

Chicken and Dumplings

Ingredients:

some chicken
chicken stock
salt
pepper
poultry seasoning
Bisquick
milk

Let me start by saying that I know the ingredients are vague. But it really doesn't matter how much chicken you have or what kind. I swear. If all you have is a bag of frozen chicken breasts, that's fine! I made this tonight with four chicken thighs and it is quite tasty. If you have a whole chicken, then good for you. It doesn't even matter if the chicken is fresh or frozen, just get "some chicken" as directed.

Get a big pot, either a Dutch oven or a taller pasta pot, pour in one of those big containers of chicken broth, and throw the chicken in. If you don't have chicken broth, just cover the chicken with water. I like using chicken broth because it saves time on making a flavorful stock, but whatever. I should warn you, if you're just using water, make sure you have chicken with bones in it. Skinless, boneless chicken breasts and a pot of water aren't going to make a tasty creation. Tonight the thighs I used had bones and skin, but I picked as much skin off as I could once they thawed in the pot a bit.

Add some salt, pepper, and poultry seasoning. I don't know how much, just some. Let's say you have a container of salt, you turn it upside down and make a circle around the pot while you pour it out. That much.

Boil the chicken for . . . an hour? I don't remember, I was watching Family Guy at the time. It might have been 45 minutes to an hour. At some point, let's call it an hour, take the chicken out of the pot and put it in a bowl to cool. Stir some ice cubes into the chicken stock and place the pot in the freezer. This will bring down the temperature of the stock faster and putting it in the freezer lets the fat separate and rise so you can skim it off.

While the stock chills, pick the meat off of the bones and shred the meat. Try to get *all* of the meat and get rid of *all* of the fat and skin hanging out in those weird pockets. If some of it doesn't look totally, completely cooked, don't worry about it. It's going to be thrown back into boiling stock and it will finish cooking very quickly. When you've picked and shredded all the meat, set aside while you go deal with the solidified fat. I know, it sounds fun!

Take the pot out of the freezer. If it's been long enough, there should be a really gross looking layer of fat over the top of the stock. If you used boneless, skinless chicken, there probably won't be much of this at all. Regardless, grab a spoon and start skimming the fat off the top. **WARNING:** I do *not* recommend slinging this into your sink and down the drain. You see the way the fat has solidified and gotten horrible? It could do that at some point in your plumbing and then you might have to call someone to come and snake your pipes and my *God* that is irritating. So just sling that fat into the garbage like a good little cook and try not to make a big mess.

When you've skimmed most of the fat off the top, place the pot back on the stove, dump the chicken back in, and return to a boil. It's time to make dumplings!

This is the thing about dumplings: most people make them too thick and they end up all gummy and gross. A friend of my father's told him how to make dumplings and they come out very nicely this way. Alternately, you could do what my father did for years—he ripped flour tortillas into pieces and dropped them in. It's a decent substitute, but I prefer the real thing.

Now on the side of the Bisquick box it says for dumplings you combine 2 1/4 cups Bisquick and 2/3 cup milk. Or something like that. That could conceivably be correct but hell if I know. I don't like measurements as you might have guessed by now. Here's my method: dump some Bisquick into a bowl and add a tiny bit of milk. Mix. The point here is consistency. It needs to be a pretty dry dough that doesn't stick to your fingers. In fact, don't use a spoon. Mix it with your hands so you can tell how it feels. I make a ball of it, punch it down a little and roll it around. Dough is fun to play with! There are probably some technical terms that could describe this, but I don't know them. A dough that is elastic enough to knead, but that is dry enough to not feel wet or sticky. There ya go.

Now, this is the crucial point. To make dumplings, pinch off a small amount of dough, a literal pinch, and flatten that as much as you can. You want these things to be tiny and thin. I like to put it on the heel of one hand and squish it with the heel of the other. It's like you're making tiny little pizza crusts—spread them out until you think you might be able to see through it. Then drop it into the boiling (make sure it's at a rolling boil) liquid. It will sink briefly and then rise up. Keep doing this until you've used all of the dough or you're tired of messing with it. Make sure that the dumplings fall *into* the liquid. If the top is all crowded with finished dumplings that have risen, move them with a spoon and drop the new dumplings into the gaps. If you would like the broth to be a little thicker and creamier, add a dash of milk at the end and stir. This is also a good time to add more salt if you want, but be careful! This will thicken, especially if you put leftovers in the fridge, and the salt taste will concentrate and intensify.

Happy Eating!

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