

How To Grill the Best Chicken

By Curt Hagedorn

Chicken is one of those grilling staples, whether leg quarters slathered with your own special sauce at a backyard barbecue or a quick grill-pan meal of boneless breasts already prepared for cooking by Perdue, Tyson or your local packager. The best grilled chicken really depends on the piece of meat you're cooking and whether you're preparing it to be eaten on its own or as an ingredient in another recipe. For example, grilling a chicken breast is a matter of minutes on a tabletop grill like a George Foreman, and you can make it into a sandwich, slice it for a grilled chicken Caesar, chop it for chicken or chicken pasta salad or even mince or grind it for chicken croquettes or spread. Here are some other tips for the best grilled chicken.

- 1) Whether inside or out, grill chicken on the bone for best flavor. Even though those boneless skinless breasts are handy and light, they also don't have the flavor that say, a split breast with the skin on will have after grilling. And bone-in breasts are also usually cheaper. So grill your breasts bone in and skin on and then, if you must remove the skin and bones and eat, or prepare the meat in recipes. Boneless skinless breasts can be significantly improved by marinating (see below.)
- 2) The best tasting and most economical cut to grill is the drumstick or leg quarter, which you can usually find in bulk pack for around a dollar a pound or under. Dark meat has the most flavor. You can cut up the leg quarters into drumsticks and thighs yourself if you like (some leg quarters have a bit of the back attached as well which you can save for making chicken stock.) These are excellent just grilled with salt and pepper, or use a spice rub or even bottled or your own barbecue sauce. Remember, dark meat takes at least twice as long to cook as breasts, but its well worth the wait. To help increase flavor and juiciness, do what my mother does and always soak it in brine then ice it heavily in salted water for at least an hour before cooking.
- 3) A great way to add flavor to grilled chicken is using a homemade or store-bought marinade. Clean and wash chicken parts, put into a zipper locking plastic storage bag, add marinade and refrigerate overnight. If you carefully squeeze out the air from the bag before sealing, your chicken will remain in contact with the marinade and no turning or redistributing is necessary. The next day, grill as usual. Remember, you cannot use the leftover marinade that has been in touch with the raw chicken as sauce for the finished product, throw it and the bag away. A marinade is usually tries to strike a balance

between sweet, sour and salty. Basically, if there's a particular salad dressing or sauce you love, it will probably make an excellent marinade from Caesar dressing to Taco sauce. Check out your grocery store's international or gourmet food section for some interesting choices.

- 4) If you like the rotisserie chickens in your grocery's prepared food department imagine how much you'll like the ones you make yourself. You can usually buy a rotisserie accessory for an existing grill for around 20 bucks or more, or look for a new grill with a rotisserie feature included. For rotisserie, gas grills are usually easier to regulate and result in more successful results, and you can always add some oak or apple or wood chips to give your chicken that smoky flavor.
- 5) Remember, if you're going to the trouble to fire up the grill, buy chicken in the least expensive bulk packages and either wash, separate and freeze smaller amounts, or cook it all up for a variety of menus throughout the week. Grilled or barbecued chicken makes a great addition to everything from salads to pasta, and there's nothing like a barbecued drumstick or two for a quick, satisfying and even reasonably healthy lunch.
- 6) Grilling makes all the difference for your hot wings, buffalo wings and other winged recipes, so fire up the grill for those appetizers. Even during winter, you can bring a little of that summer flavor indoors for parties and family gatherings.