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Roast Chicken with Basil, Scallion, Lemon Butter, and Potatoes

Serves 4

I'll never tire of a butter-rubbed chicken roasted with rich, earthy potatoes tucked along its edges. Still, it's nice to update the classic pairing with a simple tweak or two. Here, when the bird is almost done, I sprinkle whole parsley leaves and squeeze a few lemon quarters over the potatoes, then pop the whole thing back into the oven. The herb leaves crisp up and the lemon pieces caramelize. Some might find the lemon rinds intense, but, if you like that sort of thing, you'll enjoy sliced bits of them with the rest of the dish.

1 (4-pound) whole chicken
1 cup thinly sliced basil leaves
5 tablespoons unsalted butter at room temperature
2 lemons
5 garlic cloves, very thinly sliced
2 scallions, very thinly sliced
Flakey coarse sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1-3/4 pounds small to medium potatoes (about 1-1/2 inches in diameter),
cut lengthwise into quarters
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
About 1/2 good-sized bunch parsley, stems trimmed to 1 inch (1-1/2 packed cup)

Preheat the oven to 450°F with the rack in the middle. Pull off excess fat around the cavities of the chicken 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 basil and butter in a bowl. Finely zest the lemons into the bowl, holding the zester close so that you capture the flavorful oil that sprays from the lemons as you zest. Add the garlic and scallions and mix together to thoroughly combine.

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.

Season the chicken all over, using 2 to 3 teaspoons coarse salt and generous pepper, then tie the legs together with kitchen string. In a large bowl, toss the potatoes with oil, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and a generous grind of pepper to coat well. Cut 1 lemon into quarters and set aside.

Roast Chicken with Basil, Scallion, Lemon Butter, and Potatoes, (continued)

Put a roasting pan (not nonstick) or 9x13-inch baking dish in the oven to heat for 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and immediately put the potatoes and any oil left in the bowl into the pan, keeping them in as much of a single layer as possible, and pushed to the edges of the pan to make room for the chicken (it's fine if the bird sits on some of the potatoes); put the chicken into the pan, breast-side up.

Roast for 20 minutes, then remove the pan from the oven and turn the chicken breast-side down. Continue to roast for another 20 minutes, then remove the pan from the oven and turn the bird breast-side up again. Sprinkle the parsley over the potatoes then stir the parsley and potatoes to coat with the pan drippings. Squeeze 3 pieces of the cut lemon over the chicken, and put the squeezed rinds into the roasting pan. Continue to roast until the juices of the chicken run clear when the thigh is pierced with a fork, 20 to 30 minutes more.

Remove from the oven and let the chicken rest in the pan for 15 minutes, then transfer to a cutting board. Let rest for another 5 minutes, then carve. Spoon the pan juices over the chicken and serve with the potatoes and roasted lemons.

Author's Recipe Note: Your Pick of the Potatoes – My favorite potatoes to use for this dish are a mix of farmers market varieties, including Fingerlings, Adirondack Reds and Blues, yellow Carolas, and more. It's fine to purchase potatoes of different shapes and sizes, just be sure to cut them into roughly same-size pieces so that they cook through at the same rate.