

For many years we raised our own meat birds. We'd do 50 at a time, raise them on a vegetarian diet, with greens added, and could expect 8 – 10 lb. birds in a couple of months. We had a chick room, and a finishing room, and during the warmer months, both would be busy.

One year we noticed that some of our young birds had black feathers around their necks and tails. They weren't growing as quickly as our Cornish crosses, and acted like, well, like layers! We built a large outdoor run adjacent to the barn, and let them grow. Fortunately it was our last batch of the year, so we didn't have to move them out to make room for the next group. They turned out to be beautiful Columbian Rock chickens. So we wouldn't be getting meat from these birds anytime soon. However, we did find a buyer for the flock of hens and a couple of the roosters, and about a month later had the rest of the roosters finished for meat. I suppose there was someone out there that had a bunch of meat birds instead of these beautiful layers. Sorry!

Having spent lots of time outdoors, eating grass and bugs, these birds had a much fuller flavour than the chickens that had been raised under cover. The usual Cornish crosses really didn't have the sense to come in out of the rain and you could lose a few if there was a surprise downpour, consequently, they were raised with a roof over their heads. It's been several years since we last raised any poultry, and the flavour of store bought just doesn't have the flavour of homegrown. It's well worth the effort to find someone in your area who raises meat birds on a vegetarian diet (except for any bugs the bird finds itself). You don't get handy little packages of boneless, skinless chicken breasts, but you do get a rich bird that is perfect when roasted.

Roast Chicken

Ingredients

1 roasting chicken about 4 lbs (bigger takes longer, allow for about an extra 15 minutes per pound)
Salt & pepper
1 or 2 lemons or more, depending on the size of the bird
A couple of sprigs of fresh herbs
Melted butter
Paprika
Flour
Chicken stock

Directions

Spray your roasting pan with cooking spray, or wipe with oil.
Place your cold bird on a rack in the roasting pan, with its wing tips tucked under.
Season the cavity with salt & pepper
Cut up the lemons into chunks, and stuff them into the cavity with the herb sprigs.
Using a brush, baste the whole exposed skin of the bird with the melted butter. It will harden on the cold bird.
Lightly dust with paprika, and season with salt & pepper.
Preheat the oven to 400° with the rack in the center.
Place the roasting pan with the seasoned bird, in the center of the oven.
Roast for 1½ hours basting each ½ hour with the pan juices. Take the bird out of the oven for the couple of minutes that it takes to do this.

The thigh joint should not have any redness to it when the bird is done.

The temperature of the bird, taken at the thickest point, should be at least 80°C when done.

Let the chicken sit for at least 15 minutes before carving.

While it sits, prepare gravy, using the drippings with any excess fat removed. It's okay if there's some fat, it makes for much better gravy.

Whisk an equal amount of flour, as you have drippings, into the drippings in the pan over medium heat. When the flour is completely absorbed, and is a smooth roux (it's okay if there's yummy bits in it), start to add in warmed chicken stock. Continue to add in stock, stirring while the gravy thickens. A nice addition is white wine, but only to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of your liquid. You may use a couple of cups of liquid total, or if you're lucky you may have enough drippings to make more.

Season to taste with salt & pepper, and maybe a splash of balsamic vinegar.

To carve your bird, joint out the wings, drumsticks, and thighs, followed by slicing off the breast meat.

Serve with creamy mashed potatoes, some colourful veg and a sluicing of gravy.

Yum.

Note: Gluten Free – amaranth flour is the best for gravy roux to replace wheat flour.