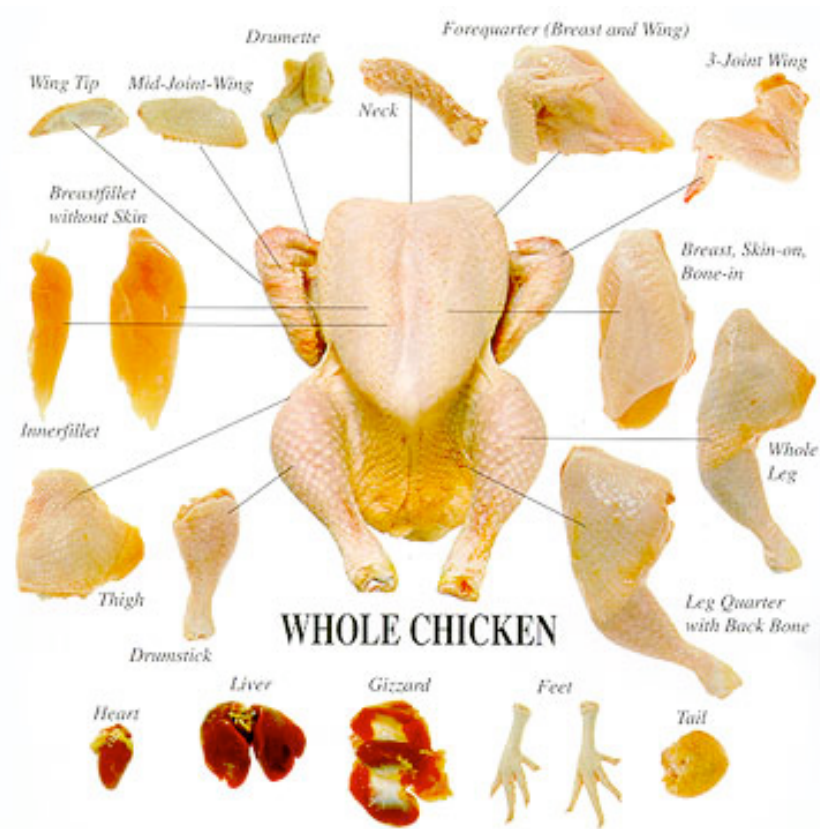


# Chicken



Chicken is highly regarded by cooks for its widespread appeal and numerous advantages. Economical, versatile, and readily available, chicken is the perfect ingredient for easy, everyday recipes, as well as entertaining. It also stars in thousands of sought-after ethnic and regional recipes -- from chicken marsala, chicken parmesan, chicken enchiladas, and sesame chicken, to chicken fried steak, chicken and dumplings, and even oven-fried chicken drumsticks.

Chicken boasts a positive nutritional profile, as well. It is high in protein, low in fat and cholesterol, and contains zero carbs, making it a winning choice for healthy eating.

The vast selection of chicken products -- from boneless, skinless chicken breasts to whole capons -- can make choosing the right ones for your favorite chicken recipes a challenge. Knowing the differences between types of chicken make it easier to cook with chicken in your kitchen.

In this article, we'll show you how to buy chicken. Learn how to choose a chicken, as well as the safest methods for storing and handling chicken in the following sections:

- Choosing Chicken

You want to make sure that you have the right kind of chicken for the dish you're trying to create. Broiler-fryers, roasters, capons, and stewing hens all have their places at the dinner table. We'll teach you how to discern the

differences when you're in the grocery store. Another important aspect to remember when choosing chicken is the color and smell. To avoid spoiled chicken, be sure to choose chicken that is creamy white to deep yellow

in appearance. Learn lots of tips on choosing a chicken in this section.

- Storing and Handling Chicken

Chicken can keep in the coldest part of the refrigerator for up to two days. If the time between bringing it home from the grocery store and placing it into the skillet is more than that, make sure

to store chicken in the freezer in an airtight package. When you're handling chicken, it's important that you remain vigilant against salmonella bacteria. In addition to cooking chicken completely, you want to make sure you're taking precautions when working with chicken. In this section, we'll show you how to handle and store chicken in a safe manner.

## **Choosing Chicken**

Learning about the types of chicken available in the supermarket can make you a better chicken cook. Chickens are first classified by age and weight. Young chickens are tender and cook quickly; older chickens need slow cooking to make them tender. For best results, it's important to know which type of chicken to buy.

