

An Upper Crust

Herb crusts add a layer of seasonal flavour and interest to fish or meats such as lamb, pork or chicken. As spring growth takes off in the garden herbs are often the first culinary plants with masses of tender leaves crying out to be used. Pay attention as it won't be long before they toughen up over the drier summer period. While salads, risotto and pasta dishes are the obvious choice of use, combining a mix of spring herbs with breadcrumbs and grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese as a herb crust for baked meats can really add a lot of flavour and crunch. The cheese not only gives the crust a bit of cohesion, it adds a wonderful umami character. I have a baked chicken dish I do many variations of. It is a quick family friendly meal consisting of pieces of chicken thigh (skin on) placed on top of sliced potatoes, onions and, in the summer, vegetables such as sliced eggplant, zucchini and tomato. Drizzled with olive oil and white wine it is baked in the oven for about 15 minutes and then the breadcrumbs are added for a further 15 minutes, until golden. The dish can sit for a while once baked and be served directly from the pan at the table making it a no fuss meal. This week I made my trusted baked chicken using sliced cauliflower and potato and added herbs to the crumb mix which gave it a delicious spring touch. Give it a try and make it your own easy family meal.

Baked Chicken With A Herb Crust

- 4 chicken thighs, skin on (approx 600 g)
- 2 large potatoes
- 1 white salad onion or purple onion
- approx. 1/4 head cauliflower

- olive oil
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1- 2 cups fresh bread crumbs
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh herbs (parsley, chives, thyme, marjoram, sorrel)
- 2 tbs grated Parmesan or pecorino cheese
- salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 170°C

Slice potatoes and onion thinly and place in a roasting dish. Slice the cauliflower in cross section into slightly thicker slices. Lay that on top of the onions and potato. Place the chicken on top. Drizzle liberally with olive oil and add wine. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Bake for approximately 15 minutes. In the meantime prepare the breadcrumbs, using stale bread and a food processor or use shop bought crumbs. Add the herbs of your choice and the grated cheese and mix well. Sprinkle the herb crumbs over the chicken and vegetables and bake until golden brown.

