

Food <sub>101</sub>  
*poaching* with ease

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LET THE GENTLEST  
FORM OF COOKING  
BRING A LITTLE CALM  
TO YOUR KITCHEN.

SOME COOKS THRILL at a flaming sauté pan or a blistering hot grill. But there's another place where flavor resides, a place below the boiling point, where food achieves perfection in its own good time, without all the fireworks. It's called poaching, and it may be the closest thing to Zen you'll ever experience in your kitchen.

Poaching is a contemplative act, a time for quiet focus. After the cooking liquid is carefully adjusted to the proper temperature, a veil of intoxicating steam lingers over the pot, but no bubbles disturb the liquid. A certain level of attentiveness is necessary throughout the process to ensure the surface barely moves and doesn't break into a boil, or even a simmer, lest the underlying contents turn tough or fall apart.

What emerges after a few minutes is fish, poultry, or fruit with a silken texture and natural juiciness—not to mention a subtle though discernible flavor imparted by aromatics added to the liquid. It's a state of pristine completion, one that's as much about the journey as it is the destination.



**SIMPLY SATISFYING** Fennel, lemon, and herbs lend their essence to the poaching liquid and the resulting halibut, which cooks ever so gently beneath a surface that remains motionless. The result is fish that's subtly flavored—and perfectly cooked.

## Food 101


**HALIBUT POACHED IN LEMON-FENNEL COURT-BOUILLON**

SERVES 4

- 1 pound small Yukon gold or red bliss potatoes, peeled
- 3¾ teaspoons coarse salt
- 10 cups water
- 1 bottle dry white wine, such as Chablis or Sauvignon Blanc
- 2 fennel bulbs, trimmed, cut lengthwise into ½-inch-thick wedges, fronds reserved
- 1 lemon, cut into ¼-inch slices, plus 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 3 sprigs fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 medium leek, white and pale-green parts only, halved lengthwise and rinsed well
- 4 halibut fillets, skinned (each about 1 inch thick and 6 to 7 ounces)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

**1.** Place potatoes in a saucepan, and add enough cold water to cover by about 2 inches. Add 1 teaspoon salt, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer briskly until just tender, about 15 minutes. Drain, and return to pan to keep warm.

**2.** Meanwhile, in a pot wide enough to accommodate halibut fillets in a single layer, combine 10 cups water, the wine, fennel wedges, lemon slices, and remaining 2¾ teaspoons salt.



**FISH** Clockwise from top left: Fennel, lemon, herbs, and white wine create a flavorful broth, often referred to as court-bouillon, for poaching halibut. To maintain a clear cooking liquid, the aromatics are bundled between a halved leek. A slotted spatula or two eases the transfer of the finished fillets to a plate. A spoonful of broth can double as a finishing sauce.

**3.** Place parsley, bay leaf, and some of the reserved fennel fronds between the leek halves, and tie together with kitchen twine. Add to pot, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer briskly until fennel is barely tender, 12 to 15 minutes.

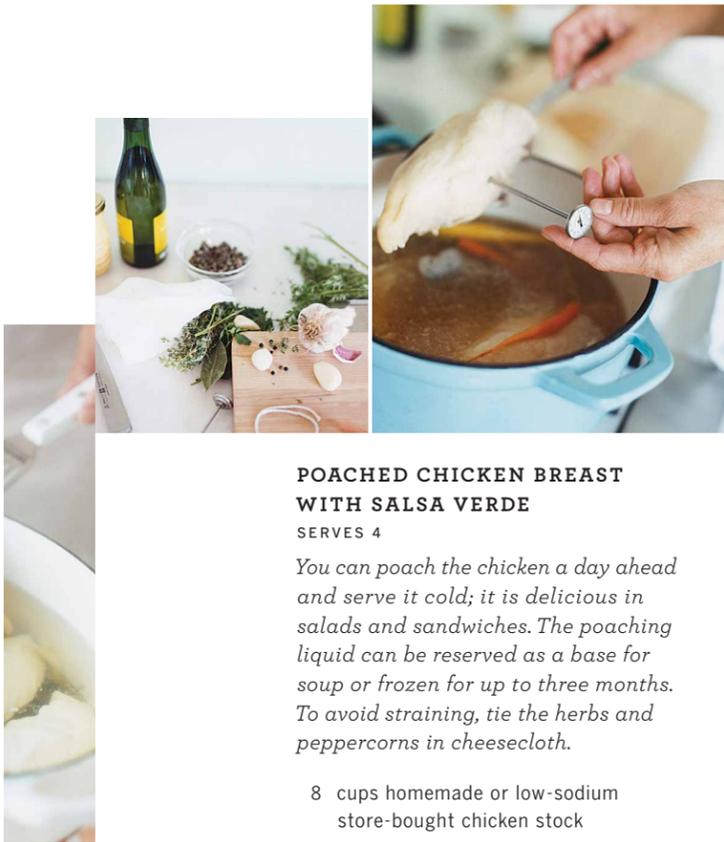
**4.** Clip a candy thermometer to side of pan. Reduce heat so that liquid is barely simmering (190° to 200°). Add halibut in a single layer. Cook, adjusting heat so that steam rises but only a stray bubble surfaces, until fish begins to flake when

gently pressed and an instant-read thermometer inserted into center of fillets registers 140°, about 6 minutes.

