1/2 cup sour cream
- * 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- * 2 teaspoons curry powder
- * salt and pepper
- * 6-8 small butter lettuce leaves

In a medium saucepan, poach chicken breasts in simmering water or wine for 15 minutes. Cool chicken and then cut into small cubes. In a medium bowl, mix chicken, pecans, celery, onions, and grapes. In a small bowl, mix mayonnaise, sour cream, Dijon mustard, curry powder, and salt and pepper, to taste. Gently mix dressing into salad ingredients, cover, and chill for several hours or overnight. At serving time, scoop chicken salad into butter lettuce leaves or "cups" and garnish each plate with extra grapes, if desired.

Yield: 6 servings. >>



PROPER POACHING

The secret to perfect poaching? Keep the water at a simmering point without actually boiling it. Boiling can result in white chicken meat that is dry and stringy. Instead of poaching in plain water, infuse the meat with flavor using chicken or vegetable broths, beer, white wine, or apple juice. In a medium to large saucepan, cover the chicken with liquid and poach for about 15 minutes uncovered over medium-low heat. Remove the chicken from the liquid and eat immediately or cool for later. Easy!

GRILLED JERKED CHICKEN DRUMMETTES WITH JAMAICAN GLAZE ▶

Here's a perfect starter from **Brookhaven Country Club** near Dallas for that outdoor pool party. You can use this spicy sauce on any cut of chicken (legs, breast, or thighs) for an entrée portion.

- * 1 cup pineapple juice
- * 1/2 cup dark rum
- * 1 cup prepared barbecue sauce
- * 1/4 cup honey
- * 1/4 cup soy sauce
- * 1/2 cup Caribbean jerk seasoning
- * 2 dozen chicken drumettes
- * 2 julienned scallions
- * 1 julienned red pepper

Prepare Jamaican glaze by combining pineapple juice, rum, barbecue sauce, honey, and soy sauce in a medium pan and stir over medium-high heat. Add half of the jerk seasoning and mix thoroughly. Bring to a boil to burn off the alcohol of the rum, and then simmer for 10 to 12 minutes.

Prepare a charcoal grill over medium-high heat. Season the drumettes well with remaining jerk seasoning. Brush all surfaces of the drumettes with the Jamaican glaze. Grill chicken and turn often, brushing with the glaze until the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees, approximately 15 minutes. To serve, place warm drumettes on a large serving platter. Garnish with scallions and red pepper by sprinkling them over the top to add color and crunch.

Yield: 24 drumettes, or 6 appetizer servings.



POUNDED PEPPERONI CHICKEN AND CAPRESE SALAD ▶

Both kids and adults will enjoy this dish from executive chef Dan Wozniak of **Skyline Club** near Detroit. Substitute prosciutto in place of pepperoni for a more sophisticated flavor.

- * 4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts (5-6 ounces each)
- * 8 ounces thinly sliced pepperoni
- * 1/2 cup high-quality olive oil
- * 4 teaspoons dried Italian seasoning
- * 12 ounces high-quality whole mozzarella
- * 4 medium, ripe tomatoes, sliced thin
- * 1 large bunch fresh basil leaves (about 15 leaves)
- * salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place 4 sheets of plastic wrap on a flat surface and wrap each chicken breast like an envelope. With a flat mallet, gently pound chicken breasts to an even thickness, then remove the plastic. Place 2 slices of pepperoni on each breast and roll into a column, or roulade. Place roulade folded side down on a baking pan and coat with about half the olive oil and sprinkle with the Italian seasoning evenly. Bake uncovered for 20-30 minutes. Remove and set aside to cool.

In the meantime, compose the caprese salad in the center of four dinner plates. Divide the mozzarella into 8 slices and layer 2 slices on each plate with the sliced tomato and basil leaves, as desired. After the chicken has cooled slightly, slice it as thin as you wish and place each chicken roulade on the plate cut side up, encircling the salad. Drizzle the salad and plate with the remaining olive oil as desired and season the salad and the chicken with salt and pepper to taste.

Yield: 4 servings. ▶▶

SAFETYFIRST

- First rule of chicken cookery: Buy a meat thermometer. You can wash your chicken until the cows come home, but heat is the only way to kill bacteria. An internal temperature of at least 165 degrees must be reached in the bird's thickest part for safe, complete cooking.
- Wash your hands with warm soapy water before and after handling chicken, along with your knives, cutting boards, and dishes after preparing each food item. Don't cross-contaminate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods while preparing or serving. Throw out marinade used for raw chicken, or reserve some that has not touched the raw chicken.
- Refrigerate or freeze raw chicken immediately. Chill cooked chicken leftovers within two hours.



