



Podcast Script
Season 1 / Episode 12 -
[Breaking Down Chicken / Knife Skills / Waste Control]
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INTRODUCTION

Hello chefs, today we talk breaking down a chicken, knife skills and waste control. I am Mark Grigsby, your chef and guide through this experience, and this.. Is the IncrEDIBLE Discourse.

UPDATE / INTRODUCTION

Before we get started, a quick update on the show.. So we started doing youtube shorts this week with a lot of success. They're funny, informative and give you little brain food for your culinary minds. Check 'em out and drop a comment to let us know what you think. I'm also designing a monthly newsletter that you can subscribe to on the website. I plan on including tips, just like I do on the show, plans, teasers for upcoming episodes and different focuses on various topics. You should subscribe so you're always up to date on all things the incredible discourse.

We're also now available on Iheartradio for those who prefer that platform. My idea is to be able to offer the show to as many folks who are willing to listen across any platform.. So if you have Iheartradio and love the show be sure to give us a listen over there.

I don't know if you guys have noticed yet, but I added thumbnails to all of the previous episodes. I've been getting my creative on in the lab lately trying to spice up the show and bring more flair and interest to our discussions. It's not much, but I like where the show is going.. Always trying to get better and deliver a worthwhile show to all of my listeners.

Lastly, since I brought up the creative thing.. I'm also going to start youtube shorts.. Small little videos with tips to help. I want them to be funny, encouraging and informative little snippets that touch on some of the things we've covered on the show so far. My thought is that if you get a visual and maybe a joke or two behind the lesson, it'll stick more. I'll let you know when it launches officially, you let me know if you like them.

So now that we got our update out of the way, let's talk business.

Today we're going to cover breaking down the whole chicken and why that's important in a home or professional setting and why you should know the skill of butchering. In our advice

column today we dive into knife skills and waste control and why both of those topics are critical things to know in a kitchen.

But before we get into the thick of it, as usual, it's important that we do our history lesson.. So let's jump in that time machine and go way back.. Like 8000 years back..

Humans have been butchering poultry for thousands of years with evidence of domesticated chickens, specifically the red junglefowl, being hacked up dating back over 8000 years ago in southeast asia. Chickens spread through trade and migration, becoming a staple protein worldwide. Over time, as societies shifted toward agriculture, chickens became a key food source due to their rapid reproduction and adaptability to various climates.

By 2000 BCE, chickens had spread throughout Asia, the middle east and africa where they were integrated into early diets and culinary traditions. The Romans played a significant role in chicken farming and butchering. They developed some of the first known written recipes for chicken dishes, including detailed instructions on how to portion and prepare them for cooking. In medieval Europe, chickens were often reserved for the wealthy due to their value as egg layers, and butchery was a skilled craft practiced by professional butchers in villages and royal kitchens. In the 19th century, Auguste Escoffier standardized the French culinary system, making precise butchery of poultry an essential skill in professional kitchens. French butchery emphasizes efficiency, cleanliness, and presentation, leading to specialized cuts like the "suprême" or "airline" and techniques such as ballottine, where you debone and stuff the whole bird. In contrast, British and American butchery leaned more towards breaking chickens into standard retail cuts for home cooks and markets. In China, whole chickens are often butchered with a cleaver rather than a boning knife, and they are typically served with the bone-in, chopped into small, bite-sized pieces for ease of eating with chopsticks. Japanese yakitori chefs break down chickens into precise parts, using every component—including cartilage, skin, and offal—for skewered and grilled delicacies. In India, butchering techniques focus on bone-in cuts, as stewed and braised dishes like curries benefit from the deeper flavor of slow-cooked bones and marrow.

The 20th century saw a shift toward industrial poultry farming, which dramatically changed the way chickens were butchered and sold. In the 1950s-60s, as refrigeration became widespread, grocery stores began selling pre-cut chicken parts, making home butchery less common in many Western households. Factory butchering & automation introduced the mass production of uniform chicken cuts (boneless, skinless breasts, wings, drumsticks), but many chefs argue that this compromised flavor, quality, and the appreciation of whole-animal cooking. Recently, farm-to-table movements and sustainable cooking practices have revived interest in whole chicken butchery, encouraging home cooks and chefs to buy local, free-range birds and utilize every part of the chicken efficiently.

