



University of California
Cooperative Extension
Tulare County
Agriculture and Natural Resources



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FOCUS ON: CHICKEN

What's for dinner tonight? There's a good chance it's chicken -- now the number one species consumed by Americans.

History and Definitions

The chicken is a descendant of the Southeast Asian red jungle fowl first domesticated in India around 2000 B.C. Most of the birds raised for meat in America today are from the Cornish (a British breed) and the White Rock (a breed developed in New England). Broiler-fryers, roasters, stewing/baking hens, capons and Rock Cornish hens are all chickens.

A broiler-fryer is a young, tender chicken about 7 weeks old, which weighs 2 1/2 to 4 1/2 pounds when processed. Broiler/fryers are very versatile and can be cooked using any method.

Rock Cornish game hens are a small broiler-fryer weighing between 1 and 2 pounds. They are often stuffed and roasted whole.

A roaster is an older chicken about 3 to 5 months old, which weighs 5 to 7 pounds. It yields more meat per pound than a broiler-fryer and is usually roasted whole.

Capons are male chickens about 16 weeks to 8 months old, which are surgically unsexed. They weigh about 4 to 7 pounds and have generous quantities of tender, light meat. Capons are usually roasted.

Stewing or baking hens are mature laying hens 10 months to 1 1/2 years old. Since the meat is less tender than young chickens, it's best used in moist cooking such as stewing.

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A cock or rooster is a mature male chicken with coarse skin and tough, dark meat that requires long, moist cooking.

Chicken Inspection

All chickens found in retail stores are either inspected by USDA or by state systems, which have standards equivalent to the Federal government. Each chicken and its internal organs are inspected for signs of disease. The "Inspected for wholesomeness by the U.S. Department of Agriculture" seal insures the chicken is free from visible signs of disease.

Chicken Grading

Inspection is mandatory but grading is voluntary. Chickens are graded according to USDA Agricultural Marketing Service regulations and standards for meatiness, appearance and freedom from defects. Grade A chickens have plump, meaty bodies and clean skin, free of bruises, broken bones, feathers, cuts and discoloration.

Hormones and Antibiotics

No hormones are used in the raising of chickens.

Antibiotics may be given to prevent disease and increase feed efficiency. A "withdrawal" period is required from the time antibiotics are administered before the bird can be slaughtered. This ensures that no residues are present in the bird's system. FSIS randomly samples poultry at slaughter and tests for residues. Data from this monitoring program have shown a very low percentage of residue violations.

Additives

Additives are not allowed on fresh chicken. If chicken is processed, however, additives such as MSG, salt, or sodium erythorbate may be added but must be listed on the label.

Source: Food Safety Inspection Service Consumer Education and Information, Focus On Chicken, Revised September 2000.

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