

BRINING 101

The process of brining (or soaking meat in a solution of water, salt, and sometimes sugar before cooking) can dramatically improve the flavor and tenderness of chicken, turkey, and pork. As it soaks, the meat absorbs the brine, and then retains it during cooking. The result? The juiciest and best-tasting poultry or pork you've ever eaten. Best of all, brining is easy; all you need is some refrigerator space, a little time, and a container big enough to submerge the meat fully in the brine. Brining isn't essential, but we highly recommend it in simple roasted or grilled recipes.

Salt: Table versus Kosher

Table salt was used for all the brines in the chart below, although kosher salt can be substituted. It is important to note, however, that cup for cup, table salt is stronger than kosher salt. If you use kosher salt in a brine, multiply the amount of salt called for in the chart by 1½ times.

Do not brine kosher poultry, frozen injected turkeys (such as Butterball), or enhanced pork. Before they make it to supermarket shelves, these products are treated with salt in one form or another. We have made this mistake before; brining any of these products only intensifies these treatments, resulting in virtually inedible meat. If in doubt, check labels, which always indicate if salt has been added during processing.

Brining Directions: Dissolve the salt and sugar in the water in a container or bowl large enough to hold the brine and meat, following the amounts in the chart. Submerge the meat completely in the brine. Cover and refrigerate, following the times in the chart (do not overbrine or else the meat will taste too salty). Remove the meat from the brine, rinse, and pat dry with paper towels. The meat is now ready to be cooked.

	COLD WATER	SALT	SUGAR	TIME
CHICKEN				
1 whole chicken (3½ to 4 pounds)	2 quarts	½ cup	½ cup	½ to 1 hour
2 whole chickens (3½ to 4 pounds each)	1 gallon	1 cup	1 cup	½ to 1 hour
4 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (whole breasts, split breasts, whole legs, thighs, and/or drumsticks)	2 quarts	½ cup	½ cup	½ to 1 hour
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (6 to 8 ounces each)	2 quarts	¼ cup	¼ cup	½ to 1 hour
TURKEY				
1 turkey (12 to 17 pounds)	2 gallons	1 cup	*	6 to 12 hours
1 turkey (18 to 24 pounds)	3 gallons	1½ cups	*	6 to 12 hours
1 bone-in turkey breast (6 to 8 pounds)	1 gallon	½ cup	*	3 to 6 hours
PORK				
4 bone-in rib loin pork chops (12 ounces each), 1½ inches thick	1½ quarts	3 tablespoons	3 tablespoons	1 hour
1 pork roast (3 to 6 pounds)	2 quarts	¼ cup	¼ cup	1½ to 2 hours

*Because turkey must roast for an extended amount of time, the sugar in the brine will cause overbrowning. Therefore, we omit the sugar in the brine for turkeys.