

How to Grill Great Chicken

By Amy Kennedy

Chicken is a family favorite all-year-round, but it's even more popular when it's been lightly seasoned and cooked to perfection on an outdoor grill.

When you shop for chicken to grill, buy broiler fryers either whole or cut into pieces. If your family favors certain parts over others such as breasts, wings, thighs or legs, you can buy select parts packaged together.

To determine how much to buy, keep in mind that one 4-lb. broiling chicken makes about four servings. If you are buying select parts, you can figure on two or three pieces per person.

Always defrost frozen chicken in the refrigerator until you are ready to use it. You can speed up the thawing by placing frozen chicken in a bowl of cool water or defrosting it in a microwave. Avoid thawing chicken at room temperature on a countertop, and always wash countertops and cutting boards thoroughly after handling chicken.

Make sure you have extra clean plates on hand so that grilled chicken is never placed on a plate that has held raw chicken.

To add more flavor to chicken you can lightly season it, marinate it, or brush on a homemade or commercially prepared barbecue sauce during the last 10 minutes of grilling. If you like a smoky taste on your chicken, try using mesquite chips or buy a barbecue sauce with a hickory smoke flavor. You can vary the taste of your grilled chicken by using different marinades, dry seasonings and a variety of barbecue sauces. Several major food companies make specialty marinades already prepared or you can mix up your own. Try experimenting with citrus and pepper blends, Asian, Cajun, Hawaiian or Caribbean marinades to spice up your chicken.

Avoid brushing barbecue sauce on the chicken at the beginning of the grilling process. It can cause over browning or burning and really make a mess on the grill. Experiment with different barbecue sauces until you find a few your family really likes. Some have a mild hickory flavor while others may be spicier. The spicier varieties are good for making Buffalo wings.

When you've warmed up the grill to the desired temperature, place chicken pieces about eight inches from the heat. Direct grilling is the preferred method for cooking chicken pieces. Turn the chicken frequently by using tongs instead of a fork. (If you use a fork, it can pierce the meat and cause flare-ups or unwanted blackening.)

Grill chicken for 45-60 minutes. Always cook chicken thoroughly until juices run clear and there is no visible pink. You can test the chicken for doneness by piercing it with a fork just before you remove it from the grill.

Grilling is a low fat way of cooking and it imparts a smoky flavor that is hard to duplicate indoors. If you are using a charcoal grill, try soaking two cups of hardwood chips such as hickory or mesquite in cold water for an hour, drain, and place on the coals. To attain a smoky flavor on a gas grill, place the soaked chips in the smoker box if your grill has one, or wrap them in heavy foil, poke a few holes in the foil and place it under the grate directly over one of the burners. When you start to see smoke, it's time to get the food on the grill.

Try the recipe below and your family will be begging for grilled chicken every week.

Grilled Herb and Garlic Chicken with Salsa

- 1 1/4 cups herb and garlic marinade
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- 1 can (4 oz.) diced green chiles, drained (optional)
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced green onions
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/2 tsp. garlic salt
- 8 fajita-size flour tortillas, warmed to soften

Pour one cup of herb and garlic marinade in a large plastic bag. Place chicken pieces in bag and marinate for at least 30 minutes in the refrigerator. Combine tomato, chiles, onion and 1/4 cup of remaining marinade, vinegar, cilantro and garlic salt and mix well. Cover and refrigerate until chilled. Remove the chicken from the bag and throw away any unused marinade. Grill the chicken for 30-45 minutes or until thoroughly cooked, turning halfway through the grilling time. Slice the chicken into strips and place on tortillas. Spoon the salsa mixture on top and serve as chicken wraps.

Top Things To Remember

1. Always defrost chicken in the refrigerator, never at room temperature.
2. Marinate chicken 30 minutes prior to cooking, but only baste on barbecue sauce during the last 10 minutes of grilling.
3. Never place grilled chicken on a plate that has held raw chicken.

4. Use tongs to turn the chicken. Piercing with a fork can cause flare-ups and blackening.

Copyright © 2005 Publishers-Edge

