

Making Turkey Stock: Turn That Carcass into Heaven!

You may already know I roast at least one turkey every month (summer usually means a small bird), which means I have the basis for a little bit of Heaven: bones for soup stock. In case you don't know, stock comes from bones, broth comes from meat. Either way, the final result is homemade comfort food. I've been making poultry stock since I was a teenager. I've learned a few things I want to share.

For the kind of jellylike stock that makes the best soup, you need to concentrate on the Holy Trinity of extracting the most collagen from the bones (I crack open all the hollow long bones), which becomes gelatin:

1. Heat
2. Time
3. Acidity

One important tip is to add the vegetables, aromatics, and herbs *at the end*, and don't boil them. You'll avoid that overcooked vegetable flavor and won't have to worry about all that good flavor ending up in the stuff you throw away. More about this later.

Depending on what size bird you devoured, you'll need a stockpot of at least 12 quarts (3 gallon) to 20 quarts (5 gallon) capacity. Harvest as much of the skin as you can – you'll get more gelatin in the finished product. Add in the roasted neck, gizzard, heart, and any parts you removed while roasting the bird. Skip the liver! It can add a bitter note and 'liverish' smell. When you start cooking the stock, bring it to a full boil (and skim off the crud that rises to the top). Reduce the heat until you get an occasional bubble rising to the top, a/k/a faint ebullience.

Don't add vegetables and perishable herbs and spices at this time! You can safely add whole peppercorns, whole cloves, celery seeds, and perhaps a dried bay leaf or two. We'll get to the other ingredients after you've thoroughly extracted all that goodness from the bones, over time. I start my stock making in the late afternoon/evening, and let it simmer overnight. My latest tweak is to add a bit of vinegar, which helps extract collagen from bones, skin, etc.

Cookware & Ingredients for creating gelatin:

Stockpot – at least 12 quarts. You need room for tons of vegetables at the end.

Big spoon

Measuring spoons

Turkey carcass; roasted gizzard, neck, heart (optional)

Pan drippings (if you have any left after making gravy)

Vinegar (I use red wine vinegar, you can use plain white vinegar)

Celery seeds

Whole peppercorns

Whole cloves

Bay leaves

Sufficient water (I prefer Chateau Faucet) to cover the ingredients. Leave room at the top.

No salt yet

Dismember the carcass into chunks. Crack open all the long bones, which are hollow. I use a pair of channel lock pliers (dedicated to food prep) for this chore. Nut and seafood crackers will do the job, too. Add the turkey to the stock pot and dump any pan drippings into the pot. Add enough water to cover the pieces with an inch of liquid. Add 1Tbsp. (that's a tablespoon, 1/2 ounce) of vinegar, 1Tbsp. celery seeds, about half a dozen whole peppercorns, 3-4 whole cloves and 2-3 bay leaves.

Crank up the heat, bring to a full boil, and skim off any crud that floats on the surface (congealed intercellular fluid and blood). Reduce the heat to a faint ebullience (a bubble rises to the surface every few seconds, about 180°F). Most suggest you let this simmer uncovered, but I prefer to cover the pot, as I simmer it all night. Cook at least 4 hours. Longer cooking time increases gelatin content.

Cookware and Ingredients for finishing the stock:

Smaller pot for finished stock (I use an 8 quart pot)
Wire strainer for draining the turkey pieces and spent vegetables/spices/herbs
Slotted spoon for removing the spent stuff

Ingredients, in the order I add them to the pot (don't be stingy!):

3-4 whole carrots
3-4 celery ribs
2-3 leeks; the dark, woody parts of the leaves (save the tender bottoms for other dishes)
1 big onion
4-6 garlic cloves (half now, half smashed and added in the last 30 minutes – see below)
Whole ginger root; about 1/2 oz. (half now, half later)
1Tbsp. rubbed sage
1Tbsp. dried whole rosemary leaves
1Tbsp. dried thyme
1 bunch Italian parsley (yeah, the whole bunch)
Maybe a bit more water – depends on whether you can cover all the ingredients
No salt yet!

Wash the greens and roots in warm water. Cut the carrots, celery, and leek leaves into 3-4 inch sections, and add to the pot. Peel and cut the onion in half (across the equator) and add to the pot. Add half the garlic cloves and ginger root now. Later, you'll add the balance, smashed (and diced, too, if you like) near the end of the cooking (these flavors are 'perishable'). Add the Scarborough Fair herbs, cutting the parsley into 2-3 inch sections with scissors. Do NOT boil! You're poaching these ingredients, to keep them from soaking up the goodness (about 180°F).

Cook for 45 minutes, add the rest of the smashed garlic and ginger root, and cook for a final half hour. Switch off the heat. Begin removing the ingredients with a slotted spoon and dumping them in small batches into a wire strainer on top of your smaller pot. Let each batch drain well, and dump the remains into the paper-in-plastic bag you got for the bird (reuse – better than recycling).

Put the smaller pot on the stove and boil rapidly, reducing the volume by about half. Now, rapidly cool the stock. I use tap water in the sink, bathing the pot and changing the water until

the stock reaches a temperature of 70°F, then adding ice to cool it to 50°F. Put it in the refrigerator (or freezer, if you have room). Once it forms a firm layer of fat on the top, peel it off and discard. Now you have turkey stock that will amaze!

My personal preference for gobbling is adding Kluski noodles, cut turkey and salt, with a scant dash of pepper. I boil the noodles for about 2/3 of the recommended time, then drain and dump into the stock, repeating the cooling process.

A word about salt: you can always add more, you can't add less! If, by accident, you did add too much, peel a raw potato and simmer it in the stock. It'll wick up some of the salt. Learned that trick from a professional chef.

©2015 by Vince Runza. All rights reserved, unreservedly