The philosophy behind breaking down the bird is pretty simple and can be broken down into 3 parts: skill development, creativity and respect.

Breaking down the whole bird is a core skill in professional kitchens that improves knife control, efficiency and confidence. Knowing how to perform this skill confidently tells the chef that you know how to hold the knife and where to cut. Once you become proficient at this your efficiency will go up.

When it comes to customization and creativity.. You control the portioning, the size and the use of each piece. No more being at the mercy of what's left in the case in those plastic little trays that who knows how long they've been there.. Gross. And within the price of those little trays, you're paying the butcher. So the price is much higher than if you butchered the bird yourself. You control whether or not you keep the skin... some people eat it, some people don't.. bone-in versus boneless.. But at least you get to choose... and there's empowerment there. Not to mention the best part of the whole process.. You get the bones! Now you can make a stock which now in turn, gives you many more options of dishes or sauces you can make to go with your delicious chicken dishes. Having every part of the bird at your disposal gives you options... and chefs like options. It allows them to be creative without limitations.. But remember to respect the bird. Breaking down a chicken teaches cooks to respect the whole animal and to utilize every single part that will ultimately reduce waste and raise the value of your bird.

Our minds are in the right place. Now it's time to butcher some bird! Ready? Let's go.

TOPIC 1 - Breaking down the bird

1. **Start with removing the wishbone and excess skin** - Removing the wishbone is an easy but necessary step. If you don't remove it, when you go to remove the breast, you will have a harder time getting a clean removal. It's not impossible to remove the breasts without taking out the wishbone, but it does make it a hell of a lot easier. So.. take your knife and put it into the cavity where the neck and head would be and scrape your blade alongside the right and left sides of this hole, after a few scrapes you will start to hear your knife scraping a bone. This is the wishbone. Now that you have located it, put the tip of your knife into the meat opposite of where you just scraped, follow it straight down being careful not to cut into the breast meat. Repeat for the other side. Now you should have 2 of the 3 ends of this bone exposed. With your hands pinch the tip of this bone that is still connected at the top and twist and pull to dislodge it. If you break it, it's ok just make sure that you get all of the pieces out. Dry this bone and do the whole wishing thing.
Next, remove the excess skin on the back side of the bird. Turn your bird around and you will see an excess of skin hanging off the ass of this bird, simply pull it and cut, being careful not to cut too much so that your breasts are still fully covered. Save this for render!
2. **Remove the legs** - Flip your bird upside down and carefully cut through the excess skin to where the leg connects to the body. Wiggle to find the thigh joint, then pull back the entire leg until you hear a pop. you should see the thigh bone disconnect from the body and the bone exposed. Slide

your knife in between where the thigh bone popped off and straight back to the tail, be careful not to damage the oyster if you're trying not to damage them to remove. Repeat this process for the second leg.

3. **Separate the legs** - If you want to separate the leg and the thigh, you do this by wiggling the leg and the thigh to find the joint that connects them. Once you do you will cut right where it bends. It will seem like you're cutting more from the thigh than the leg, but that's where the joint is! Repeat this for the second leg quarter.
4. **Remove the oysters** - You can remove them when you remove the legs, or.. Not. Let's do this as if you have already removed the legs. While the bird is breast side down, find the two little bulges of meat located in the lower back of the chicken. Run your knife under the back skin to disconnect it from the back bone and then up again to cut through allowing you to now peel the skin down revealing the oysters. Simply take the tip of your knife and carve out the top of these little gems. The cavity that this piece is located in is concave, like a pool. After making the incision put your thumb into the hole and pluck out the oyster. They're incredibly small, but also incredibly tender and flavorful. Some consider this the absolute best part of the chicken.
5. **Remove the wing tips** - Flip your bird right side up or breast side up. Wiggle the tip of the wing to find the joint and cut through. Save these for stock!
6. **Remove the wings** - Remove the wings by wiggling the wing to find the joint that is connected to the body of the bird. Cut through that thin layer of skin to expose this joint. Just like you did with the leg, pull it back to hyperextend it further exposing that joint and cut right through. This will give you the wing with the first and second joints connected. Again, wiggle the two pieces at the bend to find the joint, and cut through. Repeat this entire process for the second wing.
7. **Remove the Breasts** - Now, to complete the process of butchering or breaking down the whole chicken, we remove the breasts. Run your thumb down the center of the breastbone between the breasts. Now you're going to slide your knife alongside this bone to carve the meat from the bone in nice smooth cuts curving along the carcass until you have cut all the way down to the slender tip of the breast. Repeat this process for the second breast.

