

How to Use a Whole Chicken

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Getting ready to cook supper and staring at a whole chicken can be intimidating. When we started butchering our own chickens, I wasn't quite sure what to do with the whole thing and where to start, so I went to YouTube. Gordon Ramsay's video on [How to Part a Chicken](#) helped me get started along with [How to Debone a Chicken in 18 Seconds](#) got me started, and I think I watched both videos about 10 times before I was ready to try it on my own.

But the only way to really get comfortable with it is to try it yourself and to keep practicing. Once you understand how the chicken is put together, it's a lot easier to take it apart.

Once I got comfortable with parting an entire chicken, I had to figure out what to do with all of the parts. Until we started using whole chickens, I was more of a frozen chicken breast kind of girl and hadn't really worked with any other cuts. I spent a lot of time looking up recipes, and I finally feel like I'm pretty efficient.

I usually part the chicken and use either the breasts or the legs for a meal the first night. One chicken breast is enough for our family if it's cut up and put in something like a stir fry or quesadilla. If I make chicken strips or something similar, we'll use both breasts.

If I know I'll be using the rest of the chicken the next night, I'll leave it in the fridge, otherwise I'll freeze it in a Ziploc and label the bag. Labeling the bag seems like a no brainer, but I haven't in the past and then I have a freezer filled with a bunch of mystery chicken parts.

I used to freeze the carcass to use later to make chicken stock, but now I just have a lot of frozen chicken carcasses that I'll get to eventually. So now, as soon as I part the chicken, I take the carcass, put it in the crock pot immediately, cover it with water, and turn it on low for 24 hours. Sometimes I'll use the carcass right away to make chicken soup. The next day, I strain the chicken and divide the broth into 1/4 cup cubes in an large ice cube tray and 2 cups in a Ziploc that I lay flat to freeze. Once the Ziplocs are frozen, I stand them up for easy storage in our freezer. When the cubes are frozen, I pop them out of a tray and store them in a gallon Ziploc.

After working out the kinks and using a lot of trial and error, one chicken can last our family 3-4 meals and any stock I make is used in a variety of recipes.

Knowing how much time and effort goes into raising and processing the chickens makes me even more conscientious about how I use it, and I feel like I owe it to the birds to get as much out of each one as possible. It can be intimidating, but knowing your way around a whole chicken can be very rewarding and there's something great about knowing that no part of the animal that you're consuming is going to waste.

Do you have any tips for using whole chickens? I'd love to hear them!

{Steph}

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