LEAN AND MEAN

If you skin chicken *after* it's cooked, you can eliminate more than half the grams of fat per serving. So keep it moist and juicy while cooking, but skip the calories of the skin unless you want it to appear on your hips right at swimsuit season.



HONEY ANCHO GLAZED CORNISH HENS

These gorgeous Southwestern-style hens (pictured on page 44) from executive chef Phil Bouza of **Barton Creek Resort & Spa** in Austin, Texas, impress for a special occasion, like Mother's Day.

- * 6 Cornish hens (9 ounces each), with giblets removed and legs tied together with kitchen twine
- * 3 ounces melted butter
- * dried spice mixture: 1 teaspoon each of salt, pepper, red chili powder, paprika, combined
- * 1/2 cup ancho chili in adobo sauce, pureed
- * 1/2 cup teriyaki glaze
- * 1/3 cup honey
- * Red Wine Lime Sauce (recipe follows)
- * 4 limes, cut in wedges or twists
- * 1 bunch cilantro

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Rub hens with melted butter and sprinkle equal amounts of dried spice mixture on each. In a small bowl, combine ancho puree, teriyaki glaze, and honey. Place hens in one large or two medium roasting pans that have been coated with cooking spray, and then glaze each hen with the ancho honey mixture using a pastry brush. Roast hens uncovered, basting occasionally with juices for 45-60 minutes (or until internal temperature

measured at the leg joint reaches 165 degrees). If hens look dry during baking, place foil loosely over pan to impede browning and add a little hot water to the roasting pan to increase liquids. When done, remove hens from oven and let rest while preparing the sauce.

To serve, pool a few tablespoons of red wine sauce in the center of each dinner plate and top with a whole Cornish hen. Serve immediately, garnished with lime wedges and a bouquet of cilantro, if desired for color.

Yield: 6 servings.

RED WINE LIME SAUCE

- * 1 cup red wine
- * 1 cup chicken stock
- * 4 ounces cold whole butter
- * 1 lime, juiced
- * salt and pepper

Deglaze a roasting pan with the red wine and chicken stock over medium-high heat. Reduce volume by half until it becomes a thick sauce consistency. Strain through a fine mesh, if needed. Return sauce to a smaller saucepan. Over medium-high heat, finish by whisking in butter, lime juice, and salt and pepper to taste. ♦♦

▲ PESTO STUFFED CHICKEN WITH TOMATO, CAPER & OLIVE RELISH

Chicken breasts strut their stuff accessorized with this refreshing — and addictive — relish served at **Brookhaven Country Club** near Dallas.

- * 6 chicken breasts with skin and ribs attached
- * 1 cup high-quality, store-bought basil pesto
- * salt and fresh ground pepper
- * 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- * Tomato, Olive & Caper Relish (recipe follows)
- * basil leaves, for garnish

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. With fingers, gently loosen the skin from the meat of each chicken breast in order to form a pocket. Spread about 1 tablespoon of pesto evenly under the skin of each breast. Place chicken in a large, high-rimmed baking dish and sprinkle chicken generously with salt and pepper, to taste. Brush the tops and bottoms of each breast with the additional pesto and drizzle with olive oil. Bake uncovered with skin side up for about 30 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees.

Serve each chicken breast with a neat spoonful of relish; garnish with a few basil leaves.

Yield: 6 servings.

TOMATO, OLIVE & CAPER RELISH

- * 1 1/2 cups small grape cherry tomatoes, sliced in half; or 4 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced
- * 1 cup kalamata olives, pitted and diced
- * 1 tablespoon drained capers
- * 1 large garlic clove, minced
- * 2 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley and basil combined, minced
- * 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- * 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- * fresh ground pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients and gently fold until well incorporated. Marinate at room temperature covered for at least two hours before serving with chicken.

EXCLUSIVE ON THE WEB

Visit www.privateclubs.com for a Perfect Roast Chicken recipe from **Aliso Viejo Golf Club** in Orange County, California. Just click on the "Food" icon.



DEFINING ORGANIC AND FREE RANGE

"Organic" chicken is defined as chicken that has been fed only organic grains (no chemicals or pesticides were used at the farm for at least three years). The organic rule prohibits the use of antibiotics, hormones, or drugs, and stipulates that the chicken was raised humanely in a stress-free environment. USDA-approved labels that read "100 percent organic" must contain only organically produced ingredients. "Free range" means the chickens are given room to roam and allowed access to the outdoors. The argument is that the chickens exercise more, so they are leaner.

FOOD STYLING BY MARTHA GOODING, SET STYLING BY PLO VIGIL