

# GREENER PASTURES Eco FARM

## HERITAGE CHICKEN



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## What is Heritage Chicken?

Excerpts from Modern Farmer

Heritage-breed chickens are defined by [The Livestock Conservancy](#) as breeds with four characteristics:

1. they were recognized as an American Poultry Association Standard Breed prior to the mid-20th century;
2. they are naturally mating;
3. they can live a long and productive life outdoors; and,
4. they have a slow growth rate — meaning they reach market weight in no less than 16 weeks.

These are different than industrial-breed chickens — the kind you typically find at a grocery store or restaurant — in price, form, conformation and genetics.

## Raising Chickens on Pasture

By Carl VanRooyen

At Greener Pastures we raise everything out on pasture. We truly believe that this creates happy, healthy animals and results in nutrient dense, flavorful meat.

Having a successful pastured poultry operation starts with a good hearty breed of chicken. We have chosen raise the Barred Plymouth Rock. They are a heritage dual-purpose breed which means they yield good meat and are also strong egg producers. They are also winter hardy, which is crucial when the birds have constant outdoor access, even in winter. Barred Plymouth Rock chickens were one of the most popular chicken breeds on farms prior to the industrialization of the chicken farming industry.

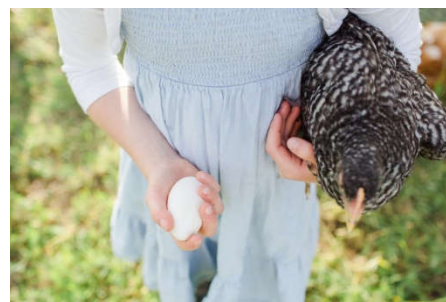
Pastured poultry comes with its challenges. Having birds outside means extra work to keep the birds safe from weather and predators. So we start our chicks indoors and move them out to pasture as soon as they have enough feathers to survive a cooler climate (around 4 weeks old). We move the chickens out on pasture with access to shelter - the “Cackellac”. It provides protection for the birds from the spring rains, summer sun and fall winds. The main benefit

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They’ll likely cost quite a bit more than your normal bird. However, many cooks and eaters swear by their flavor. Heritage birds also look a bit different, as Americans’ obsession with huge chicken breasts is a relatively recent phenomenon. Expect, instead, to see longer-bodied chickens with smaller breast-meat portions and darker dark-meat portions.

(<http://modernfarmer.com/2014/03/find-cook-heritage-chicken/>)



Barred Rock chickens: a dual-purpose breed giving a good supply of both eggs and meat.



of the Cackellac is that it is easy to move. We also surround the Cackellac with a portable electric poultry fence which is moved every three days.

The chickens follow the cattle in our rotational grazing program. This is a symbiotic system that mimics nature. Take the buffalo which used to be so prevalent in North America as an example. Buffalo would graze the plains in large herds and stick together for safety. After a while predators would cause the herd to move on to new grazing land. Shortly after the herd moved, a flock of birds came in to clean up after. On our farm the buffalo are grass fed cattle, the electric fence is the predator and the chickens graze in behind as the clean-up crew.

Chickens cannot maintain a healthy diet on forage alone. They generally consume about 10% of their diet from pasture and bugs. The other 90% of their diet consists of an Organic grain ration which we mill and mix directly on our farm.

We process our chickens at 20 weeks old. This means that they are fully mature at the time of processing.



Chickens on pasture in the Cackellacs.

This should be noticeable in the flavor of the meat as flavor does not set in until around 16 weeks maturity.

All of our birds are processed at a provincially inspected facility. This allows our customers to enjoy the healthfulness of local heritage chicken while being assured that food safety standards are being followed.

## Cooking Heritage Chicken

By Andrea VanRooyen

When you bring your frozen heritage-breed chicken home, there are a couple important things to keep in mind – it is not like cooking other chicken we are accustomed to here in North America. To get the fullest flavour and the best texture out of your bird, the key to preparing heritage chicken is to cook it low and slow.

Since our birds are raised for 20 weeks, the muscle is well developed. This means that the meat can be tougher than the chicken you may be used to. But you should find that, when cooked right, this meat is much tastier and nutritious than the industrial Cornish cross chicken meat.

Mary Lou Shaw, a writer for Mother Earth News, writes about this challenge: “I found the ‘toughness problem’ was solved by cooking these birds for a longer time at a lower temperature. Therefore, I roast the bird, oiled and breast-side down, for two and a half to three hours at 325 degrees in a non-vented roaster. The meat is tender and extremely tasty, and the juice is wonderful.”

*“The key to preparing heritage chicken is to cook it low and slow”*

Our family has adopted this method of cooking our heritage chicken and has found that we can feed our family of five 2 or 3 meals out of one bird. We get to enjoy the full flavour of slow cooker chicken the first night, use any remaining meat in a second meal such as enchiladas or stir fry, and make a delicious tasting stock using the chicken “leftovers” that we can freeze for later or turn into soup or stew. In this way, every part of the chicken is used to its maximum potential and there is very little wasted. Being able to feed our family multiple meals out of one 3-5lb chicken also makes the price of the meat more economically feasible.

