



For herbs, the French connection

It said "pour grillades" on the label, which meant that it was meant "for grills" or barbecues.

But just taking a sniff at the mixture was enough to make you salivate. When it comes to cooking with herbs, you simply cannot beat the French.

My bottle of Provençal herbs have seen a lot of use since I bought it. At \$2.50 a bottle, it was real value and a real find. Here are some suggestions, other than using it to make a delicious roast chicken like what I have done.

- **Salads** – Sprinkle it over quartered tomatoes and cheese chunks. Serve on a green salad for a healthy quick lunch.

- **Steaks, Chops, Fillets** – Cook steaks, lamb or pork chops or even fish fillets as usual. Just before you lift it from the pan, sprinkle the herbs. The heat from the meat will release its wonderful aroma.

Available from Carrefour. Please check prices as offers may apply.

Flavourful roast chicken

French herbs and butter give this bird a good complexion

SIZE matters in this case. Don't go for those young, limp chicks. To enjoy a roast chicken you can sink your teeth into, go for the big bird.

I don't know about you, but I find the chickens in the supermarket shelves and even the wet market these days are such puny specimens.

All very well if you dissect them and fry them up or steam them. But for a proper roast you can present on the dinner table, you need at least a two-kilo bird.

At the moment, I've only seen such specimens in Carrefour, and very regularly, too. The birds there average about two to 2.5 kilo and cost just below \$10.00 each, depending on the seasonal price.

A bird this size will have lots of flavour, since they have had time to grow some muscle.

I like roasts, but I find the traditional western method of cooking a little too long and it takes all the juices out of the chicken, making it very dry.

Being Asian, I like my chicken still pink around the bone, just like what you'd get with chicken rice.

My version of the roast takes just about 45 minutes in the oven, by which

time the potatoes are also nicely crisp around the edges.

The secret to a roast chicken with moist meat but crisp skin is the butter and herbs mixture you slip under its skin.

The herbs and butter sink slowly into the meat during cooking and flavours it. The mixture also separates skin from meat and crisps the skin.

Use young potatoes to bake along with the chicken. I bought a bag of ready washed, young red-skinned potatoes and halved them.

Use the potatoes to prop the chicken up on the baking pan. The close contact helps crisp the spuds as the oil renders from the chicken skin.



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Roast chicken with French herbs and butter

Ingredients:

1 large chicken (abt 2.2kg)
1 bag young potatoes (about 1kg)
1 bunch coriander or rosemary
100g butter
2 tablespoons French herbs (see story above, right)
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon olive oil

Method:

1. Wash chicken. Trim off head and feet. Keep the neck flap intact. Using your fingers, gently push the skin covering the breast apart to create a pocket between skin and breast.
2. Soften butter, add salt, French

herbs and chopped coriander or rosemary. Mix well. Using your hands, take a little mixture and rub the cavity of the chicken.

3. Spoon a generous amount of the mixture into the pocket between breast and skin. Push the mixture right in to distribute evenly. Rub rest of mixture over chicken skin. Close neck flaps with a bamboo skewer.

4. Let chicken rest and start washing potatoes. Cut into halves. Toss in olive oil and place on baking tray. Put chicken on top.
5. Bake in 200 deg C oven for 45 minutes. (Adjust time according to your oven's idiosyncracies.)

(Preparation: 1 hour. Serves 6 or more.)

Note: Let chicken rest for a few minutes before cutting. This will allow the juices to settle back into the meat and will not spurt.

Grocery Checklist

(Fresh produce prices are seasonal):

1 large chicken (abt \$9.90)
1 bag young potatoes (\$2.50)
coriander or rosemary (\$1.00/\$2.25)
Herbs de Provence (\$2.50)
(All items available at Carrefour)

