

#100 - Change Your Life Chicken

Hi, everyone! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 100! You guys! It's the 100th episode! That's feels like a really fun thing, so we're going to celebrate the best way I know how. We're going to deep dive Change Your Life Chicken. I know. It's incredible. This chicken recipe is going to be my legacy I'm pretty sure, and I want to give it a little spotlight today so that you can have the best Change Your Life Chicken every time you make it. And if you've never made it before, this episode will make it a regular in your rotation. I'm absolutely sure of it.

Before we get going, I want to make sure you're following me on Instagram @thelazygenius. I'm there often and especially on Mondays which is the day this episode is coming out. Every Monday, I share my meal plan on what I creatively call Meal Plan Monday, and you guys are starting to share your meal plans, too, which is so fun to read and share. We're helping each other feel a little less crazy around dinnertime which is always a plus. There are also a lot of great resources in the posts themselves since you guys are super smart and leave such great comments. The point is that it's really the only social network I hang out on, so if you want more Lazy Genius than just these episodes, head to Instagram where I hang out almost daily. And my handle there is super easy @thelazygenius. And as we talk about Change Your Life Chicken today, you might have questions you want answered. The best way to do that is to join me live every week! I hang out for about half an hour every Thursday around 12:15pm EST, and I love answering your questions. So follow me on Instagram @thelazygenius yay amen.

Now let's talk about chicken! If you haven't heard of my Change Your Life Chicken, you might think I'm really full of myself to claim a recipe can change your life. But it can and probably will based on the feedback I get pretty much every day on this recipe. So let's start by explaining what it is, and we'll for sure have a link in the show notes to the recipe itself with photos and all that.

Change Your Life Chicken is basically chicken and vegetables roasted on a sheet pan in a super hot oven. So hot you'll think it's a mistake, but we'll get to that. In fact, we'll get to a lot of the intricacies of this super simple recipe, but first let's talk about why it's such a life-changing recipe.

First, it's stupid easy. You put some vegetables on a pan, put some chicken on top of them, and stick it in the oven. Seriously, that's it.

Second, it's incredibly versatile. You can use a couple cuts of chicken which we'll get to in a second, but you can use such a variety of vegetables to switch it up. You can also add herbs and spices or whatever else to change up the flavor.

Third, it's a complete meal. Everything exists on this sheet pan, and unless you want to bake some rolls or toss together a quick salad, you really don't need anything else.

Fourth, there's zero cleanup. If you're comfortable using foil or parchment paper to line your pan (I use both actually), you use throw it away once all the food is gone, and you literally have no dirty dishes. Praise.

Fifth, it's easy to scale up or down for the number of people you have. We'll talk about the particulars of how to decide what size pan to use, but you can make this for one person or twelve without a lot of extra effort beyond cutting more vegetables.

Sixth in case you're not convinced yet, kids love it. I'm serious. Or kids at least tolerate it. My favorite thing is the number of moms who tell me that their kids like it but say "it didn't change my life though." Darling children, it's not meant to change your lives; it's meant to change your mom and dad's lives. But most kids find it decent to it, and a lot of kids even love it. That crispy chicken skin is a big selling point in our house.

Seventh, I know there's more! It's Whole30, Paleo, gluten free, dairy free, and all the other frees you can think of because it's just chicken and vegetables, oil, and salt. Truly. If you're in need of a meal that hits a lot of dietary restrictions, this is it.

Eighth, it's make-ahead if you can believe it. Set it all up on the sheet pan in the morning, pop some plastic wrap over it, and put it in the oven at dinner. I wouldn't go more than ten hours or so just because the salt starts to extract too much liquid from the vegetables, but going from one morning to that night? Totally.

Ninth and at this point I'm surprised at how many reasons there are, too. Ninth, once it's in the oven, it's hands off for almost an hour. The prep time varies a bit based on the vegetables you use which we'll talk about in a second, but ultimately, you have almost a stress-free hour before dinner hits the table because you literally do nothing.

And tenth because we might as well round it up to ten, it's delicious. And isn't that we want the most anyway? When you learn how to use salt, fat, and heat to your advantage, you can turn the simplest ingredients into a delicious masterpiece which this recipe is. I'm a firm believer in there not being a perfect recipe for everyone except may this. It truly will change your life.