You just broke down a bird in what the industry calls an "8 way". This means that you have 8 edible pieces to work with. 2 legs, 2 thighs. 2 breasts, and 2 wings. And you also came away with excess skin to render and cook with.. A carcass and wing tips to make a stock with.. I mean shit you have at least 3 hearty meals here.. With just one bird.

Now there are numerous other ways to break down a bird.. 8 way isn't the only way, it's just the most common way. You could not break the legs in half and have 2 dark meat quarters.. Or you

could keep the wings together and have the full wing... or you could separate the tenderloins from the bottom of the breasts and now you have 10 pieces to work with... Or you could cut the wing from the whole bird at the second joint leaving the drumette on the breast. We call this an airline breast in America.. In France they call it supreme. This is my favorite for the restaurant for a couple of reasons. First it gives a simple chicken breast dish a more elegant look and also gives the consumer a little bonus bite of super tender meat at the end. Secondly, it shows the mastery of the butcher. It's not difficult to pull off this cut, no, but it does take practice. If you cut too far in you risk cutting the crease that holds this drumette to the breast and then it looks stupid. I have served airline chicken breast in almost all of my restaurants as one of my premier chicken entree dishes. I'll do this dish as one of our episodic recipes one day, but we crispy the skin and finish in the oven, deglaze the pan with white wine and then create a pan sauce with the chicken stock we make from the bones and butter. Delicious. Simple. A winner every time.

So you see.. Butchering the chicken just gives you so many options, plus the quality is super high while the cost stays lower than if you bought the bird already cut up... And you get the bones to make the stock which you use to make a sauce to compliment the dish. I don't see how you lose here.

Go buy a whole chicken. Try the butchering out. Every grocery store sells the whole chicken. Let me know how you did.. Send me photos of your work on X or at theincrediblediscourse.com. And if you need some help, shoot us a message and I'll reach out to you and help you. Don't get discouraged if you don't get it right the first time.. Or hell even the first 2 or 3 times.. But every time you do it, you should remember your experience from the time before and build from it. You know.. That 1% your chef is always talking about. And once you're done and you have the bones.. Go and make you a stock and listen to episode 3 and download the resource on stocks and broths where I go into detail about how to make a perfect stock.. A lot of really good information there to help guide you in creating amazing dishes and elevating your cooking game.

Now that our bellies are full.. Wait.. we didn't eat shit today.. It's just been brainfood all day

Nonetheless.. It's time for

Food for thought.. Or what I like to call.. Pro Tips from a chef's lips.

TOPIC 2 - Home Cook Advice - KNIFE SKILLS

So today's first topic focuses on knife skills and why they're so important. If you haven't noticed by now.. Knife skills allow you to be versatile in so many things.

First precision and consistency. When you have good knife skills and you can cut everything uniform and neat.. It helps you cook everything even. We've talked before on the show about not cutting everything all the right size. Who remembers one of the most important reasons why we do this?... anyone? Because when it looks like ray charles cut your vegetables, all of those

little interesting shapes you cut all cook at different times. And then you have some mushy, some raw and the experience when you eat it isn't as good as it should be. Uniformity should be the goal here.. For the cooking, the flavor and the presentation. And in pro kitchens, every plate must look the same. How will your plates look when all of your cuts look like they belong in one of those kids shapes sorting boxes? Refine your technique.. Learn the bear claw where you tuck your thumb and measure with your knuckles. And go slow..

