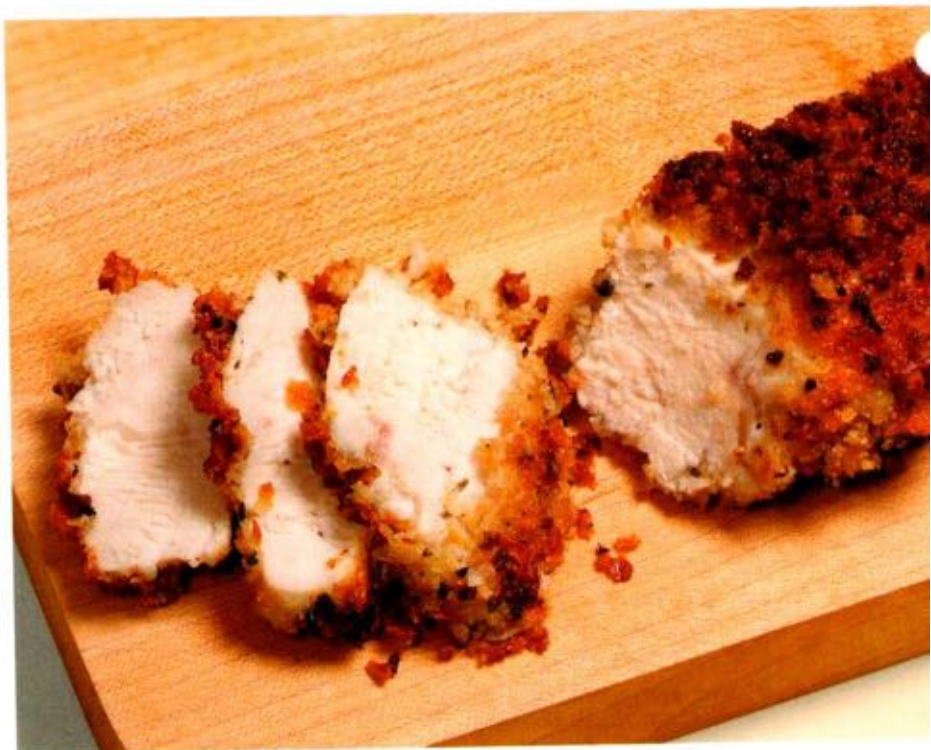


crusting chicken

Finally! The secrets to crusted chicken that's crisp on the outside and juicy on the inside are revealed.



Our staff is picky about crusted chicken. Far too much of it has been dredged in boxed bread crumbs and dried herbs. As if that weren't enough, it's often baked until it's inedible.

The challenge then was to develop a recipe for chicken with a flavorful crust and juicy interior. The key to success involves the four "Cs": chicken, crumbs, coating, and cooking.

Chicken: Boneless, skinless breast halves are convenient and cook quickly. Because whole breast halves are too big, halve each one lengthwise. This ensures that the coating won't burn before the chicken is thoroughly cooked. If you double this recipe, be sure to sauté the chicken in two pans to avoid crowding.

Next, lightly pound the pieces to an even $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick (*Step 1, page 35*). You're not tenderizing or creating a cutlet for scaloppine, so be gentle. Pounding chicken pieces in a slightly damp plastic bag helps to prevent sticking and tearing.

Crumbs: Crumbs are the most important "C" in this equation. Besides adding great flavor, they're essential for the right texture. They create a crouton-like crust on the chicken, not a dry, flavorless, crumbly one.

For the best crumbs, you need the right bread. A rustic-type loaf with a chewy, yet fairly soft crust is ideal. Bread with a holey interior makes crumbs that vary in size — that's good. Stay away from loaves having dense, hard crusts. These crumbs would make chewing extremely painful!

Cut bread into cubes (leave crust on) and process into crumbs. Work in batches and don't overfill the bowl. The crumbs will be different sizes — from powdery to the size of peas. That's fine. Uniformity is not the goal here.

Dry the crumbs on a baking sheet in a 200° oven until they're completely dried but not toasted, about 10–15 minutes. Freeze any extra crumbs in a resealable bag. They're great to have on hand.



For "crusting" bread crumbs, a rustic-type loaf with a chewy, yet fairly soft crust (like ciabatta) is ideal.