

CHICKEN STOCK

Makes 7 to 8 cups

By Dennis W. Viau; a standard recipe

Homemade chicken stock is inexpensive because you make it with the parts of the chicken you throw away, the trim. How much does it cost for a carrot, an onion, and a couple stalks of celery? This chicken stock, besides being delicious because it is homemade, is practically free! In a previous installment of these recipes I showed how to bone a chicken. What do you do with the scraps? Make stock.



Homemade chicken stock is essential in gourmet cooking. You can buy stock in the store, but the canned product is more like a broth than a stock. The difference is in the gelatin, which is derived from the bones and cartilage. This gelatin adds body to the stock and gives soups their silky smoothness. Broths are made primarily from meat or vegetables.

Ingredients:

2 chicken carcasses (all the remains after filleting off the breast, thigh, and drumstick meat)
6 cups (1.4 liters) water
1 large carrot, coarsely chopped
1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
2 large stalks of celery, coarsely chopped
2 bay leaves
10 whole peppercorns
Herbs as desired (marjoram, parsley, thyme)

Directions:

Place chicken bones and skin (not the liver, which adds bitterness) in a 6- to 8-quart (5.7 to 7.6 liters) pot. Add the water, chopped vegetables, and herbs. Add any additional flavorings you might want, but keep it simple. The simpler the stock, the more uses it will have. Bring the pot to a boil over high heat with the cover off and then reduce heat to low. Skim off the scum that rises to the surface until it stops appearing.

Simmer the stock 1 to 1½ hours. Avoid a rapid boil, as this can make the stock more cloudy. Remove from the heat and allow the pot to cool until the contents are cool enough to handle safely.

Use a slotted spoon or other strainer to remove the solids, placing them in a colander over a clean bowl to catch the drippings. Filter the stock through a *chinois* (conical strainer) or other strainer. Pour it into a large bowl, along with the drippings captured from the solids, to let the fat rise to the surface.

Discard the solids. Taste for salt, if desired. If you plan to use the stock to cook beans, such as when making Pasta Fagioli, do not add salt. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight to allow the fat to float to the top and solidify.

The following day, skim off the solidified fat and discard. Spoon out the gelled stock, avoiding any solids at the bottom of the bowl, and place in a clean pan. Melt the stock and pour into one-cup plastic containers for freezing. When frozen, pop out the solid stock and store in zip-lock bags in the freezer. Use for soups and sauces.

The **Step By Step** guide begins on the following page.

STEP-BY-STEP

1



I have both a pressure cooker and a stock pot. I use my pressure cooker to make stock because it uses less water, it cooks for only 30 minutes, and the stock is already concentrated. You can use a stock pot, but you might need to add more water. When the frozen trim is thawed, push it down with a large wooden spoon. If it is not under the surface of the water add more water to cover it.

Although the following pictures show my pressure cooker, you can just as easily use a stock pot. Sometimes I use both at the same time when I have a lot of chicken trim for making stock.

2



Put everything in the pot, along with any herbs you might want to include. This is a good time to use some of those bottled herbs that have been sitting in your cupboard since your college days. Place the pot over high (or medium-high) heat and bring the water to a boil.

3



As the water comes to a boil, a brownish foam will rise to the surface (sort of visible in the picture above). Skim this off and discard it. The foam will eventually diminish after about 30 minutes.

4



When I'm satisfied I've removed enough foam, I place the lid on the pressure cooker. On my cooker the center knob is all the way down when there is no pressure. As the pressure inside the cooker rises, red lines become visible. When two lines are visible my cooker is at optimum pressure.

5



After 30 minutes (plus about 20 minutes wait time as the pressure cooker depressurizes naturally) here is my stock. Allow the stock to cool enough to be safe to handle. You don't want to accidentally scald yourself as you strain it.

When using a stock pot, you would simmer the stock slowly over low heat for 1 to 1½ hours, covered. Using a gentle simmer rather than a rolling boil will help the stock to be less cloudy.