### **Type of Chicken**

Broiler-fryers are young chickens weighing from 1-1/2 to 3-1/2 pounds. Only 7 to 10 weeks old, they yield tender, mildly flavored meat and are best when broiled, fried or roasted.

Roasters are 4- to 6-pound chickens that are 16 weeks old. As the name implies, they are perfect for roasting and rotisserie cooking.

Capons are young, castrated roosters that weigh from 5 to 7 pounds. These richly flavored birds have a higher fat content and yield more meat than roasters.

Stewing hens are adult chickens from 1 to 1-1/2 years old. They weigh from 4-1/2 to 7 pounds and have tough, stringy meat. Stewing hens are excellent for stocks, soups or stews, since moist-heat preparation tenderizes them and enhances their chicken-y flavor.

Supermarkets fulfill a constant demand for chicken with a variety of chicken cuts and products. The key is knowing what you plan to use it for and then buying according to your needs. Here are some of the more popular choices:

**Whole chickens** of every type are available with the neck and giblets wrapped separately and stuffed inside. Look for livers and giblets packaged separately for use in stuffings, soups, and specialty dishes.



**You can use a whole chicken in many different kinds of recipes.**

**Cut-up chickens**, usually broiler-fryers, are disjointed whole chickens consisting of two breast halves, two thighs, two wings, and two drumsticks. Small broiler-fryers are also available in halves and quarters.

**Chicken pieces** are available to suit many needs:

- \* Chicken legs are whole broiler-fryer legs with thighs and drumsticks attached.
- \* Thighs; boneless, skinless thighs; and drumsticks are available packaged separately.
- \* Chicken wings are a popular choice for appetizer recipes. Drumettes are disjointed wing sections.



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## **Bread chicken drumsticks for flavor.**

\* Chicken breasts are popular because of their tender, meaty, sweet character. They are available whole or split into halves. Recipes that call for one whole breast require both breast halves.

Once you have the right kind of chicken on your shopping list -- and you remember to take your list with you to the store -- you also need to remember the principles of how to select the best chicken.

### **Choosing Chicken**

#### **Make sure you inspect and purchase chicken safely and confidently.**

- Check the package for the U.S.D.A. Grade A rating; chicken in most supermarkets should be government inspected. Look for secure, unbroken packaging, as well as a "sell-by" date stamp that indicates the last day the chicken should be sold.
- Physically inspect the chicken before purchasing. Its skin should be creamy white to deep yellow; meat should never look gray or pasty. Odors could signal spoilage. If you notice a strong, unpleasant odor after opening a package of chicken, leave it open on the counter for a few minutes. Sometimes oxidation takes place inside the package, resulting in a slight, but harmless odor. If the odor remains,

do not use the chicken. Return it in its original package to the store for a refund.

To make sure you buy enough chicken to meet your family's needs, follow this guide: One broiler-fryer (2 to 3 pounds), cut up, yields 3 to 5 servings; one roaster (3 to 6 pounds) yields 4 to 8 servings. One whole chicken breast or two chicken breast halves (about 12 ounces total) yields 2 servings; one pound of chicken thighs or drumsticks yields about 2 servings.



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**Two chicken breast halves  
yield two servings of cut chicken.**

As a rule, two whole chicken breasts (about 12 ounces each) yield about 2 cups chopped, cooked chicken; one broiler-fryer (about 3 pounds) yields about 2-1/2 cups chopped, cooked chicken.

Once you've bought chicken, you need to follow proper procedures for storing and handling it at home. Learn how in the next section.

## **Storing and Handling Chicken**

To keep your family safe and healthy, it is important to use good judgment and sound food safety procedures for storing and handling chicken at home.

### **Save Storage**

Fresh, raw chicken can be stored in its original wrap for up to two days in the coldest part of the refrigerator. However, freeze chicken immediately if you do not plan to use it within two days after purchasing. You can freeze most chicken in its original packaging safely for up to two months; if you plan to freeze it longer, consider double-wrapping or rewrapping with freezer paper, aluminum foil or plastic wrap.

Stocking the freezer with boneless, skinless chicken breasts and thighs can be a real timesaver. Divide the chicken into efficient, meal-size portions and package for freezing. These convenient packages defrost and cook quickly into chicken recipes that can eliminate leftovers.

Airtight packaging is the key to freezing chicken successfully. When freezing whole chickens, remove and rinse giblets (if any) and pat dry with paper towels. Trim away any excess fat from the chicken. Tightly wrap, label, date, and freeze both chicken



and giblets in separate freezer-strength plastic, paper, or foil wraps.



