

Home Fried Chicken

If you've ever had a piece of crispy outside, juicy inside fried chicken, you know how blissful it can be! Learn how to make fried chicken at home with these tips and tricks for creating fried chicken that will have everyone wanting to steal your secrets.

Did you know fried chicken can be controversial? There are debates over brining the meat. People argue over what starch is used to coat the chicken, the fat frying it, and the cooking temperature. Follow these instructions to make the best 5-star fried chicken at home.

You can cut a whole chicken into parts for frying or buy it pre-butchered. A 3 to 4-pound whole chicken can be cut into ten pieces for frying: two drumsticks, two thighs, two wings, and two breasts, each cut in two, with the backbone discarded. You'll get a nice white and dark meat assortment when using a whole chicken.

If buying pre-cut chicken breasts, cut them into two pieces so they will have a cooking time similar to legs and thighs.

To brine a chicken means to submerge it in a solution of salt and water, sometimes flavored with other ingredients, to add moisture and flavor to the meat.

For a basic chicken brine, dissolve 4 tablespoons kosher salt in 4 cups of lukewarm water. Add the chicken to the solution, cover, and place in the refrigerator for a few hours and up to overnight. If desired, add a few tablespoons of sugar, along with some fresh herbs or chopped garlic.

To make buttermilk brine, dissolve 2 tablespoons kosher salt in 4 cups of fresh buttermilk, along with some black pepper. Add the chicken to it, cover, and place in the refrigerator for a few hours and up to overnight.

Regardless of how you brine, making sure your chicken isn't sopping wet when you start is essential. Dry it beforehand with a paper towel.

Before frying the chicken, let the meat sit at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes. Cold chicken will drop the oil temperature when you put it in.

A crisp crust is characteristic of great fried chicken. You achieve that by covering the meat's exterior and skin with starch before cooking.

The easiest method for dredging chicken is to place the parts in a large baggie filled with flour that has been seasoned. Close the bag, shake it a few times, then carefully remove each piece and shake off the excess flour before frying.

Wait to dredge the chicken right before frying it. Leaving the chicken to rest in its coating will make it gummy, reducing its chances of crisping up during frying.

Alternative starches include gluten-free flours, bread crumbs, cereal, chip, or cracker crumbs, cornstarch, and potato starch.

Chicken is usually fried in shortening, lard, oil, or a combination of fats. Try a neutral-tasting oil with a high smoke point, like canola, vegetable, or peanut oil.

Deep fry the chicken in a lot of oil or less. If you prefer to shallow fry, the fat should come halfway up the pieces to ensure even frying.

The ideal temperature to fry chicken is a steady 350 - 375°F.

You'll need a heavy, wide, high-sided skillet or Dutch oven with a lid. Cook in small batches. One of the most common frying mistakes is overcrowding the pan.

Turn the chicken a few times while it cooks with tongs. Use an instant-read thermometer to ensure the chicken's internal temperature is at least 165°F.

After removing the chicken from the skillet, let it rest before serving. Place the chicken on a wire rack set on top of a baking sheet. Keep it in a 250°F oven!

Fried chicken can seem tricky, troublesome, and not worth the effort to make at home. Believe me, it's worth it and not that hard! Now you have the secrets for crisp, juicy fried chicken!

(Sources: cooking.nytimes.com; www.thedailymeal.com; www.thrillist.com; usda.gov)