

## Lemon Chicken – a Practical Version of a Classic Recipe

### *Notes:*

I was first introduced to this recipe, which I understand to be an Italian classic, by my sister, who lived in Cotignac. However, with cooking being a job to be fitted into a busy life, I have over the years aimed to simplify it without losing its essential character. It doesn't take much longer to prepare than to read about it. Being able to buy a "ready to cook" chicken from the supermarket, as opposed to a farmyard chicken, has helped considerably in this respect. Because I dislike cleaning ovens I have offered the alternatives of open roasting, or as I do, cooking in a closed Pyrex casserole.

### *Ingredients:*

Chicken, ready to cook, of appropriate size. A medium size supermarket chicken is typically 1.5Kg, and serves 4 comfortably, provided that some are happy with legs.

1 or 2 fresh lemons

### *Method:*

Remove the cord trussing the chicken, and check the cleanliness of the interior. Wash it out, drain and dry with kitchen paper if necessary. Some chickens seem to have lumps of fat left inside (which I never found in Tesco ones); these should be removed to avoid the juices when serving being swamped with fat. One good size lemon will probably be adequate for a medium size chicken – in fact sometimes supermarket chickens are slightly crushed, so that it may be necessary to push a fist inside to enlarge the cavity. Use two lemons if they are small or the chicken large. Preferably using a single pointed instrument – a thin skewer, a pointed awl, or a larding needle – stab the lemon(s) liberally all over, aiming at twenty or thirty stabs. The time and motion study experts will use a fork – this tends to squeeze the lemon as you pierce it, and you finish up with juice all over the chopping board instead of in the chicken. Push the lemon(s) into the cavity, and close up the aperture; the classic recipe suggests using cocktail sticks (which break) or a trussing needle and string (too fussy) – I use a 10cm long skewer zigzagged between the two sides of the opening. There will also be a smaller aperture at the neck end to close: I find that a stainless steel kilt pin is ideal for this purpose. It is suggested that if open roasting, the ends of the legs should be loosely tied with string so that they don't splay out and break the skin; in a closed casserole they are adequately constrained, so that this step is unnecessary.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (although with a fan convector oven you can start from cold) and place the bird initially upside down, resting on the breast bone. Cook it this way up for one third of the total cooking time, and then turn it over for the remainder of the time; this is when you realize the advantage of a short skewer. No other attention is necessary. Total cooking time should be calculated as 70 min/Kg if open roasting, or 80 min/Kg in a closed casserole.

When serving, most of the skin can just be lifted off, and the legs and wings should separate without difficulty. Pour off the juices from the cooking dish, and spoon them over the chicken on the plates. Resist the temptation to squeeze the lemon: very little will come out of it, and what does may squirt!