

Home-roasted chicken: dish that keeps on giving

By Anita L. Arambula
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For the amount of time I have spent in the kitchen, one would think that roasting a chicken would be old hat by now. I should have dozens of roasted chickens in my culinary past. Sadly, until last year, I could count the number of chickens I've roasted in my lifetime on one hand.

Why? Maybe it's the dried-out chicken breasts the teen in me remembers eating at friends' homes that made me fearful that I could do no better.

Or maybe it's the intimidation of starting at an entire chicken on a cutting board, string in hand, trying to figure out what the heck "truss" means?

Perhaps it's just the convenience factor of being able to swing by nearly any grocery store these days to pick up a rotisserie chicken, no knowledge of trussing required.

You know what, though? At least half of the time, those rotisserie chickens have been sitting under hot lights long enough for the breasts to dry out anyway, and the meat on the legs becomes so hard as to render it inedible.

The idea of roasting a chicken at home was becoming more and more appealing with every disappointing store-bought rotisserie chicken.

And honestly, is there anything like the smell of a roasting chicken as it filters throughout the house? For me, the smell stirs memories of weekends spent gathered around



Dreamstime/TNS

Rosemary Roasted Chicken with Red Grapes is an elegant and fragrant dish easy enough for everyday cooking but fancy enough for company.

the kitchen table, with family members fighting over who got the drumsticks.

A freshly roasted chicken straight out of the oven is comfort food times ten.

Depending on the size of the chicken, it's also a dish that keeps on giving. Leftovers are perfect for chicken salad or shredded for chicken tacos, ideal for soups, or even tossed with greens for a satisfying salad.

I started the year determined to roast more chickens. So far, I've only done it a few times.

The first one I made this year, I followed the much-hyped recipe from Jamie Oliver for chicken roasted in milk with cinnamon. It was tasty and different and a recipe I plan to try again. (I had no sage when I made it, and in hindsight, it needed the bitterness of sage to balance out the sweet

warmth of the cinnamon.)

Then there's this version of roasted chicken inspired by a book I recently added to my Kindle library.

After having "The Flavor Bible" mentioned to me at least a half-dozen times in less than a week, I bought it and I'm so happy I did. "The Flavor Bible" is not a recipe book. It's a reference book with more than 600 entries listing compatible flavor combinations. I

find the book inspiring, sparking new ideas for recipes. It's easy to get stuck in a rut of using the same ingredients and the same familiar recipes, but this book helps me in truly creative ways by listing unique ingredient combinations I would not have thought of on my own.

For example, roasting chicken with grapes.

This idea came about after reading the entry for grapes. It was in the middle of summer and I had a large bag of ripe red Muscato grapes sitting in my refrigerator. Although excellent for eating out of hand, they were screaming for more creative use.

According to "The Flavor Bible," grapes pair perfectly with nearly all of this dish's ingredients. I just went down the list of compatible flavors under the grape heading, checking off ingredients I already had on hand to come up with this recipe. Not having tried this combination before, I bit the bullet and went with it, adjusting amounts as I experimented. This roast chicken is moist, fragrant and utterly delicious. It's an elegant dish easy enough for everyday cooking but fancy enough for company.

Muscato grape season has just passed, but any seedless red grape will do. Some of the grapes burst while roasting, their juices mingling with the butter and olive oil, creating a lovely sauce for the chicken.

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FLAVORS

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1. Cut peeled kohlrabi in half through the stem end. Put the cut side down on the cutting board and slice thinly into half-moons. You should have about 4 cups. Use a vegetable peeler to shave carrots into long ribbons; you should have about 2 cups loosely packed.

2. Put sliced kohlrabi into a microwave-safe bowl. Add 1/3 cup water and cover with a lid or plastic wrap vented at one corner. Microwave on high (100% power), stirring once or twice, until fork-tender, 6 to 8 minutes. (The tip of a fork should pierce it easily.) Let stand, covered, 5 minutes. Drain well. Return to bowl; stir in carrots. Cover and set aside while you make the dressing.

3. Whisk together soy sauce, vinegar, honey, hot sauce and oil in a medium-size bowl until homogenous. Add kohlrabi and carrots. Toss well to coat. Taste and season with salt. Serve warm or at room temperature garnished with plenty of chopped green onions and sesame seeds.

Nutrition information per serving (for 6 servings): 69 calories, 1 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 15 g carbohydrates, 10 g sugar, 3 g protein, 665 mg sodium, 4 g fiber



Alex Garcia/Chicago Tribune/TNS

Kohlrabi, in green and purple. The vegetable is technically not a bulb, but instead an above-ground stem.

SMOKED SAUSAGE AND KOHLRABI SKILLET

Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 20 minutes
Makes: 6 entree servings

If desired, use smoked sausage made from turkey or chicken here to reduce the richness of the dish. If serving the dish with pasta, choose medium shapes such as penne, orecchiette or gemelli.

