

The Best Roast Chicken

There was no way I could omit my roast chicken recipe from this book. I serve it for those I love and, each time, it is devoured within minutes. It's soft, succulent and juicy. Quite simply, it's the best roast chicken I've ever made.

This dish is quite affordable, with the biggest cost being the chicken. Buy the best quality free-range chicken you can get – it makes the world of difference. You can also add just about any sort of vegetable to this dish, so don't feel restricted by what I have included below. I've made this many times, with whatever vegetables were lying about in the fridge, and each time it turned out even better than the last. It also helps to marinate the chicken for a few hours, but overnight is best.

Serves: 4 hungry people or 6 with sides | **Total time:** 1 hour 30 minutes, plus marinating time

1 large chicken, gizzards removed, and washed and cleaned
1 sprig each of fresh rosemary and thyme
Salt and pepper, to taste

For the marinade
60g butter, melted
¼ cup olive oil (the best kind you can get)
1 Tbsp smooth Dijon mustard
2 Tbsp honey
2 large oranges (I use blood oranges when in season)
1 naartjie (if you don't have one, use another large orange)
2 lemons

For the vegetables
2 carrots, halved
2 fennel bulbs, halved
3 baby onions or 1 large onion, halved (red or white but I usually prefer red)
1 whole bulb of garlic

Pat dry the chicken and set aside.

To make the marinade, add the butter, olive oil, mustard and honey to a roasting dish (I usually use a 30cm round dish with high sides). Squeeze the juice of 1½ oranges into the dish, along with the juice of the naartjie and 1 of the lemons. Give everything a good mix until well combined.

Place the chicken in the marinade and turn it over (with the top part facing you), so that the entire chicken is covered in the marinade. Spoon the marinade under the skin of the chicken, including under the skin of the body and legs. Be careful not to pull the skin completely off the chicken as you work. Use your hands to spread the marinade under the skin, including the skin at the legs, joints and the rest of the body. Don't be afraid of using your hands here; it really does help to get the buttery marinade into all the nooks and crannies.

Stuff the inside of the chicken with the sprigs of herbs and half of the remaining lemon. Toss the other half of the lemon, remaining orange half and the vegetables around the chicken, along with the whole bulb of garlic. Season with salt and pepper.

Cover the dish and place in the fridge. Remove the chicken from the fridge 1 hour before you roast it.

In the meantime, preheat the oven to 200°C.

When the oven is ready, place the chicken in the centre of the oven, uncovered. Roast for 1 hour, spooning some of the juices over the chicken every 30 minutes. After 1 hour, lower the heat to 170°C and roast for a further 30 minutes. Slice the leg to see if the juices run clear. Once the juices run clear, remove the chicken from the oven and allow to rest for 2 minutes. Slice however you want, serve and enjoy with a side of roasted veggies or thick and crusty white bread to help mop up the juices.

NOTE

If you're going to shred the chicken, make a stock from the cleaned bones and any leftover skin. Place the bones and skin in a large pot. Add 1 large chopped carrot, 1 small onion (halved), 1 bay leaf, 1 stick of celery (halved) and 4 cloves of garlic. Cover with 8 cups of water and bring to a simmer over medium heat, then add 3 peppercorns and a sprig each of rosemary and thyme. Allow to simmer for 3–4 hours, until reduced. You could also add 1 teaspoon of powdered or liquid chicken stock to the mix, but that is optional. Once reduced, strain the stock over a fine, mesh sieve and pour into a jug (it will yield ± 1 litre), or pour it into a few Ziploc bags and freeze for future use. It will keep in the fridge for up to 3 days or in the freezer for up to 3 months.