Which brings me to the next point.. Safety. Always use a sharp knife.. A sharp knife means you will get better and more precise cuts and less bruising of the product.. But with a sharper knife, a larger risk presents itself most of the time.. My seasoned veterans know what I'm talking about. Some Say they would rather be cut with a sharp knife than a dull one. The dull one usually comes with bruising. They hurt more & they take longer to heal. Proper technique reduces accidents and injuries. I've seen many cooks over the years cut themselves because of poor technique or going too fast. Don't go fast if you're not ready. In pro kitchens a cut means that we have to trash the entire prep and start over because of contamination.. Then take the time from said prep to clean and properly bandage the wound.. Then sanitize the entire workstation.. Damn that's a lot of time. Time is money.. Plus the cost of what you just threw in the garbage. And that whole scenario is considering that this is a small superficial cut.. What of you really cut yourself and you need to go to the hospital and get stitches and the whole nine yards.. Now the kitchen is down a cook.. Down the prep and everything is contaminated.. You see the domino effect here? Refine your technique chefs. Learn how we cut and develop that skill. And that's for home and pro cooks. If you're in a kitchen, you should know how to properly hold and use a knife.

Once you do know how to hold and use your knife you become efficient and faster saving you time because you can prep faster with less effort. That bear claw technique is mentioned? Well mastering this technique minimizes your overall movement and improves your work flow. You'll be able to take on a larger amount of prep and be able to knock it down a lot faster, because you'll be confident with your knife.

And cooking and prepping are more enjoyable when you're confident with your knife. Mastering knife techniques allows you to experiment with different textures, cuts and presentations.. Further elevating the dining experience. And that's what we're here for right? Elevated dining experience regardless of setting. If you're not trying to elevate your kitchen game, save yourself the time and feeling like it's a chore and eat from the microwave. You know chef mic is always on call when you need him.. And when I say chef mic.. I don't mean michael.. I mean microwave. Good knife skills make cooking feel like the craft that it is... building from the ground up, and doing it correctly.

Poor knife skills lead to excess waste.. Losing too much meat when you butcher or cut meat.. Cutting too much from a vegetable.. You don't maximize with your ingredients and now you're just wasting money. And maybe this doesn't seem like much from a home cook, but if you're cooking for your entire family of 4, 6 nights a week and recklessly waste food because of poor knife skills.. It may seem like a little bit today and then a little tomorrow but the shit adds up. 6

days of wasting food.. Is 24 nights of wasted food per month! That blows my mind. And the kicker to that scenario is that we're only talking about the nights.. Most people eat 2 or 3 times a day.. Now multiply that one out. If it's not eye opening.. Maybe you are Ray Charles lol. In pro kitchens we use just about every single part of the ingredient so that we can stretch every product and yield more value per ingredient and maximize our profit margin. Chefs, you should have a bucket in your walk in cooler for scraps. Throw all that shit in your stock pot versus cutting fresh vegetables for the stock or create a special with them. Even if there are few scraps.. It helps reduce your waste and maximize your profit. Work smarter.. Make more money.

TOPIC 3 - Professional Chef Advice - WASTE CONTROL

Alright.. Time for my pros to get a little injection of knowledge.. Today's pro topic is all about waste.. And we can start with the obvious.. Waste equals lost money. I think that we all know that throwing away food costs money... if you don't, you need a small crash course on the business side of the restaurant or industry. Lucky for you.. You're an avid fan and subscriber to the incredible discourse with your truly and I'm about to school you so buckle your ass up.

So.. the obvious... money lost. Ok, so whether it's throwing away usable scraps or spoilage.. Both count as lost money. In the past segment we talked about turning those scraps into something that can make you money like the stock pot or a special and I think that's a great way to increase your sales.. And I like to think of that as kinda, let's say extra sales.. Because you originally bought the product for something else that is already making you money. But what about the money that was already supposed to go out on the tables? I'm talking about spoilage. Restaurants operate on tight margins so throwing away spoiled food should be a no no. And this happens because of poor training and practices. When you receive the truck, whoever is putting away the product should be rotating and marking things "use first". They sell these really big and round stickers that say "use first" in like 3 different languages. I know that it sounds pretty elementary, but you would be surprised how many things go bad and how quickly they turn when you don't rotate properly. If you're a seasoned pro, you've probably heard the term FIFO. You know.. First in first out. It's not just a catchy slogan.. It's a way of life in the restaurant. Always rotate. Otherwise you're going to always waste. Practice smart waste control by pre portioning everything you can. This way you don't over serve and you always know exactly how much is going out every single time. Utilize those scraps and repurpose ingredients.. Just like we talked about in the first segment. Yes this takes a little craftiness on your part and some extra thought, but once you become dedicated to doing this it just becomes another part of your day. Trimmings can be used for soups, stocks and pickles. Restaurants turn "ugly produce" into house made sauces, dressings or fermentations to add value to their menus. I know a restaurant's kitchen staff that takes anything that has a root and regrows it in their greenhouse on the property.. Any other scraps that start to turn are turned into compost to fertilize those ends, creating a circle of life that just keeps giving back to them. And they do it as a team because it's what they believe in doing, not because the owners told them to or that it's the concept behind the whole place. They regrow and repurpose many ingredients like scallions, pineapple, peppers, celery, frisee and many other things. And anything else that starts to turn goes into the compost bin like egg shells, coffee grounds, pepper stems and it has become a

