

Dreamy Creamy Chicken Pie

To make your dreamy creamy chicken pie, the first thing you need is a really big pot; big enough to put the chicken in whole and cover it with cold water. Into that, you put a couple of fat carrots that you've peeled (you don't need to top and tail them), a couple of sticks of celery, an onion (that's halved and peeled) and an entire bulb of garlic. Those just get plonked into the water. What you're doing there is a downpayment on the veg that is going to go into the pie later. It's a good investment of time as well as flavour! Also, add some branch herbs (winter herbs); a stick of rosemary, some branches of thyme and a couple of bay leaves. The robust herbs, not the soft ones. You throw all of those in and you pop the lid on and you make sure the chicken is submerged in the cold water and then you bring it up to a simmer. Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles! You don't need to skim it.

Then just turn it down when you have small bubbles and at that stage, just walk away for about an hour (until the chicken is cooked). There's a massive window of this chicken being cooked and not over-cooking so don't stress about it too much! Smaller chicken if there's less of you, a big chicken if there's more of you. It's a loose recipe, just scale it up and down in terms of the size of your family or whoever you're cooking for.

About an hour later, you come back to it. You use something sensible (like a pair of tongs or a slotted spoon) to lift the chicken out. Then you put it in a tray and let it cool at room temperature.

Then you turn the heat right up on the stock (you have now made chicken stock, congratulations) and you simmer it down to about a litre. Again, you don't need to be too precise about it. What you're doing is intensifying the flavour as it's quite watery at the moment and you want to get it nice and chickeny. It's going to be the stock you add to your base.

So, you boil down the chicken stock until it's nice and strong. I do tend to throw in one of those chicken stock tubs just to really boost up that chickeny flavour as well. It's a mixture of homemade and a little nudge from Mr Knorr or whoever...Mrs Knorr?

Next thing you do is get a couple of leeks and chop them. I tend to cut them in half, down the entire length (so they're still held together by the root). Chop them down into little semi-circles and give it a good wash! Then you get a wide pan and you put half the butter in it until it fizzes. Then you pop the leeks in, as well as the mushrooms (which you have de-stalked, washed and cut into quarters). So you're frying the mushrooms and leeks in another pan. A nice high heat to start with (to get the water out of the leeks). Then when the leeks start to soften, you turn the heat down a bit. You want to get them to that nice yellowy, muted-green colour and get the sweetness out of them. They will probably be on there for around fifteen minutes in total. Add a bit of seasoning (salt and pepper).

So then you have your stock and your leeks and mushrooms in another pan. Grab a third pan, I know a three-pan dish, and melt the rest of the butter (you're making a roux here which will be

the base of the creamy bit). Once the butter is melted and fizzling, you stir in the flour with a wooden spoon.

You've now taken the nice bits of veg out of your chicken stock that were in there whilst it was reducing and you've put the chicken stock into a jug. You've got the veg, which is cooling down with the chicken (the carrots, celery and garlic). Once the roux has cooked out for a couple of minutes, you add a couple of ladles of stock at a time. You start with a wooden spoon and it makes a sort of gluey paste, you've all made white sauce before, I'm sure. Once you've put a couple more ladles of stock in, you want to move to a balloon whisk. Whisk it until it's smooth. You're working on a medium-low heat here. By the time you've put in the last of the chicken stock, bring it up to a simmer and give it a taste, turn it off and season it.

You're now in prime chicken pie position! All you need to do now is pick the chicken so all the meat comes off. You top and tail the carrot, chop the veg up into whatever bite-sized pieces you want. Same with the celery. You squeeze the entire bulb of cooked garlic in with the mushrooms and leeks. You are pretty much good to go! You add your pieces of chicken into your velouté, which is the technical name for the sauce you have made. When you put stock into a roux, it makes a velouté.

You're almost over the line now. Mix your picked chicken in with the veg it was cooked with. You have another pan with the garlic, leeks and mushrooms in. They are all going into the same thing now. It's starting to look like a chicken pie! You move it into your chicken pie cooking vessel which is an oven-proof dish.

If you've done the clever thing and bought a pre-rolled pastry, then all you need to do is egg wash the outside of the dish and pop the pastry on it (having given it a roll to make sure it fits). Use any offcuts to make a pretty picture of a chicken, a rising sun, a sunflower or whatever jolly thing is going to brighten up your day. You attach those with a bit of egg wash. Pretty pictures are essential. Then you egg wash the whole thing.

You will have preheated your oven to around 180°C. You put the chicken pie on a tray (in case of any spillages). Oven-cleaning is boring. Bake it for about around half an hour-forty minutes until it's golden on top. The chicken is already cooked so you don't need to worry about that. You can give it a second egg wash halfway through the cooking if you want just to really get the pastry to pop, in terms of colour.

It's dreamy creamy chicken pie time.

Good job! Pat on the back.