



“Now I’m preparing for the guests to come. I did the preparation already, and I’ll show you how I set a table in the next chapter, but there is a last-minute burst of cooking—which of course you can also always do with your friends or family helping.”

SUBCHAPTERS

Flavors From the Fire
Balance Your Meal With Salad
Be Conscious of Portions
Plate and Serve

CHAPTER REVIEW

Alice has planned her menu but she makes an impromptu decision to also grill the chanterelle mushrooms a friend brought to her the day of the dinner. Feel free to modify the menu as you see fit and grill an extra vegetable or two. Even if you don’t serve it with dinner, you can use the cooked vegetables in meals throughout the week and it is an opportunity to practice cooking over the coals.

If you are able to cook over a fire, follow the recipe for Grilled Chicken, and if you will be cooking in cast iron on the stove, follow the recipe for Chicken Cooked Under a Brick. Whether cooking on the grill or on the stove, start the chicken skin side down and cook it longer on that side (about two-thirds of the total time) to develop a flavorful crispy skin. Finish the potatoes on the grill with the chicken, or in the pan after removing the cooked chicken. The potatoes do not need to be served piping hot but keep them on the fire long enough to brown and develop slightly crispy edges.

For Alice, the salad balances the plate in both texture and color. She uses a mandoline to slice fennel and radishes to add to the lettuces, and dresses everything with a vinaigrette just before serving.

To plate this meal for four, slice each breast in half lengthwise and place a half on each plate. Add a few of the potatoes and spoon the aioli next to the potatoes. Arrange the salad on the plate and finish with chopped parsley, if you like. Notice that two chicken breasts are enough for four people and only account for a quarter of the plate. More vegetables means that the protein can be an equal element on the plate rather than the dominant one.

Alice serves a balanced plate full of vegetables and salad that does not leave the diner feeling overly full. Restaurant culture in the US has taught us that we aren’t getting our money’s worth if the portions aren’t huge but both at Chez Panisse and in her home, Alice prefers to focus on balance and satisfaction.

The fruit compote prepared earlier is chilled and ready to serve. It is easy to make ahead and the flavors improve as it sits. For this very simple dessert, Alice uses whatever fruit is in season and sometimes a mix of fruits. A fragrant tisane is always a welcome compliment to the compote and a soothing end to the meal.



RECIPES

GRILLED CHICKEN

ADAPTED FROM *The Art of Simple Food*, PAGE 348

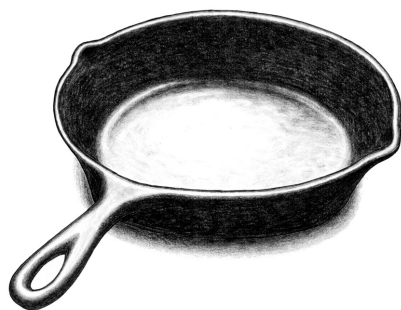
First, if you haven't already, season the chicken breasts (boneless, skin on) liberally with salt, pepper, and thyme and drizzle with olive oil. If dinner is more than a few hours away, refrigerate the chicken and pull it out an hour before you are ready to cook so that it has time to come to room temperature.

Prepare a bed of coals and let them burn down until medium-hot (the coals should be covered with white ash). Clean the grate and set it 5 or 6 inches above the coals to heat. Place the chicken breasts on the hot grill, skin side down, and cook about 7 minutes, until the skin is brown and crispy. Turn and cook another 3 to 5 minutes. Depending on the fire this will take about 10 to 12 minutes total. Check to gauge doneness—when pushing the center of the meat with your tongs or fingers it should feel firm. You can always check the chicken breast by making a cut to peek inside and return it to the grill if more cooking is needed. Keep an eye out for flare-ups and over-browning. Move the chicken to a cooler place on the grill if it is cooking too quickly. Remove from the grill when done and let rest for 5 minutes before cutting and serving.

CHICKEN COOKED UNDER A BRICK

ADAPTED FROM *The Art of Simple Food*, PAGE 346

This is the classic Italian dish known as *pollo al mattone*. Cooking chicken under a heavy weight (*mattone* means brick) results in an exceptionally crispy skin.



Season chicken breasts well with salt, pepper, and thyme, and drizzle with olive oil. Put a cast-iron skillet over medium heat. When hot, add a tablespoon of olive oil, then quickly and carefully place the chicken breasts in the pan with the skin side down. Arrange the chicken so that all the skin is in contact with the skillet. Wrap another skillet of the same size with aluminum foil to use as a weight. Place the foil-wrapped skillet on top of the chicken. This will press all of the skin into contact with the hot skillet surface below and give it extra crispiness. Adjust the heat so that the chicken is sizzling at medium. The aim is to thoroughly brown and crisp the skin and render some of the fat without burning the skin or overcooking the meat. Lift the weight and check the skin after a few minutes to see how it's doing. If it's darkening very quickly, lower the heat a bit. If the skin is still pale, raise it a little. By the time the skin is well browned and crispy, about 10 to 12 minutes, the meat will be nearly cooked through. Remove the weight and carefully turn the chicken over; there will be a lot of rendered fat by this point, some of which you can pour or spoon off. Do not replace the weight on the skin side or it will lose its crispiness. Cook for a few minutes more to finish.

CRISPY POTATOES

To finish the potatoes on the grill: Cut the parboiled fingerlings in half lengthwise. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt. Place flat side down on the hot grill to brown while the chicken rests.

To finish the potatoes on the stove: Cut the parboiled fingerlings in half lengthwise. After removing the cooked chicken from the pan to rest, add the potatoes, flat side down, to the hot pan and cook 5 minutes or so to brown.

LEARN MORE

- ♦ For more recipes to make over the fire, read the complete chapter “Over the Coals” on pages 151–161 of *The Art of Simple Food*.
- ♦ Try cooking beans over a fire. You can reference the recipe on page 42 of *My Pantry*. Read the book that inspired the technique, *The Magic of Fire: Hearth Cooking: One Hundred Recipes for the Fireplace or Campfire* by William Rubel.

