



Thigh's the Limit

Dashi-Butter Braised Chicken

Shiitake • Bok Choy • One Pan • Real Umami, No Bouillon Cubes



Shown here with our Grain of Truth Dashi Rice — see the companion sheet for that recipe.

The cheaper cut wins again: Dark meat, rich fat, and a dashi pan sauce that does the heavy lifting for you.

Here's a quiet little rebellion: the most celebrated cut of chicken isn't the best one. Boneless, skinless breasts get all the marketing, but thighs and drumsticks deliver far better fat, deeper flavor, and infinitely more forgiveness in the pan. For a nutrient-dense, fat-and-protein-forward plate, dark meat isn't a compromise—it's the smart move.

The real secret weapon here is dashi—a traditional Japanese broth built from kombu, shiitake, and bonito flakes. A single sachet of quality dashi delivers the deep, savory punch that most cooks rely on processed bouillon cubes to achieve—except dashi gets there using real, whole ingredients instead of maltodextrin, seed oils, and an avalanche of sodium.

If pairing a sea-and-sun-dried broth with poultry sounds like an odd combination, rest assured: it's time-tested culinary tradition. Dashi and chicken are a foundational pair in Japanese home cooking. Oyakodon—chicken and egg simmered in a dashi broth—is an everyday staple, the kind of deeply comforting food found at kitchen tables and neighborhood diners across Japan. While dashi might read as “fishy” on paper to Western ears, in practice it functions just like a master stock: the foundational, savory backbone that elevates everything it touches.

The core technique here is the sear. Lay the chicken skin-side down in a hot pan and leave it alone. That deep golden crust isn't just color; it's the Maillard reaction—heat transforming surface proteins into hundreds of complex, savory flavor compounds. Rush it or crowd the pan, and you lose the crust.

After that, it's effortless one-pan execution: sauté the shiitakes right in the rendered chicken fat, deglaze with your dashi, and let the chicken finish low and slow until tender. A knob of butter stirred in at the very end turns the braising liquid into a glossy, velvety reduction—no flour, cornstarch, or thickeners required.

Fifteen minutes of hands-on work is all this really asks of you—the dashi and the oven handle the rest while you do something else entirely. And every single ingredient in the pan is something you can actually trust. Sear hard, don't rush the crust, and let the dashi do the rest.



Ingredients

Serves 4 • 35–40 minutes total, ~15 active

- 4 chicken leg quarters (thigh and drumstick attached, about 2 1/2 lb total)
- Salt and black pepper, to season
- 1 Tbsp avocado oil (or other high-heat oil)
- 8 oz shiitake mushrooms, sliced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/4 cups brewed dashi (see sourcing note)
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce or tamari
- 3 Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 4 heads baby bok choy, halved lengthwise
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced, for garnish
- 1 clove garlic or 1-inch knob ginger, for finishing (microplaned)



The dashi we're using: bonito, kombu, shiitake, dried sardine — no shortcuts.

Sourcing & Technique Notes

Leg quarters vs. parts: This recipe was tested with whole chicken leg quarters — thigh and drumstick still attached. Bell & Evans labels these “whole legs.” If your store only carries thighs and drumsticks separately, that works too: just grab 4 of each.

Dashi: Brew per the packet's instructions — one tea-bag style pack steeped or simmered in 600–700 ml water for 4–5 minutes makes a clean, savory stock. Look for one with a short, real-food ingredient list: bonito, kombu, shiitake, dried sardine. That's it — no need for anything fancier. We buy ours on Amazon; the price has climbed from \$12.99 to \$15.99 per 10-pack recently, so it's worth price-checking before you stock up.

Skin matters: Leave it on. It renders fat for the sauté, crisps beautifully, and is where most of the flavor — and a good amount of the fat you actually want here — lives.

Don't crowd the pan: Give the chicken room to breathe when searing. Crowding traps steam and you lose the crust you're working for.

The microplane finish: A light dusting of fresh garlic or ginger, grated right over the finished dish, adds a bright, aromatic hit that dried spice can't match — and it's a genuinely easy way to pack in more micronutrients.

Bok choy substitution: Any quick-cooking green works — baby spinach, Swiss chard ribbons, or napa cabbage all take well to a last-minute wilt in the braising liquid.

Method

- 1 Brew your dashi first so it's ready when you need it — one pack in 600–700 ml water, simmered 4–5 minutes. Set aside.
- 2 Pat the chicken completely dry with paper towels. A dry surface is what lets the skin crisp instead of steam. Season all over with salt and pepper.
- 3 Heat the avocado oil in a large, oven-safe or braising-capable skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering.
- 4 Lay the chicken skin-side down. Don't move it. Let it sear undisturbed for 6–8 minutes until the skin is deeply golden — this is the Maillard reaction doing its work, and it's worth the patience.
- 5 Flip briefly, about 1–2 minutes on the other side, then remove the chicken to a plate. It won't be cooked through yet — that's fine, it finishes in the braise.
- 6 Add the sliced shiitake to the rendered fat left in the pan. Sauté 3–4 minutes until browned and fragrant. Add the garlic and cook 30 seconds more, just until fragrant.
- 7 Pour in the dashi and soy sauce, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan — that's flavor, not mess. Bring to a simmer.
- 8 Nestle the chicken back in, skin-side up and above the liquid line so it stays crisp. Cover and simmer on low for 25–30 minutes, until the chicken is tender and cooked through.
- 9 In the last 5 minutes, tuck the halved bok choy into the liquid around the chicken just to wilt — you want it bright green, not mushy.
- 10 Move the chicken and bok choy to a serving platter. Off the heat, stir the butter into the braising liquid a piece at a time until glossy — that's your pan sauce.
- 11 Spoon the sauce over the chicken, finish with a light pass of the microplane over garlic or ginger, and scatter the scallions on top. Serve.



Mise en place: everything prepped and ready before the pan gets hot.

Nutrition, Equipment & Cost

Macronutrients — PER SERVING

(this recipe yields 4 servings total; all figures below are for one serving)

MACRO	GRAMS	% OF CALORIES
Calories	~540 kcal	
Protein	35 g	26%
Fat	40 g	66%
Total Carbohydrate	11 g	8%

Total carbohydrate includes ~2g dietary fiber. Macro % of calories sums to 100%.

Estimated using bone-in, skin-on thighs and drumsticks; figures will shift slightly with exact cut weight.

Key Nutrients Beyond Macros

Selenium and B12 (dark meat chicken) — support thyroid function and red blood cell formation.

Umami compounds from dashi (glutamate + inosinate) — the synergy behind why this tastes so satisfying without added sugar or heavy sauce.

Vitamin K and folate (bok choy) — a cruciferous green that holds up well to quick cooking.

Allicin (fresh garlic, especially microplaned) — more available when garlic is freshly grated rather than long-cooked from the start.

Equipment

- Large oven-safe or lidded braising skillet
- Tongs
- Cutting board & chef's knife
- Microplane or fine grater
- Measuring cup, for the dashi

Approximate Cost

~\$4–5 per serving

Based on actual receipt pricing: chicken leg quarters at \$3.49/lb (\$11.10 for 5, evenly sized), plus shiitake, bok choy, garlic, scallions, and current dashi cost at \$15.99 per 10-pack, and you will need one pack of dashi.