**5.** While fish is cooking, slice potatoes ¼ inch thick, and divide among 4 shallow dishes. Remove 6 lemon slices from pot, and finely dice the peel. Melt butter in a small saucepan, and stir in lemon juice.

**6.** As soon as the fish is cooked through, lift each fillet from pot using 2 slotted spatulas, and divide among 4 serving dishes. Add fennel wedges to dishes. Spoon about 1½ teaspoons of the cooking liquid over each fillet; sprinkle with diced lemon peel, and drizzle with lemon sauce. Garnish with remaining fennel fronds, and serve immediately.





**POACHED CHICKEN BREAST  
WITH SALSA VERDE**

SERVES 4

*You can poach the chicken a day ahead and serve it cold; it is delicious in salads and sandwiches. The poaching liquid can be reserved as a base for soup or frozen for up to three months. To avoid straining, tie the herbs and peppercorns in cheesecloth.*

- 8 cups homemade or low-sodium store-bought chicken stock
- 8 sprigs fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 bay leaf
- 12 whole black peppercorns
- Coarse salt
- 6 medium carrots, peeled and halved, or 12 small carrots
- 4 bone-in chicken breast halves with skin (about 3 pounds total)
- Salsa Verde (see the Recipes section), for serving

1. Place stock, parsley, thyme, garlic, bay leaf, peppercorns, 2 teaspoons salt, the carrots, and chicken in a pot. Add enough cold water to cover by about ½ inch.
2. Clip a candy thermometer to side of pot. Heat over medium-high heat until temperature of the stock reaches 170°



**BONE-IN CHICKEN BREASTS** Clockwise from top left: Adding all the ingredients for soup to the poaching liquid embellishes both broth and chicken. White meat achieves uncommon tenderness when poached until cooked through, as gauged by an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest portion of each breast. The chicken can be made in advance, covered with broth and parchment paper, and refrigerated for later. Sliced crosswise and served with herb sauce, it has plenty of eye appeal.

(liquid should be moving beneath the surface but no bubbles should appear). Cook, adjusting heat to keep the liquid between 170° and 180° and the surface still, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part of chicken breast registers 165°, 18 to 24 minutes.

3. Using a slotted spoon, remove chicken from liquid. Let stand until cool enough to handle. Remove skin, and cut breast along bone to remove meat in one piece. (Chicken can be covered partially with

broth and then topped with parchment paper and refrigerated overnight.)

4. Slice chicken crosswise. Divide chicken and carrots among 4 plates. Spoon 1 tablespoon poaching liquid and 2 tablespoons salsa over each chicken breast, and season with salt if desired.



## Food 101

**poached to perfection**

When poaching any ingredient, the primary consideration is maintaining the liquid below a simmer, because even a gentle boil will render the results tough. Here are a few more tips.

**FISH** Firm-flesh fish, such as salmon and most whitefish, including halibut, are best for poaching. Tie delicate fillets in cheesecloth to prevent breakage; for larger pieces, set a wire rack in a large pot or a deep-sided roasting pan. Fish is done when it begins to turn opaque throughout, flakes slightly when gently touched, and registers 140 degrees on an instant-read thermometer.

**CHICKEN** Almost any cut works well for poaching, whether a whole chicken, bone-in pieces, or boneless cutlets. You may need to top the chicken with a heavy plate to keep it submerged until it's done (when the thickest portion reaches 165 degrees).

**FRUIT** Many fruits take well to poaching, including apples, pears, plums, apricots, tangerines, and even prunes and dried figs. They tend to assume the flavor and color of the cooking liquid, whether wine, liqueur, or tea. The fruit is done when it can be pierced easily with a knife, and it can be served alone or with a spoonful of reduced liquid.

SEE RECIPES SECTION FOR MORE  
SEE GUIDE FOR SOURCES

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**PEARS** Clockwise from top left: A mingling of green tea and grapefruit zest transforms Bosc pears into an intriguing, healthful dessert. The tea is steeped separately, before the sliced fruit is added. The tender, cooked pears can rest in the liquid for hours, absorbing additional flavor before serving.

**PEARS POACHED IN GREEN TEA**  
SERVES 4

*Monitor the tea carefully. Steeping it too long or simmering it vigorously will impart a bitter flavor to the pears.*

- 3 tablespoons jasmine green tea leaves (see the Guide)
- 3 cups cold water
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- Finely grated zest and juice from ½ pink grapefruit
- 3 firm, ripe Bosc pears, peeled, halved lengthwise, cored, cut into ¼-inch slices, and rubbed with lemon

**1.** Place tea in a glass measuring cup or a teapot. Bring 2 cups water to a simmer, and pour over tea. Steep for 4 minutes.

**2.** Strain tea into a medium pot. Stir in sugar, grapefruit zest, and remaining 1 cup water. Gently simmer, stirring, until sugar has dissolved, about 2 minutes.

**3.** Add grapefruit juice and pears to pot. Cook, adjusting heat so that steam rises from surface but no bubbles appear, until pears are slightly translucent and just tender, 12 to 15 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, divide pears among 4 dishes, and let cool slightly.

**4.** Return liquid to a gentle simmer. Cook until slightly reduced, about 5 minutes. Pour over pears. Serve warm, at room temperature, or chilled. Pears can be refrigerated in syrup for up to 2 days.

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