



Too-tough chicken? Check it by degrees

For safety's sake, I cook poultry to 180 degrees. But my chicken breasts are always dry and tough, even if I marinate them. How can I prevent that?

First, good for you for paying attention to meat temperature when cooking. Using a meat thermometer is essential in making sure the food you serve is safe and wholesome.

But let me let you in on a little secret: Not all poultry has to be cooked to 180 degrees Fahrenheit. In fact, food safety experts say poultry is *safe* to eat when it reaches 160 to 165 degrees. But safety isn't the only issue when cooking meat. You also have to pay attention to doneness. You see higher temperatures recommended for poultry than for other types of meat because poultry just isn't *done* at that low of a temperature. If you take poultry off the grill at 160 degrees, it will be pink and still taste raw. It might be safe, but it certainly will not be appetizing.

Boneless, skinless chicken breasts are both safe and done at 170 degrees, so feel free to serve them once they reach that temperature. Whole birds and poultry pieces with bone and skin need to reach 180 degrees to

be done.

Finally, make sure you're using your meat thermometer correctly. No matter what, be sure you insert the thermometer's tip half-way through at the thickest part of the meat to be sure you're measuring the internal temperature accurately. Also, know the potential and limitations of the type of thermometer you use. For example, thermocouple and thermistor types of thermometers can accurately measure very thin foods, such as hamburger patties. Both are available in cooking fork/thermometer combination. On the other hand, bimetallic-coil thermometers with dial gauges need to be inserted 2 to 2.5 inches into the food, so are usually used only for roasts, whole birds or casseroles. Some can be left in the food while cooking, while others are designed to test food near the end of the cooking time.

For more information on meat thermometers and how to use them, see the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Web site at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/thermy/kitchen.htm>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



**For the week of
August 1, 2004**

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