Okay, I'm going to assume you're convinced now, so let's talk about the particulars of how to make it. Let's start with the method. A pan of vegetables and chicken are cooked at - now, hold on - 500 degrees. Yes, I said 500. And no you won't burn your house down. We're going to troubleshoot the temperature in this episode, but the temperature matters. The reason we cook it at 500 degrees is to get crispy skin which is as close to fried chicken as you'll get without actually frying it, to make sure the chicken is cooked through which freaks everybody out, and to get the vegetables cooked with a combination of a little char and also nice and soft. Now if you've heard my episode on roasting stuff, you heard me talk about spreading the food out on the pan in order to get crispy texture on the vegetables. This is very true. But not for Change Your Life Chicken. If you spread out your vegetables too much in a 500 degree oven, everything will burn. I've seen the photos some of you have sent me and have seen the burn. And I know how frustrating it is to make dinner that doesn't turn out the way you hoped. But Change Your Life Chicken is different in that you want your vegetables to be super cozy and mostly covered by pieces of chicken. Since the vegetables are close, they protect each other a bit in the hot oven, and the chicken itself insulates the vegetables and keeps them from burning. But because everything is so cozy, you need a hot oven to make sure everything cooks. If you were to turn the oven down to say 425, the vegetables and chicken wouldn't be done at the same time, some vegetables might be a little soggy because there's not enough heat to get some char on the exposed edges, and you definitely wouldn't get the crispy skin. So essentially, the 500 degree oven gets everything cooked and crispy, and the coziness of the stuff in the pan is the other side of the scale, keeping everything from burning to a crisp. Does that make sense? So that's why you cook it at 500.

Now let's talk about the chicken and why it's risky to make this recipe with anything but chicken with skin and bone, particularly my preferred cut, the chicken thigh. Chicken on the bone is

more forgiving than chicken off the bone. The bone acts as a protector for dry chicken as does the skin. It's like you get protection from the inside and the outside. If you were to put a boneless skinless chicken breast on a bed of vegetables and roast it at 500 degrees, you'd end up with something resembling rubber or jerky. The chicken would cook long before the vegetables do. Now if you want to cook boneless skinless chicken on a sheet pan with vegetables, everything needs to be spread out, cut smaller, and cooked at a lower temperature. But I've made that recipe, and it doesn't change your life. The magic that happens with that chicken skin especially makes the recipe one of a kind.

My personal favorite cut of chicken and the one that's in the recipe is the thigh. I love a chicken thigh. It has more fat in the meat itself which keeps it from getting dry, and it takes a little longer to cook than chicken breasts which leaves more time for the vegetables to develop flavor and get a better texture. The recipe does work with legs and breasts, too. They both just take a little less time which means you'll probably want to cut your vegetables a hair smaller.

Now let's talk about the vegetables. You can use just about anything, but you have to think about the end result. Potatoes take way longer to get crispy and cooked than green beans. Big chunks of carrot take longer than big chunks of mushrooms. Because vegetables cook at different rates, pay attention to their size so that everything is done at roughly the same time. My personal favorite combo is potatoes, carrots, onion, and green beans. I'll talk through that combination so you can see how the sizes of your vegetables need to play together.

If I were to cut all four of those vegetables to be the same size, by the time the potatoes were done, the onions and green beans would be a black mess, and the carrots wouldn't be far behind. So whatever vegetable takes the longest should be cut the smallest. Size up as you add the other vegetables to the pan. So potatoes would be cut into one inch cubes, maybe a tiny bit smaller since I'm always surprised by what an inch actually is, the carrot would be cut into thick coins a bit bigger than the thickness of the potatoes, the onions are cut into bigger chunks than that where you keep the layers together even in a few pieces, and then the green beans aren't cut at all and definitely tucked up under the chicken and not left out on the edges. See how that works? The vegetable that takes the longest to cook should be the smallest size on the pan. You'll avoid black vegetables that way.

Next, let's talk about the benefits of lining your pan and how you do it for the best results. I line a big sheet pan with heavy duty foil first and then put a layer of parchment paper on top. I've made this with both individually and prefer using both although each individually is fine and so is using nothing at all. You'll just have to wash the pan obviously. I like using the foil because it's sturdy and can curl up over the edges of the pan which keeps any leakage from getting on the pan. Plus the foil helps conduct the heat which is always helpful. But the problem I have with only using foil is that sometimes vegetables get stuck. And then when you use a spatula or something to pry them off the foil, the foil tears and you have a dirty pan. So annoying. So I use foil for pan protection and heat conduction and then a layer of parchment to keep the food from sticking.

Okay, so we've talked about the temperature, the chicken, the vegetables, and now let's talk about oil and seasoning. Once your vegetables are cut and you put them on the lined pan, drizzle just the tiniest bit of oil. I tend to use avocado oil and not extra virgin olive oil just because I want an oil that has a high smoke point and not smoke up my kitchen like olive oil does, and I don't necessarily need the flavor of olive oil since the fat from the chicken itself has all the flavor I need. So I drizzle on just enough oil to make the salt stick to the vegetables. Some of you have sent me messages saying that your vegetables were really oily at the end which was tasty but also too oily and not as crispy as you were hoping. Your solution to that is to use less oil on the vegetables themselves because the fat from that chicken skin does so

much of the work for you. So if your Change Your Life Chicken is greasy, cut back on the oil you drizzle on the vegetables themselves and definitely don't oil the chicken. There's no need.

I know it seems counterintuitive to have so much to say about such a simple recipe, but the more you see why it's put together the way it is, the more you can adjust it and troubleshoot it based on what you're using.

