



Poultry Cookery

IN New Zealand, where poultry is eaten less than in some other countries, housewives tend to reserve it for a Christmas treat. In this article Edith G. McNab, Rural Sociologist, Department of Agriculture, Dunedin, provides some general information about choosing, preparing, and cooking poultry and gives a variety of recipes, so that choice of a method of cooking need not be restricted to the usual stuffed roast fowl. An article in this issue by W. L. McIver, Poultry Instructor, Hamilton, deals with plucking, drawing, and trussing fowls.

IF poultry is to be bought, the housewife needs to go shopping with some knowledge of how to judge the age and tenderness of a bird. Old birds are likely to be tough. Choice of cooking methods is governed to a considerable extent by the age of the bird. The feet and legs of a young bird are soft and smooth, and with age the legs become coarser and scaly. The skin of an old bird is coarser than that of a young one. The best test for age is to press the end of the breastbone furthest from the head; if the bird is young, there is a decided "give" in the bone, but the end of an old bird's breastbone is quite hard and rigid. In ducks and geese the hardness of the windpipe increases with age, so the windpipe of an old bird is less easily indented when pressed.

Freshness can be judged by the condition of the feet, eyes, skin, and flesh: The feet should be moist and soft rather than hard and dry; the eyes should be bright and full, not shrunken; the skin should be clear, unbruised, and unbroken; and skin and flesh should be soft yet firm and not flabby.

A plump, compact, well-fleshed bird has a higher proportion of meat to bone than a bird with long bones. About an eighth of the weight of a bird is lost in dressing and about another fifth in drawing, so the weight of a dressed and drawn bird is about two-thirds of its live weight.

Preparation and Stuffing

As the flesh is protected by a skin outside and a membrane inside, a fowl may be washed, but it should not be soaked in water. The simplest way is to allow a stream of water to run through the body cavity and then dry the bird.

The type of stuffing depends on the type of poultry. The mild flavour of chicken and turkey should not be masked by too strong a flavour in the stuffing. Duck and goose flesh is naturally fat—much more so than that of chicken and turkey—so a dry stuffing soaks up fat during cooking. For ducks and geese sharply-seasoned or tart fruit stuffings are best.

Breadcrumbs form the foundation for most stuffings. Salt, pepper, herbs, and perhaps nutmeg are added. Onion which has been chopped and browned in fat may also be added. Fat is the usual binding ingredient, but if the poultry is to be served cold, slightly-beaten egg as a binding helps the stuffing to hold its shape. Other additions to stuffings may be ham or bacon (for fowl, turkey, and rabbit), oysters (for fowl and turkey), sausage (for turkey and rabbit), and apple or orange (for duck or goose).

When a bird is being stuffed the cavity should be not quite filled, for the stuffing swells during cooking. The bird should be trussed as directed in the Poultry Instructor's article. Openings must be well secured so that the stuffing does not escape. If they are sewn up, the thread is removed after the bird has been cooked and before it is sent to the table.

Cookery Methods

As with other meats, too high a temperature increases the loss of weight during cooking and decreases the tenderness and juiciness of poultry. Therefore a bird should be cooked at a temperature below browning point for most of the time, or below boiling point if it is being cooked by moist heat.

Young, very tender poultry may be fried, for this method of cooking supplies fat, which tends to be lacking in young birds. More mature but still young birds may be roasted. If there is any doubt about the tenderness of a bird for roasting, it may be pot roasted, or it may be partly cooked for 20 minutes in a pressure cooker or by being simmered in salted water for 2 hours, then stuffed,