Chicken Breasts Three Ways

Quick · Serves 4

Ken's note: TBD

A master page: three ways to cook a plain chicken breast (grill, oven, pan), then a menu of sauces, salsas, and garnishes to take it in different directions. Learn the method once and change the finish.

Ingredients

Prep (all methods)

- 4 chicken breasts, 6–8 oz each (boneless, or skin-on for the pan)
- Kosher salt: ¾ tsp per breast
- Black pepper
- Oil

Method

1. Pound or butterfly the thick end so the breast is an even thickness (about ¾ inch). It matters more than technique.
2. **Dry-brine (best) or brine (optional).** Salt the breasts on all sides and rest them uncovered on a rack in the fridge, 1–4 hours or overnight. It browns better than a wet brine. In a hurry, brine them 30 minutes in 4 cups of water with 3 Tbsp salt, then pat dry.
3. Pull the chicken at 155–160°F in the thickest part. Carryover cooking takes it to 160–165°F while it rests. Rest 5–10 minutes, on a rack if the skin is on.
4. **Grill.** Pat dry, rub with oil, and season. Grill over medium-high heat with oiled grates, 5–7 minutes per side, until 160°F. For a seasoned version, rub with 1 tsp each of cumin, chili powder, garlic powder, and Italian herbs, plus the juice of 1 lime, and serve with the salsa below.
5. **Oven.** Heat the oven to 425°F. Set the breasts on a lightly oiled sheet pan, rub with oil, and roast 18–22 minutes (30–40 for bone-in, skin-on) until 160°F.
6. **Pan.** Pat bone dry. Heat a film of neutral oil in stainless steel or cast iron over medium-high until it shimmers. Lay the breasts in skin-side down (or presentation side down if skinless) and press flat for the first 30 seconds, then leave them alone 6–8 minutes (5–6 if skinless), until deeply golden and they release on their own. Flip, add 2 Tbsp butter, 4 thyme sprigs, and 1 crushed garlic clove, and baste continuously 2–3 minutes. Pull at 155°F and rest on a rack. Make a pan sauce in the same pan for the fond.
7. Sliced breast on greens, with ranch or the sesame dressing from Salads, also makes a quick dinner salad.

Notes

Finishing menu

- **Mango, peach, and pineapple salsa** (with grilled): 2 ripe mangoes, 2 ripe peaches, 1 cup diced pineapple, ½ small red onion, 1 red bell pepper, 1 small jalapeño (optional), a handful of cilantro, juice of 2–3 limes, and salt. Dice it all, toss, and taste. Good with black beans and rice.
- **Green Sauce** (Sauces): jalapeño, cilantro, and lime in a creamy sauce.
- **Lemon Butter Sauce** (Sauces): spoon over the sliced chicken, with pasta or broccoli.
- **Pan sauce:** after pan-searing, pour off the fat, cook 1 minced shallot 30 seconds, add ½ cup white wine and reduce by half, add ½ cup stock and 1 tsp Dijon and reduce again, then whisk in 1–2 Tbsp cold butter and a squeeze of lemon. Add capers for a piccata feel.
- **Chimichurri** (Sauces): parsley, oregano, garlic, olive oil, and red wine vinegar.
- **Herb butter** (Compound Butters, in Sauces): melt a coin over the hot chicken.
- **Basil pesto** (Sauces), with sliced tomatoes and mozzarella.
- **Alabama White Sauce** (Sauces), or **Sweet & Smoky BBQ Sauce**, for the grill.
- **Lemon-Greek:** marinate in olive oil, lemon, garlic, and oregano (see Greek Lemon Chicken) and top with cucumber-dill relish and feta.
- **Crisp and breaded:** see Chicken Schnitzel or Summer Chicken Parmesan.