

Smoked Poultry



Poultry Smoking Tips

Before you start smoking, I'd like to share a few "secrets" that will help you create the best smoked poultry ever.

1. Brining works magic on poultry

A brine of salt, sugar, seasonings and water can do wonders to poultry. During the brine, liquid is absorbed into the flesh, adding moisture, flavor, and improving the texture. The absorbed water also conducts heat, so the plumped up bird will cook faster.

2. Don't overcook poultry

Whole poultry can be challenging to cook because different parts of the bird are done at different temperatures. Breast meat is done at 170 Fahrenheit, while the thigh is done at 180 F. Foil placed over the breast partway through smoking will prevent it from overcooking. Remove the bird from the smoker when the thigh reaches 175 degrees and the breast reaches 165. The temperature will raise five degrees as it rests before carving.

3. Add seasoning underneath the skin

To make the best use of seasonings and rubs, put them between the skin and flesh of the bird. This is where they'll make the greatest contribution to flavor.

How to Brine Chicken

The salt and sugar in brine make changes to protein that improves its texture and enhances its ability to retain moisture. And that translates into better tasting chicken come dinnertime!

How Brining Works

When chicken or other meat is put into a brine solution, a two-way transfer begins. Juices from the protein are pulled out into the brine, while the brine (along with any added sugar and flavorings) is pulled in. The end goal is to equalize the level of salt between brine and flesh.

As that's happening, other changes occur. The salt changes the character of the proteins in the meat, breaking them down and loosening their grip on each other. In a way, it causes them to somewhat gel, and makes it harder for moisture to escape when the chicken is cooked. Sugars that are absorbed into the flesh hold on to water, which helps keep the meat even more moist when cooked.

How to Brine Chicken

First, let's start with a basic poultry brine recipe:

1 gallon cold water

1 cup kosher salt

1/2 cup sugar

Added flavorings

Spices, herbs and other flavors (chopped onion, garlic, celery, etc.) are all fair game. Use your favorites, use your judgment, and don't overdo it. Find a good recipe for more guidance.

Bring 1/2 gallon of the water, the salt and sugar to boil, stirring until both are completely dissolved. Remove from heat, add flavorings, cover and allow to cool completely. Add the remaining 1/2 gallon of water. Refrigerate to below 40 degrees Fahrenheit before adding chicken.

You can cut the recipe in half, or double it as needed, depending on how much chicken you'll be brining. Make enough so the chicken is completely covered in the brining container. If you brine in sealable plastic bag, you'll need less brine than if brining in a bowl.

To keep the chicken submerged, place a heavy plate, or a flat-bottomed bowl filled with some water over the chicken in the brine container.

Keep the brine and chicken COLD during brining, between 36-40 degrees Fahrenheit. If there's room, place the brining chicken in the fridge. If not,

brine in an insulated cooler, and place a sealed bag of ice in the brine with the chicken. Don't put loose ice in the brine...when it melts, the brine will be diluted and it won't do its job.

How Long to Brine Chicken

Use the following brining time chart for chicken as a guide. Adjust within the brining times to achieve more or less salty flavor.

Whole Chicken	4 to 8 hours
Half Chicken	3 to 6 hours
Bone-in Skin-on Breasts	1 to 2 hours
Boneless Skinless Breasts	30 to 60 minutes
Legs, Thighs, Skin-on	45 to 90 minutes
Legs, Thighs, Skinless	30 to 45 minutes

Always brine in a non-reactive container. Glass, porcelain, crockery, plastic and stainless steel are all OK. Aluminum, copper and wood are not.

After brining, rinse the chicken well in cold, running water. Pat dry with a clean towel.

Now that the chicken is brined, it's ready to be seasoned with your favorite dry rub and smoked or grilled. Brined chicken usually takes less time to cook, which is another benefit of brining.

If you haven't brined chicken before, you'll definitely notice an improvement in both flavor and texture.

How To Smoke Chicken Breasts

Now, back to the breasts. The reason it's better to smoke them at 225 degrees rather than 275 degrees is that the white meat of the breast is fragile and temperamental. If it's smoked too hot and long, it can go dry and tasteless on you in a hurry.

The chicken breasts are smoked with the bone in and the skin off. Leaving the bone in helps the meat remain moist and adds a bit of flavor. Taking the skin off allows the breast to capture a nice looking burnt-orange color from the wood smoke. So you get good looks *and* good taste.

Smoking Chicken Breasts

This can be done in a few easy steps.

- Buy a family pack of bone in chicken breast halves.
- Remove the skin, rinse in cold water, and pat dry.
- Season with a mild dry rub seasoning
 - 2 tablespoons sweet paprika
 - 2 tablespoons onion powder
 - 1 tablespoon salt
 - 1 teaspoon black pepper
 - 1 teaspoon sugar

- Preheat the smoker to 225 degrees and add some applewood for smoke.
- Place the chicken breasts in the smoker, bone side down.
- Remove the chicken breasts when the internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. No more, no less. Let them rest for 10 minutes before serving.

How To Smoke Whole Chicken

For years I'd been smoking whole chicken in smokers running at around 225 degrees Fahrenheit, just like I smoked about everything else. But a year or so ago I stumbled onto a great website, www.virtualweberbullet.com and learned that it's ok to smoke poultry at a higher temperature.

After trying it myself, I wondered why I ever smoked chickens any other way! There are definite benefits to smoking chicken (and other poultry) at 275 degrees and higher, and no drawbacks. The chickens cook quicker and the skin gets crispy and browned, which adds another layer of flavor to the birds. And even though the smoking time is shortened, the meat gets plenty of smoky flavor.

Poultry is put together differently than beef and pork, and doesn't require low temperatures and slow cooking to become juicy and tender. I mean, weren't those beer butt chickens you grilled last summer tender, juicy and full of flavor? They didn't suffer from cooking at 300+ degrees, did they?

How To Smoke Whole Chicken

So, how do you go about smoking a whole chicken? There's really not that much to it.

- Rinse a whole chicken. Trim off excess skin and fat.
 - Soak the chicken in a simple brine for 4 hours.
 - 2 quarts cold water
 - 1/3 cup non-iodized salt
 - 1/4 cup sugar
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- Preheat your smoker to 275 degrees Fahrenheit, and up to 325 degrees if your smoker can do it. Add smoke wood (apple or cherry with a little pecan is great!)
 - Season the chicken, including the body cavity, with your favorite dry rub.
 - Put the chicken in your smoker. Be sure there's a drip pan under the chicken, 'cause it's gonna drip some fat! If you're using a horizontal smoker, place the chicken on a raised rack in a shallow baking pan.
 - Smoke for 1-1/2 to 3 hours. When the breast reaches 160 and the thigh is 170, remove it and let it rest for 20 minutes.

How to Smoke Whole Chicken...Another Way

Now, if you're smoking some ribs, or a brisket, or a big, juicy pork butt, and you want to throw in a whole chicken because, well, it's just not right to waste smoker space, just do it. Smoke that bird at 225 degrees until it reaches 160/170 degrees, then pop it into a hot (400 degrees) grill or oven for 5 to 10 minutes. Keep a close eye on it, and remove it when the skin has browned to your liking.

The skin won't brown as nicely as it would've using the hot smoking method, but it'll do in a pinch.