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Roast Chicken with Mustard Butter

Serves 4.

Dijon mustard and a good slab of butter are staples in my fridge. Here, they work together nicely to flavor this simple bird. A simple sauté of mustard greens or other greens, and Scalloped Potatoes with Goat Gouda and Thyme make nice sides.

1 (4-pound) whole chicken
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 tablespoons finely chopped shallot
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh sage
1 lemon
Flakey coarse sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 450°F with the rack in the middle. Pull off excess fat around the cavities of the bird and discard, then rinse the chicken and pat dry very well, inside and out. From the edge of the cavity, slip a finger under the skin of each of the breasts, then gently but thoroughly loosen the skin from the meat of the breasts and thighs.

Put the butter, shallot, mustard, and sage in a bowl. Finely zest the lemon into the bowl, holding the zester close so that you capture the flavorful oil that sprays from the lemon as you zest. Mix all the ingredients together to combine thoroughly.

Using your hands and working with about 1 tablespoon of the butter mixture at a time, gently push the mixture into the spaces you created between the chicken skin and meat, being careful not to tear the skin. As you work the mixture in, gently rub your hand over the outside of the skin to smooth out the mixture and push it farther down between the skin and meat where you may not be able to reach with your hand.

Cut the lemon into quarters and stuff the pieces into the cavity of the bird. Tie together the legs with kitchen string. Season the chicken all over, using 2 to 3 teaspoons coarse salt and generous pepper.

Put a roasting pan (not nonstick) or 9x13-inch baking dish in the oven to heat for 10 minutes. Carefully remove the pan from the oven and immediately put the chicken into the pan, breast-side up. Roast for 35 minutes, then rotate the pan and reduce the heat to 375°F. Continue roasting, basting with the juices occasionally, until the juices run clear when a thigh is pierced with a fork, or an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh reads 165°F, 25-35 minutes more. Remove the bird from the oven and let it rest in the pan for 15 minutes, then baste with the juices.

Transfer the chicken to a cutting board and let rest for 5 minutes, then carve and serve with the pan juices and extra salt for sprinkling.