
Recipe Packet: Kick-start Your Cooking Skills

Week FOUR: Poultry, Meat and Fish!

Pan-seared Chicken Breast with Garlic-Rosemary Pan Sauce

Serves 2

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, chilled
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
2 half chicken breasts, boneless, skin-on
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons grapeseed oil
2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
1 ½ cups low-sodium chicken stock
1 sprig fresh rosemary
1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice (optional)

Pre-heat the oven to 350°F.

In a small bowl, use your fingers to rub together the butter and flour until it forms a paste. Roll the paste together into a ball and wrap with plastic wrap. Refrigerate until ready to use. (This is called beurre manié, a quick thickening agent used in sauces.)

Take the chicken breasts out of the fridge, unwrap and set them on a large plate. Generously sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper and set aside until they come to room temperature, about 30 minutes, before cooking.

Heat a medium-sized sauté pan over medium-high flame and add the grapeseed oil. When you see the oil shimmering, place the chicken breasts in the middle of the pan, skin-side down and sear for 4 minutes. Check after 4 minutes – if the skin is still sticking to the pan, leave it alone. It's not ready to be flipped yet. If the chicken lifts up with no problem, check the color – the skin should be golden and crispy. Flip the breasts to the other side and sear for another 4 minutes.

Transfer the entire pan to the oven and roast for another 7 minutes, or until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the breast reads 165°. Remove the breasts from the pan to a clean plate and tent with foil to rest. In the time it takes for the breasts to rest, you can make a tasty pan sauce with the pan drippings that are left in the pan!

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of oil from the pan and return the pan to medium-flame. Add the garlic and sauté for a few seconds until it is fragrant. Pour a small amount of chicken stock in the pan and use a wooden spoon to rub and scrape up the hardened pan drippings from the bottom of the pan. This step not only cleans the pan, but also dissolves the pan drippings (or fond) back into the sauce, boosting the sauce's flavor. Add the remainder of the chicken stock and rosemary and increase the heat to high. Bring the sauce to a boil and then lower the heat to simmer. Simmer for 3 minutes or until the sauce has reduced by a third.

Turn off the heat and swirl in the butter and flour mixture, gently stirring to melt the butter. As the butter melts, the sauce will thicken slightly. Remove the garlic and rosemary or strain the sauce. Taste and add any additional salt and pepper, if needed.

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Stir in a couple of drops of lemon juice if you feel the sauce needs some acidity. Keep warm.

To serve, slice the chicken breasts into 1-inch thick slices across the grain and drizzle the sauce over. Serve hot with a side of pasta tossed with minced garlic, parsley and red pepper flakes, and some vegetables, like blanched peas.

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Dear Martini's Favorite Roast Chicken

Serves 2

1 Cornish Game Hen (defrosted if frozen)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2-3 tablespoons vegetable or olive oil
6 red potatoes, halved

Special equipment: Poultry shears

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

On a cutting board, place the hen breast-side down. Use the poultry shears to cut along one side of the backbone from the tail to the neck. Cut along the other side and remove the backbone. Set aside. Open up the hen and flip it back over so it's breast-side up again. Use your palms to press down on the breast bone to flatten. Use the poultry shears to snip off the wing tips at the joint. Set it aside with the backbone for making stock later.

Sprinkle the hen with salt and pepper and rub all over both sides with vegetable oil. Rest bird at room temperature for 20 minutes or refrigerate overnight uncovered.

Arrange the halved potatoes in the bottom of a shallow pan large enough to hold the hen and potatoes; season with salt, pepper, and drizzle with oil. Transfer the hen to the pan and place it directly on top of the potatoes. Roast for 45 minutes, rotating once during cooking. The internal cooked temperature of the bird should be 165°F when an instant-read thermometer is inserted into the thickest part of the breast. Remove from the oven and let the bird rest, tented with foil for 5-10 minutes.

To serve, cut the bird in half, lengthwise and serve each person a half. Divide the potatoes and garnish with a mojo verde sauce or gremolata.

Cook's Notes:

You can muscle through spatchcocking with ordinary scissors or a knife, but it's a whole lot easier with an inexpensive pair of poultry shears. Be careful not to overcook the bird.... we usually take an internal temperature after 30 minutes to determine how far along we are in the roasting process. The potatoes should be done at the same time as the chicken, but the potatoes underneath the bird won't have browned. Remove the bird from the oven to rest and leave the potatoes in for an additional 5-10 minutes.

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Salmon Fillet en Papillote

Serves 2

One 8-ounce salmon fillet, skin-on, pinbones removed
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 teaspoons olive oil, divided
1 teaspoon minced shallot
1/4 cup julienned or shredded carrots
6 pitted olives, roughly chopped
6 halved cherry tomatoes
1/2 teaspoon minced parsley

Special Equipment:

Parchment Paper (12" x 16") or aluminum foil
Baking sheet
Kitchen Scissors

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Take a sheet of parchment paper or aluminum foil and fold it in half. Draw a half-heart shape on the folded paper and trim. Open the heart and place the salmon in the center of one side of the heart. Season with salt and pepper. In a small bowl, drizzle the olive oil over the aromatics and vegetables and toss together, season with salt and pepper. Place the vegetables on top of the salmon. Fold the other half of the heart over the salmon and begin to fold the edges together.

Start at the curved end of the heart, making one folded crease 1/4-inch from the edge. Continue to make successive folds along the edge of the package, making each new fold from the center of the previous one. Keep folding along the edge, making sure each crease is flat and straight. When you reach the pointed end, fold up, then fold back, tucking it underneath the package.

Transfer the package to a baking sheet or any pan and drizzle a couple of drops of oil over the top. Use your fingertips to spread the oil over the surface of the package and bake for 10 minutes, or until the package is browned and puffy.

Remove from the oven and let it rest for a minute or two. It will start to deflate.

Carefully cut around the edges to open the package. Lift the salmon up from the package and transfer to a plate. Spoon the vegetables and any sauce drippings from the package on top. Serve immediately.

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Pan-Seared New York Steak with Red-Wine Pan Sauce

Serves 4

2 (10-ounce) New York strip steaks, cut 1-½ inches thick

Kosher salt and finely ground black pepper

1-½ tablespoons clarified butter

1 shallot, minced

½ cup dry red wine

1 sprig fresh thyme

1 cup low-sodium beef or chicken stock

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed and frozen until ready to use

Remove the steaks from the refrigerator 30 minutes before cooking.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Pat the steaks dry with a paper towel and season with salt and pepper on both sides.

Heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat, when hot, add the clarified butter and sear steaks 3 minutes on both sides. Transfer pan to the oven and roast until medium-rare (a thermometer inserted into the center of the steak will register 127°F), approximately 7 minutes or roast to desired doneness. Remove steaks from the oven and transfer to a clean plate. Tent steaks with foil to keep warm and let rest for 10 minutes while preparing the pan sauce.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the drippings from the sauté pan and heat over medium-high heat. Add the shallots to the pan and sauté until soft, about 1 minute. Deglaze the pan with the wine and scrape up the browned bits with a wooden spoon. Add the thyme and stock to the pan and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer, and simmer until the liquid is reduced by half; about 7 to 8 minutes. Add any accumulated beef juices from the resting steaks to the pan; simmer another minute. Turn the heat off and swirl in the cold butter a couple pieces at a time until blended into the sauce. Taste and season sauce with salt and pepper if needed. Strain the sauce (optional) and transfer to a small serving pitcher.

Slice steaks against the grain into 1/3-inch thick slices and serve with sauce.