So next let's talk about salt. You need more than you think you need. A friend recently told me that I should name my future bakery Salt because I'm such a proponent of salt in foods, even in dessert. Which I definitely am. Salt makes everything sing. It doesn't make food taste salty; it makes food taste like itself. Of course you can use too much salt and make things taste salty, but I think most of you are definitely skewing on the end up of under seasoning way more than you are over seasoning. You want to see the salt. Every piece of vegetable should have several grains of salt on it, so a little pinch for an entire sheet pan is just not going to cut it. My rule of thumb for the average cook is to salt the amount you'd normally salt and then do that two more times. I swear you're not using enough. And guess what? If you make it and it's too salty, you'll have a better understanding of your salting tendencies for next time. Maybe you're not as far off center as I'm telling you, but almost certainly you need to use more than you think.

Now let's talk about salting the chicken. You need to add more than you think there, too. Now the beauty of salting chicken is that the longer it's salted, the better it tastes and the juicier it is. I'm talking you can salt it up to 48 hours before you cook it. It's a delight. With Change Your Life Chicken and getting that crispy chicken skin, you don't want to actually salt the skin but the meat underneath the skin for two reasons. One, you want the salt to penetrate the meat itself, and two, when the skin is salted, it doesn't get as crispy which is such a bummer because that chicken skin is one of the treats of this recipe. So salt the chicken more than you think you should, just like the vegetables. You need to see it. But don't salt the skin itself.

Okay, now that you've gotten a breakdown of all the components, let's walk through the process, and we're going to assume you're not salting your chicken way ahead of time even though you totally can and will get a huge payoff if you do. Also remember that the recipe is on the website, so you don't need to take notes unless you just want to. First, preheat your oven to 500 degrees and make it so you're putting the pan in the lower third of your oven. That ensures that most of the browning happens on the protected bottoms of the vegetables and they get super delicious. Next, line your pan with foil and parchment so it's ready, and make sure the foil is curled up over the edges of the pan. And when I say sheet pan, I mean like a cookie sheet. You could make this in a casserole dish or ceramic baking dish or something, but the higher the sides on your pan, the less crispy the food gets. The shallower the better. So preheat your oven, line your pan, and now season your chicken. Pull it out of the package and you can go ahead and put it on the prepared sheet pan to save a dirty dish if you want. Since you're going to be touching raw chicken and also using salt, I like to put a little pile of salt on the sheet pan or in a tiny bowl so that I can double dip in salt but toss what little I have left and not have to wash my hands a million times between all the chicken salting. So first salt the bottoms of the chicken. Then flip them over and pull back all the skin. Salt underneath the skin and then put the skin back. Just leave the chicken piled to one side of the sheet pan while you cut the vegetables. And obviously now you just have to wash your hands just the one time. Now cut up your vegetables, remembering to make the vegetables that cook the longest be the smallest size. Pile all of those on the sheet pan. Now barely oil the vegetables and salt them generously. Toss them all together so everything is evenly distributed. Now spread out the vegetables and start putting the chicken on top of the layers of vegetables. Before you put the pan in the oven, grab a couple of paper towels and blot the chicken skin dry. This ensures you get that change your life crispiness. Now one more thing before you put the pan in the oven. Check the edges of the pan. If the vegetables on the edge aren't super clumped together, like if you can see the bottom of the pan between the pieces on the edge, push the vegetables

closer together. Ideally, the only part of the pan you should see is the actual edge, like the rim of the sheet pan. Make sure those vegetables aren't super piled on top of each other, but even in one layer they're all touching. No space. Make sure you can't see the bottom. If you just can't get the vegetables close enough, like you have too much pan, nestle the chicken closer to the pan and push out some of the vegetables from underneath the chicken. It's less important for the vegetables under the chicken to be super far apart since they're totally protected by the chicken itself, but the vegetables that are completely exposed need to be super cozy.

Now put it in the oven in the lower third at 500 degrees for 50 minutes. I love that it's easy to remember since both number have the 5-0 in them. Everybody seems to remember the 500 degrees because it seems so insane, and then you can more easily remember that the cooking time is 50 minutes. And I promise you that your chicken will be cooked. Pinky swear. No one has ever had problems with underdone chicken. The only problems have been greasy vegetables which we talked about and super burnt ones which we also talked about. The more you make it, the more you'll understand how everything works together to be perfectly cooked even in the hottest oven ever.

And that's it! Fifty minutes and you have a pan with a complete meal. My kids love the potatoes and carrots the most. I could eat those onions until I'm sick. And if you've never had roasted green beans, you're in for a treat. If you head to my Instagram account, there's a highlight you can always look through that is the picture of a chicken and says CYLC for Change Your Life Chicken. You can see what other people have used and how it's all worked to get ideas. And if you have more questions about this magical recipe, I'll be live this Thursday around 12:15pm EST to answer them!

And I love that we just spent that long talking about a single chicken recipe, but when you have something this close to perfect, you take the time to get it right. What a perfect 100th episode. Thanks for listening you guys! I'm so grateful for all of you listening, whether this is your first episode or you've heard all hundred. And if you have heard all one hundred, that kind of makes me want to cry. Thank you for being Lazy Geniuses. I heart you big time. That's it for today, friends! I'm Kendra, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. See you next week.