Find some of our family’s favorite chicken recipes and meal ideas on page 3 and 4. We hope you enjoy getting the most out of your heritage chicken!

## Chicken Recipes & Meal Ideas

If you are feeling nervous about cooking heritage chicken and aren't sure where to start, we've included a few recipes and a number of meal ideas. As you become more comfortable with preparing your heritage chicken meat, you will likely find some great new ideas and recipes of your own. We love sharing tips and hints and welcome your input as well! If you find something that works really well for you or that has helped you, please feel free to share with us through email or on our Facebook page.

Something that has been a great help to our family as we cook is the blog '100 Days of Real Food'. As you can tell from the recipes below, it has some simple ways for cooking chicken that taste great and are good for you. For more real food recipe ideas, visit [www.100daysofrealfood.com](http://www.100daysofrealfood.com).

Some other great meal ideas to try include chicken stir fry, chicken soup, chicken curry, and chicken salad, just to name a few. Happy cooking!

## The Best Whole Chicken in a Crock Pot

From 100 Days of Real Food Blog

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne (red) pepper
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 onion
- 1 large chicken



We sell pastured raised whole chickens in our on-farm shoppe and online at [www.greenerpasturesecofarm.ca](http://www.greenerpasturesecofarm.ca).

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine the dried spices in a small bowl.
  2. Loosely chop the onion and place it in the bottom of the slow cooker.
  3. Remove any giblets from the chicken and then rub the spice mixture all over. You can even put some of the spices inside the cavity and under the skin covering the breasts.
  4. Put prepared chicken on top of the onions (breast side down) in the slow cooker, cover it, and turn it on to low. There is no need to add any liquid.
  5. Cook for 7 – 8 hours on low (for a 3 or 4 pound chicken) or until the chicken is falling off the bone. Don't forget to make homemade chicken stock with the leftover bones.
1. For the sauce combine 3 cups tomato sauce, cayenne pepper, ½ teaspoon cinnamon, 1 ½ teaspoons chili powder and heat through, keeping warm until needed.
  2. Turn broiler to high.
  3. Using two separate square or round baking dishes start to layer the ingredients in the following order:

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*For more updates on Greener Pastures Eco Farm,*

*Don't forget to Like us on Facebook!*

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## Overnight Chicken Stock in the Crock Pot

From 100 Days of Real Food Blog

### INGREDIENTS

- Leftover chicken bones or carcass roughly equivalent to one small or medium sized chicken
- 1 onion, peeled and loosely chopped
- 1 rib of celery, roughly chopped
- 1 carrot, roughly chopped (no need to peel)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 sprig fresh parsley
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- Salt, to taste

Note: If you are missing any of these ingredients I wouldn't let that stop you from making it anyway.

### INSTRUCTIONS

5. After removing all edible meat from the chicken put/leave the bones, skin, cooking juices, etc. in the crock pot.

If you are using the chicken carcass from the "The Best Whole Chicken in the Crock Pot" recipe just leave every single thing that's leftover (except the good meat of course) in the crock pot including the original onion and spices you used when making the chicken.

1. Add the onion, celery, carrot and spices on top of the bones and cover contents with water.
2. Turn the slow cooker onto "low" and cook all night long or alternatively you could start it in the morning and cook on "low" for 8 – 10 hours.
3. After the stock is done cooking turn off the heat and, using a soup ladle, pass the stock through a sieve to remove all herbs/bones/etc.
4. Either refrigerate or freeze the stock for future use. I usually freeze some in both 1 and 2-cup portions, and I also sometimes freeze stock in ice cube trays just in case I just need a little for making sauce or rice.

## Chicken Pot Pie

From The Pioneer Woman Cooks

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 celery stalks
- 3 medium carrots, peeled
- 1 large yellow onion
- 4 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup frozen peas
- 2 cups cooked chicken, bite sized pieces
- ¼ cup all purpose flour
- 2 cups chicken broth (see *Overnight Chicken Stock*)
- ¼ cup white wine
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp. ground thyme
- 1 tsp. salt
- Black pepper to taste
- Your favourite pie crust

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Finely dice all vegetables, except the peas.
2. Melt the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add the vegetables. Sauté until the vegetables start to turn translucent, a couple of minutes.

3. Add the chicken and stir to combine. Sprinkle the flour evenly over the vegetables and chicken and stir to combine. Cook for a couple minutes, stirring gently.
4. Pour in the chicken broth, stirring constantly. Stir in the wine, if using. The flour will combine with the chicken to create a delicious gravy.
5. Pour in the cream and stir. Allow the mixture to cook over low heat, thickening gradually, about 4 minutes. Season with the thyme, salt and pepper. Remove from the heat. Taste and adjust the seasonings as needed.
6. Pour the chicken mixture into a deep pie pan or small casserole dish.
7. Roll out the crust so that it's 1 inch larger than the pan. Place the crust on top of the chicken mixture and cut small slits in the top. Press the crust gently into the sides of the dish to seal.
8. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown and the filling is bubbly. Cool for 10 minutes before serving.