6



I use a *chinois*, or conical strainer, to strain my stock. This *chinois* has a fine mesh filter and it very quickly strains the stock. You don't need an expensive *chinois*. I used a regular strainer for years. You might need to work in smaller batches, but if the screen is fairly fine it will filter the stock well enough. If you want to remove small particles you can filter the stock a second time through a clean kitchen towel or clean muslin. I keep muslin in my kitchen, specifically for filtering stocks. I also use a fine mesh plastic coffee filter that I bought for about a dollar. I work in small batches because it clogs, but it does a good job.

7



This is when I use my stock pot. I place the strainer on top of the pot. (You can see how large my *chinois* is when positioned in the stock pot.) I carefully pour all the contents of the pressure cooker into the strainer and in about a minute or two all the stock is strained.

When doing this with a stock pot, use a second pot to capture the stock as you strain it.

8



That's two chicken's worth of bones, skin, etc., and all the vegetables. Everything fits easily in the strainer.

9



And here's a bowl of newly-made chicken stock. It's difficult to see the volume, so I put a dinner fork next to the bowl to help you compare. Although I started with 6 cups of water, I end up with about 7 cups of stock. The extra liquid comes from the chicken pieces and vegetables that cooked in the pot. This stock has chicken fat floating on the surface. This will be skimmed off later.

10



In this close-up you can see the chicken fat on the surface of the stock. Cover with plastic wrap and let the bowl of stock cool. Place in the refrigerator overnight. The stock will gel and the fat will harden. It will then be relatively easy to skim the solidified fat off the surface.

11



Here is the stock, with some of the fat removed, after it sat in the refrigerator overnight. I'm using a spatula to skim off the solidified fat. Use whatever utensil works best for you.

12



Pour the gelled stock into a saucepan and heat it until the gel melts. You don't need to get it hot. It will be melted at about 75°F. Then ladle it into storage containers. I use one-cup containers, as this makes it easy to judge the amount of stock I'm using for a recipe. As you can see above, there was about seven cups of stock in that bowl. I stack these in the freezer and let them sit overnight until they are frozen solid.

13



In the final step I pop the frozen stock out of their containers and place them in a ziplock bag for storage in the freezer. They'll keep for several months. I use these for making soup mostly, but they make excellent rice, risotto, etc. Use these for any recipe that calls for chicken stock.

Notes

A stock pot can be used rather than a pressure cooker, but it will take longer to make and concentrate the stock. Use more water, enough to cover the chicken parts. Bring everything to a boil and reduce the heat to simmer, skimming off the foam or scum that floats to the top. Cook 1½ hours, partially covered. The strained stock can be further reduced by simmering in an uncovered pot, reducing the volume to the desired concentration. The pressure cooker starts with less water, about half, and therefore produces a concentrated stock in much less time.

A note about pressure cookers

There are many urban myths about old pressure cookers exploding and launching food all over the kitchen, along with scalding their owner. Some very old (post World War II) cookers were shoddily made and did have the potential to explode. Today's modern cookers, especially the expensive high-end cookers, are made of heavy-gauge stainless steel and fitted with safety features to prevent accidents. As with any cookware (you can hurt yourself with a frying pan if you don't use it properly), you need to use it according to the manufacturer's instructions. The best quality cookers are made in the USA and in Europe. At this point I recommend you avoid cookers made in China. I owned one and it had a plastic pressure regulator in the lid. The plastic was evidently not heat resistant and after only a dozen uses it had degraded to the point where it dangerously leaked steam. Buy cheap, buy twice. I discarded it and bought an expensive Kuhn Rikon. The pressure regulator is stainless steel. This cooker will probably last for the remainder of my life. When buying a cooker, the 6- to 8-quart models are the most popular because they are more versatile. My cooker is a 7.4 quarts and I am delighted with it.