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**If you wanted to freeze chicken pieces,  
make sure to tightly wrap and label it.**

Thaw frozen chicken, wrapped, in the refrigerator for best results. Thawing times for frozen chicken can vary depending on how thoroughly frozen the chicken is and whether the chicken is whole or cut up. A general guideline is to allow 24 hours thawing time for a 5-pound whole chicken; allow about 5 hours per pound for thawing chicken pieces. Never thaw chicken on the kitchen counter; this promotes bacterial growth.

## **Safe Handling**

When handling raw chicken, you must keep everything that comes into contact with it clean. Raw chicken should be rinsed and patted dry with paper towels before cooking; cutting boards and knives must be washed in hot sudsy water after using and hands must be scrubbed thoroughly before and after handling.



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**Wash anything that comes into  
contact with raw chicken.**

Why? Raw chicken can harbor harmful salmonella bacteria. If bacteria are transferred to work surfaces, utensils or hands, they could contaminate other foods, as well as the cooked chicken, and cause food poisoning. With careful handling and proper cooking, this is easily prevented.

Chicken should always be cooked completely before eating. You should never cook chicken partially and then store it to be finished later, since this promotes bacterial growth as well.

Now that you know what kind of chicken to buy, you'll be able to create all kinds of delectable new chicken dishes as well as your family's favorite chicken recipes.

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## **HELPFUL HINTS**

### Tenderness Tips

- \* Avoid freezing whenever possible to eliminate additional moisture loss during thawing, which results in less tender meat.
- \* Keep chicken from drying out in the refrigerator by keeping it tightly wrapped. If the chicken dries out, it will become tough.
- \* Leaving the skin on the chicken, when cooking it, helps to hold in juices, which increases tenderness.
- \* To keep breast area of chicken from drying out during roasting, place a piece of foil over this area. Remove during last 30 minutes of roasting time to allow the skin to brown properly.

\* Cook chicken to the proper temperature, because undercooking the chicken will cause it to be tough and overcooking the chicken causes loss of moisture, making the chicken drier.

\* Let roasted chicken rest for 10 to 15 minutes before carving to allow juices to be distributed throughout the meat. Standing the chicken up with bottom end up allows more juices to run into the drier breast area.

\* Cutting meat across the grain will produce slices with shorter fibers, resulting in more tender pieces.

\* When adding cooked chicken to dishes that have a long cooking time, it is best to use dark meat because it will stay moist longer than white meat.

### Light Tips

\* Roasting chicken on a rack, broiling and grilling are cooking methods that allow fat to drip away from the meat. Poaching, steaming and microwaving are methods of cooking where no additional fat is used. All provide for less fat content in the meat when it is done.

\* When frying or browning chicken in a pan, use a nonstick skillet, which requires less added fat, or use a nonstick skillet

with a fat free nonstick cooking spray to reduce the amount of fat used.

- \* Reduce added fat by seasoning chicken in marinades that are low-fat or fat-free. Use ingredients such as low-fat yogurt, juices, wine, herbs, and spices

- \* Removing the skin before eating chicken eliminates about two thirds of the fat content.

- \* When stewing chicken for soup, let broth cool and then discard fat that forms on top before reheating to serve.

#### Cooking Tips

- \* When adding chicken to a recipe that calls for a measured amount, determine how much chicken is needed by following a standard of one pound of boneless chicken equals approximately 3 cups of cubed chicken.

- \* When roasting a chicken, an untrussed chicken will cook faster and more evenly than a trussed chicken.

- \* Covered chicken takes longer to cook in the oven than uncovered chicken.

- \* When frying, grilling, broiling, or sautéing chicken, remove pieces as they get done to avoid overcooking while finishing other pieces. White meat and smaller pieces, such as breasts and

wings, will get done faster than dark meat pieces, such as legs and thighs.

\* For a quick test of doneness when roasting a chicken, hold on to the leg, move it around, and side to side. The leg should move freely at the joint if it is done. Be sure to use other methods for checking doneness also!

\* Do not overcrowd chicken pieces when cooking. Leaving space between them will allow them to brown and cook more evenly.

\* If using a marinade for basting, set some marinade aside before placing raw chicken in it to marinate. Never reuse marinade that the chicken was marinated in for basting.

\* Be sure to use a sharp knife when cutting or carving chicken. Sharp knives will make the job a lot easier, especially when having to cut in the joint areas, and will provide neatly cut slices and pieces.