

Just Plain Old Roast Chicken

This is one of those recipes that aren't really recipes, but could be classified under *Things Mother Taught Me*. When it comes to roasting chickens, one is faced with all kinds of questions. Low and slow? Hot and fast? A combination? Truss? Baste? (... and if so, with what?) Covered or uncovered or both? With or without a thermometer? Who cares? Just do what Mother did.

chicken, 4 – 5 pounds, a drug-free, free-range, clean-living bird
extra-virgin olive oil
salt and freshly ground pepper

(Optional: onion, celery tops, lemon, garlic)

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Find a pot with lid that will fit your chicken: I use a 3-quart enameled cast iron pot or a 5-quart Dutch oven.

1. Check the cavity of the chicken. If there is a neck, toss it back into the cavity. If there is a bag of giblets, rip it open. There are usually a couple of funny little things that I believe are the heart and gizzard and which I throw in with the neck. If the liver looks inviting it gets sautéed briskly in butter, salted and peppered, and eaten while it's hot. Mm-mm.
2. If you choose to rinse the chicken, pat it dry with paper towels. Rub a teaspoon of olive oil around inside the pot before putting the chicken in. Stuff chicken with a squeezed lemon, if you have one (save the juice for something else), a quartered onion (no need to peel it, but strip off any loose brown papery skin), a couple of leafy celery tops, and some garlic cloves, not necessarily peeled but lightly smashed. Coat visible surfaces of chicken with olive oil – although Mother says nothing browns chicken skin more nicely than butter. (Paprika helps, too, she says.) Dust generously with freshly ground pepper and salt.
3. Cover pot, place in oven, ***reduce heat to 400 degrees***, and roast for about 1½ hours. Check for doneness by wiggling a drumstick; if it moves with any reluctance, or tends to bounce firmly back to its original position, cook it for another ½ hour or so. If the drumstick moves easily in the joint, the chicken is cooked. (If the drumstick comes away in your hand — well, it's probably overcooked, and therefore more meltingly delicious, according to Mother.)
4. Give the cooked chicken 15 minutes to brood before serving.

Chicken options

Save carcass for *Simple Chicken Stock* on previous page. If you are looking for uses for your leftover cooked chicken, some ideas would be *Chicken Salad* (page 105), *Chicken Pot Pie* (page 203), *Southwest Couscous Salad* (page 199), *Chicken and Rice Soup, Mexican-style* (page 196), *Tom Kab Gai* (page 197), and a substitute for the lamb in *Lamb Curry* (page 204).