

## 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.

*(Serves about 6)*

1 whole chicken (4–5 pounds) a free-range, drug-free, clean-living bird

extra-virgin olive oil

salt and freshly ground pepper

*Optional:* onion, celery tops, lemon, garlic

*Preheat oven to 450 degrees. You'll reduce it to 400 later, but we start it off hot. Find a pot with a 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. (see note)
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 the optional items mentioned above – 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, trying to spread butter over a cold chicken is something I would only do once.) Dust generously with freshly ground pepper and salt.

*Reduce oven to 400 degrees.*

3. Cover pot, place in oven, and cook 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.

### **Note:**

► Buying a whole raw chicken is not where I focus on saving money. I want a fresh bird with springy flesh and taut skin, and it has to be born and bred here in the northwest. When buying any meat (or fish, for that matter), I shop where I know the people behind the counter, and can count on their guarantee.

► Chicken livers that are broken up and shapeless are not inviting, and are not honored with a hot bath in sizzling butter. They should have their rosy, smoothly-curved liver shape relatively intact. I generally trim them into evenly-sized morsels and sauté them until they have barely lost their pink centers. (See *Chopped Liver* on page 152.)

### **Chicken Options**

Save carcass for *Chicken Stock – Simple* on previous page. If you are looking for uses for your leftover cooked chicken, some ideas would be *Chicken Salad* (page 153), *Chicken Pot Pie* (page 222), *Southwest Chicken Salad* (page 223), *Chicken Soup, Mexican-style* (page 226), *Tom Kab Gai* (page 224), and a substitute for the lamb in *Lamb Curry* (page 238).