



WINE-COUNTRY COOKING

Sunday Roast Chicken

This is one of the most popular dishes in our home (I often serve it to company, but it also makes frequent appearances on Sunday, when family comes to visit, hence the name).

I usually buy one 4- to 5-pound chicken for 3 to 4 people. Any leftover meat or bones can be used to make stock the next day. Always start with fresh, top-quality chickens, preferably from a specialty meat market.

Although you can use any type of salt for cooking, I usually prefer coarse salt and experiment with different kinds all the time. For most cooking, I use either kosher salt or one of the “wet” sea salts that are now available at many specialty food stores.

1 whole chicken (about 4 to 5 pounds)
Handful of fresh rosemary sprigs
Handful of fresh thyme sprigs
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 whole lemon
Extra sprigs of rosemary and thyme
Extra-virgin olive oil

Clean chicken inside and out with wet paper towel and pat dry. Season cavity with salt and pepper to taste. Carefully slide your hand under the breast skin, starting at the top, and gently separate skin from breast meat, being careful not to tear the skin.

Remove the rosemary leaves (needles) from 4 or 5 of the stems and finely chop. Then remove thyme leaves from 5 or 6 sprigs and finely chop. Mix herbs together. Add about 1/2 teaspoon salt and several turns of your pepper grinder to the herbs. Using your hands, stuff some or all of herb mixture under the breast skin.

Rub chicken all over with olive oil. Cut lemon in half and stuff both halves into cavity along with the extra herb sprigs. Truss chicken with string.

Arrange chicken on its side on rack in shallow roasting pan and roast in 400F oven about 5 minutes; then turn chicken onto other side and continue roasting 5 more minutes. Then turn chicken onto its back and roast for about 60 to 75 minutes or longer, until chicken is done; test for doneness by piercing thigh with the tip of a sharp knife: when juices run clear, chicken is cooked. Be sure not to overcook. (Remember, the chicken will continue cooking for a while after you remove it from the oven.) Remove from oven and let sit for about 20 to 30 minutes before carving.

Carve into serving pieces and arrange on platter. Serve with boiled new potatoes and sautéed greens.

Makes about 4 servings.

This is one of our most comforting comfort meals. Carol makes the chicken and then usually adds four or five side dishes to accompany it; among the most popular side dishes are her Tuscan Beans, Caramelized Red Onions, Boiled new Potatoes with herbs, and Braised Leeks. To accompany these dishes and the chicken, I usually prefer a mature wine, something that has lost its oaky top notes, something not strident or shouting; try a five- to seven-year-old Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, or a four-year-old Pinot Noir. A stunning match!

--Jim White