

## Cooking Heritage Chicken

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Heritage chickens have very little in common with regular meat chickens, and require different cooking methods. Cooking too quickly at a high temperature is going to result in tough, chewy meat.

Commercial broilers are normally butchered before they are **6 weeks old**, but the large dual-purpose breeds grow slowly and will not reach an adequate roasting size until they reach **6 - 8 months** of age. During this time, they live an active life, using their wings and legs to develop muscle while free-ranging. The authentic, distinctive flavor of heritage fowl is mainly attributed to the length of time the birds are grown, and the firmer texture of the meat is developed through the natural activities of healthy, energetic chickens.

**Roasting:** A slow-roasted heritage chicken is a worthy centerpiece for a special occasion. To help it reach its fullest potential, it is recommended to thaw the bird completely before cooking. This is a traditional meal that cannot be hurried along, so be sure to plan ahead. Roast the chicken slowly at a lower temperature (300 degrees) preferably using a dutch oven with lid. (Enamel or cast-iron cookware is excellent!) Keeping it covered is important to retain moisture to keep the meat tender and juicy.

Allow a large roasting chicken to cook for around 3.5 hours until leg joints are loose. Avoid piercing the skin while cooking to keep the moisture in the meat, and do baste it from time to time. If the skin does not brown nicely while covered, the lid can be left off for the last 20 minutes or so.

The more intense flavour of heritage chicken means there is nothing better for braising, stewing or for delicious soups. Most regular chicken recipes can be adapted for heritage chicken by incorporating moist heat and extending the cooking time.

Heritage chickens should be prepared for the table in the same manner as they are raised - with care and patience. But when prepared and cooked properly the result is a memorable dining experience.