3 medium-size kohlrabi,

about 1 1/2 pounds, peeled, diced to 3/4-inch size
Salt

3 tablespoons olive oil
1 large (12 ounces) Vidalia or other sweet onion, halved, thinly sliced
1 small red, yellow or orange bell pepper, seeded, diced
3 cups chopped fresh kohlrabi greens, lacinato kale or baby kale leaves
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
12 ounces smoked, fully-cooked sausage, such as Polish, kielbasa, cheddarwurst or andouille, sliced 1/2 inch thick
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

3 cups cooked pasta, optional
Malt or unfiltered cider vinegar

1. Put diced kohlrabi into a microwave-safe bowl. Add 1/2 cup water and 1/2 teaspoon salt; stir well. Cover with a lid or plastic wrap vented at one corner. Microwave on high (100% power) until fork-tender, 7 to 8 minutes. Let stand, 5 minutes. Drain well.

2. Meanwhile, heat a large (12- or 14-inch) nonstick skillet over medium heat, then add oil and onion. Cook, stirring often, until golden,

about 8 minutes.

3. Add drained kohlrabi and red pepper to onions. Cook, stirring, to brown the kohlrabi, about 5 minutes. Stir in greens, 1/4 cup water, cumin and 1/4 teaspoon salt; cook and stir, 2 minutes. Stir in sausage and garlic. Cook, covered, to heat everything through, 2 to 4 minutes. Add pasta if using and heat through, about 2 minutes. Serve with splashes of vinegar, if desired.

Nutrition information per serving (without pasta): 296 calories, 24 g fat, 7 g saturated fat, 41 mg cholesterol, 13 g carbohydrates, 6 g sugar, 9 g protein, 619 mg sodium, 3 g fiber

GRILLED BEETS AND GREENS

Prep: 30 minutes
Cook: 30 minutes
Makes: 6 servings

If you do not have fresh, unwilted beet greens, substitute about 4 cups chopped lacinato kale or Swiss chard leaves.

4 large golden or red beets with leafy green tops, about 1 1/2 pounds
1 small red or yellow bell pepper, seeded, diced
1 large (12 ounces) red onion, halved, thinly sliced into wedges
3 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt, plus more as needed
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
Freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
2 or 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup crumbled feta cheese or farmer's cheese or queso fresco
Chopped cilantro or parsley

1. Prepare a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill to medium hot. (Or heat oven to 375 degrees.)

2. Remove leafy green tops from beets, rinse them thoroughly and roughly chop. Set aside.

3. Peel beets and cut into 3/4-inch dice. Place on a large sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Top with bell pepper, half of the onion and half of the olive oil. Sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon salt, the thyme and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Fold foil to completely enclose beets.

4. Put the foil packet on the grill directly over the coals if using charcoal or over the heat source if using a gas grill (or on a baking sheet in the oven). Cook, turning the packet once, until beets are fork-tender (peek into the packet and spear them with a knife), 20 to 30 minutes. Transfer from the foil package to a bowl. Season with the balsamic vinegar and adjust salt and pepper to taste.

5. Meanwhile, heat remaining 1 1/2 tablespoons oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the remaining onion and cook until golden, about 4 minutes. Stir in chopped beet greens; saute until barely wilted and tender, 2 or 3 minutes. Stir in garlic; saute, 1 minute. Remove from heat. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

6. Spoon beets over the greens. Sprinkle with feta and herbs. Serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 187 calories, 12 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 22 mg cholesterol, 15 g carbohydrates, 9 g sugar, 6 g protein, 486 mg sodium, 3 g fiber

COMFORT

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A slow cooker is the perfect appliance for making savory soups and stews. Both soups and stews can be economical because they can use less expensive cuts of meat and still yield a tender product after hours of cooking.

Again, the key to a tasty soup or stew is the use of herbs and spices to bring out the flavor of the other ingredients. Another positive about slow cookers is that they are efficient: Everything goes into just the liner of the slow cooker. It also makes the house smell nice. Pair your soup or stew with some warm, crusty bread to sop up all the juices and you have the perfect comfort meal.

If you ask other people, they will say meatloaf and mashed potatoes is their

idea of comfort food. If you are looking to cut down on saturated fat, try using half ground turkey and half ground beef, or all ground turkey in a meatloaf. If you want a new treat, try mashed yams instead of the usual mashed potato. Cooked mashed yams, with a little butter, salt and pepper gives an extra measure of Vitamin A.

Other folks prefer their comfort food in the form of macaroni and cheese. If you are looking to improve the health of the typical cheesy macaroni and cheese, try using whole wheat pasta (or mixture of regular and whole wheat), and 1% milk instead of full fat milk.

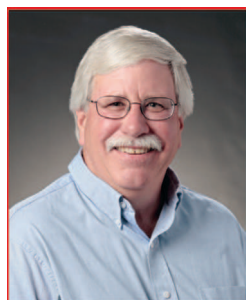
Chicken pot pie is also a great comfort food and has almost all the food groups represented. Add milk and a fruit salad and you have a complete meal.

For some, a dinner of pancakes and

eggs is what satisfies their yearning for comfort food. There is just something about pancakes that harkens back to our childhood and family breakfasts that makes people feel comforted and secure. Pancakes can be made with whole wheat flour, and if there is a gluten intolerant family member, pancakes can also be made with gluten-free flour.

Whatever your idea of comfort food is, in times of uncertainty, when we must remain isolated from family and friends, a dose of comfort food can make us feel consoled and less alone and, well ... comforted.

Ann Bloom has worked for the OSU Extension Service for 15 years as a nutrition educator. She studied journalism and education at Washington State University. She lives in Enterprise.



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