supreme focus that the entire staff has adapted to. And if you're at home, less waste means less money spent on groceries. There is a place for repurposing in both worlds, and that's what this entire episode is all about.. Utilizing every part of every ingredient that you possibly can.

I've said before that we all have a responsibility to the environment and sustainability. Restaurants produce millions of tons of food waste per year and this contributes to landfill overflows and ultimately strains the environment. Reducing waste means reducing your carbon footprint.. And that means conserving water, ensuring sustainable sourcing practices and limiting or reducing the amount of resources needed to produce products. Practice the "root to stem" or "nose to tail" mentality where you diligently use every single part of the ingredient or animal and promote responsible dining.

Waste reduction offers so much more to a kitchen than just repurposing ingredients.. It fosters kitchen efficiency, organization, professionalism, respect and culinary discipline. A waste conscious kitchen is a well-run kitchen.. Less clutter, fewer unnecessary product orders and more streamline workflow helps the flow of the kitchen as a whole. Following that acronym I gave you earlier.. FIFO.. proper labeling and storage to prevent spoilage.. All of these things should be a routine in your kitchens! And at the very least.. The mentality of being *the* chef, a chef or even the idea of aspiring to be a chef takes discipline. Being mindful of waste is a mark of a skilled chef.. Cooks and chefs respect the ingredients and their costs. Cooks who minimize waste stand out to their chefs because they understand food costs, organization and efficiency. Home chefs.. Organize your pantry and your fridge to help avoid buying duplicate ingredients and prevent spoilage. In every setting there is a focus on waste reduction.

In my very first episode we did a little story time and talked about what it means to be a chef.. And before I went on my rant and told my story I said that there could be many other things that could contribute to what it means to be a chef.. And this is one of them. It starts with the responsibility of putting out amazing dishes for your diners, yes.. But along the path of doing that, there is also the responsibility and mentality of delivering those dishes the *right* way. A great chef understands the respect and discipline necessary to take on that responsibility.. And that's what makes a professional. The title is so much more than just a 4 letter word. You live it. You breathe it. It's a way of life. And that path to becoming a chef may seem rigorous.. But if you have patience, dedication and adapt to the "way of life" one day you'll get to wear that chef coat with your name and title on it and it won't just be a uniform, it'll be a pride.

Final Thought (Outro)

Today's final thought leaves us with the ideas of what we can save and what we can create with those things when we control our waste. Our entire episode focused on how we could use every ingredient instead of throwing it away... even if that means saving it for later when you think of something to do with it. We learned how to butcher down the entire bird and the importance of having each piece and the power that it gives, to control those pieces. Then we learned how knife skills contribute to waste control. You see? Everything relates to another and brings this culinary escapade round full circle. All of these things are important, maybe some more than

others, but without all of them there would be a void within the lessons that create our foundations as chefs. Waste control is one of many things that make up what a chef should be, and undoubtedly one of the top things.. And it's not something that you just know. It takes years of practice and creativity to really have a hard control over where every little bit goes. So add this to the ever lengthening list of things to practice.. And go buy yourself a chicken and try your hand at breaking it down. If you need any help you know where to find it. Follow us on X and send us pictures of your bird for a chance to get a shout out on the show. Subscribe on youtube, spotify, amazon music and now iheartradio so you never miss a beat of the incredible discourse. Check out the website to get today's downloadable resource about butchering, sign up for the newsletter when it comes out and thank you for your time as always..

I am Mark Grigsby, and you've just been put through another episode of the incredible discourse, till next time...