

Easy Popcorn Chicken

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By: [Joanne Gallagher](#) Updated: November 6, 2025

This popcorn chicken recipe wins over kids and adults. A quick, spiced marinade seasons the chicken, and baking or air-frying makes it crispy without frying.





I highly recommend saving this recipe! Our popcorn chicken is easy to make, tastes incredible, and works for game-day snacks, easy dinners, or as a fun topping for salads.

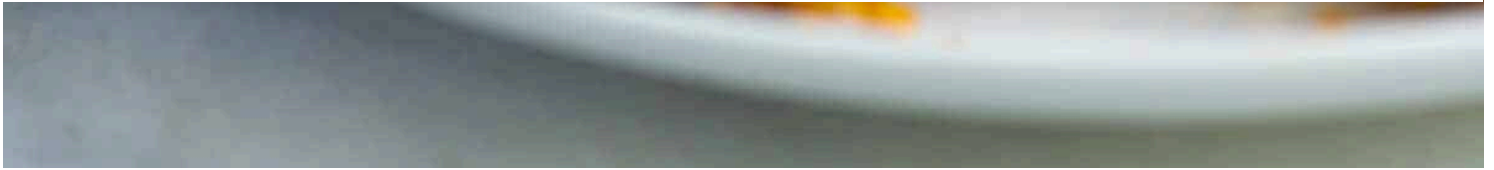
The secret is using our perfectly spiced buttermilk marinade, which does an amazing job of tenderizing the chicken and keeping it juicy and flavorful. These disappear fast!

Key Ingredients

- **Chicken:** Boneless, skinless chicken breasts or chicken thighs are great in this recipe. You'll cut them into bite-sized pieces for that popable popcorn size.
- **Buttermilk:** Buttermilk tenderizes the chicken, adds flavor, and helps the breading stick. Real buttermilk works best, but a simple substitute (milk mixed with a bit of lemon juice) works well too. Check the recipe for our go-to buttermilk substitute.
- **Spice Blend:** Many fast-food chicken places (like KFC) are known for their signature spice blends. For this recipe, the seasoning goes right into the buttermilk marinade. You'll need salt, thyme, garlic powder, onion powder, black pepper, and cayenne.
- **Corn flakes:** Crushed corn flakes make a light, extra-crunchy coating. You can also use panko breadcrumbs, [homemade breadcrumbs](#), or crushed potato chips, like when we make [chicken nuggets](#).

Find the full recipe with measurements below.





How to Make Popcorn Chicken

Tip 1: Marinate the chicken pieces. Grab a large bowl, then mix the buttermilk, salt, and spices. Add the chicken pieces and leave them in the marinade for at least 30 minutes. For even more flavor, refrigerate the bowl and marinade overnight.

Tip 2: Bread the chicken. Add crushed corn flakes and additional spices to a resealable zip-top bag. Then, shake to distribute everything. Remove marinated chicken pieces from the marinade a few at a time, shaking any excess marinade, then place them into the bag. Shake, then line them up on a baking sheet.





spray or drizzle with olive oil, and then bake them in a 400°F oven for about 20 minutes.

Tip 4: Make air fryer popcorn chicken. Place the breaded chicken in your air fryer basket, spray with cooking spray, then air fry at 390°F for 4 minutes. Shake, then continue to air fry until crispy (4 to 5 minutes more).

Make Ahead Tips

My son loves these (and I do too), so I often save half the batch for another day. After cooking, let the popcorn chicken cool completely. Then refrigerate for up to 3 days, or spread the pieces on a baking sheet, freeze until solid, and transfer to a freezer bag. They will keep well in the freezer for up to 3 months.

To reheat, bake in a 375°F oven for 8 to 10 minutes, or air fry at 390°F for about 4 minutes, or until heated through and crisp again (6 to 7 minutes if frozen).

Serving Suggestions

When we make this recipe, we always jump at the chance to grab one or two dipping sauces from the fridge. A few of our family's favorites are this [creamy honey mustard sauce](#), [homemade ketchup](#), this [BBQ sauce](#), and [creamy ranch dressing](#).

For the side, we love [baked french fries](#) (classic), [sweet potato fries](#), [roasted potatoes](#), or something lighter like [roasted broccoli](#) (also amazing with the honey mustard sauce). For something more hearty, [homemade mashed potatoes](#) and [gravy](#) or [macaroni and cheese](#) are amazing!

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PREP 40 mins **COOK** 20 mins **TOTAL** 1 hr

This homemade popcorn chicken is crispy, juicy, and healthier than take-out when baked (or air-fried). It's a crowd-pleaser for the whole family, and you can use chicken breasts or thighs.

6 servings

You Will Need

- 1 ½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast or thighs
- 2 cups low-fat buttermilk
- 1 ½ teaspoons fine sea salt, divided
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme, divided
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder, divided
- 2 teaspoons onion powder, divided
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper, divided
- ½ teaspoon cayenne, optional, divided
- 4 cups corn flakes
- Cooking spray or olive oil

Directions

- 1 Make the buttermilk marinade:** In a large bowl, combine the buttermilk, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon dried thyme, 1 teaspoon garlic powder, 1 teaspoon onion powder, ½ teaspoon black pepper, and ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper.
- 2 Marinate the chicken:** Cut the chicken into 1-inch pieces and add them to the marinade, making sure they are fully submerged. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to overnight.



- 4 Make the breading:** Place the cornflakes (or potato chips) in a large resealable bag and crush them into fine crumbs. Add ½ teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon dried thyme, 1 teaspoon garlic powder, 1 teaspoon onion powder, ½ teaspoon black pepper, and ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper. Seal the bag and shake to combine.
- 5 Bread the chicken:** Working in batches, lift the chicken pieces from the marinade and let any excess drip off. Add the chicken to the seasoned crumbs and press to coat well. Place the breaded pieces on the prepared baking sheet. Lightly spray with cooking spray or drizzle with a bit of olive oil.
- 6 To bake:** Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Bake for about 20 minutes, turning the chicken halfway through, until crispy, golden, and cooked through (165°F in the center).
- 7 To air fry:** Place the breaded chicken in a single layer in the air fryer basket. Spray lightly with cooking spray. Air fry at 390°F for 4 minutes. Shake the basket, spray again if needed, then air fry for another 3 to 5 minutes, or until crisp and golden and cooked through (165°F in the center).

Adam and Joanne's Tips

- **Tips for baking:** For extra-crispy chicken, place an oven-safe cooling rack on the baking sheet and spray it with nonstick cooking spray.
- **Corn flakes substitute:** Use about 2 cups of crushed potato chips, panko, or [homeade breadcrumbs](#).
- **Buttermilk substitute:** Combine 2 cups of milk (dairy or non-dairy milk) with 2 tablespoons lemon juice or vinegar.
- The nutrition facts provided below are estimates.



[MY ACCOUNT](#)

Saturated Fat 1g / Cholesterol 2.2mg / Sodium 910.0mg / Carbohydrate 21.4g / Dietary Fiber 1g / Total Sugars 5.8g / Protein 25.7g

AUTHOR: Joanne Gallagher



We are Adam and Joanne Gallagher, the creators of Inspired Taste. Established in 2009, Inspired Taste grew from a childhood dream into one of the internet’s most trusted recipe sites with hundreds of reliable recipes, step-by-step videos, and expert tips.

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Anu September 29, 2022

I am new to cooking . I am going to try the Easy Baked Popcorn Chicken today.
Wish me good luck !

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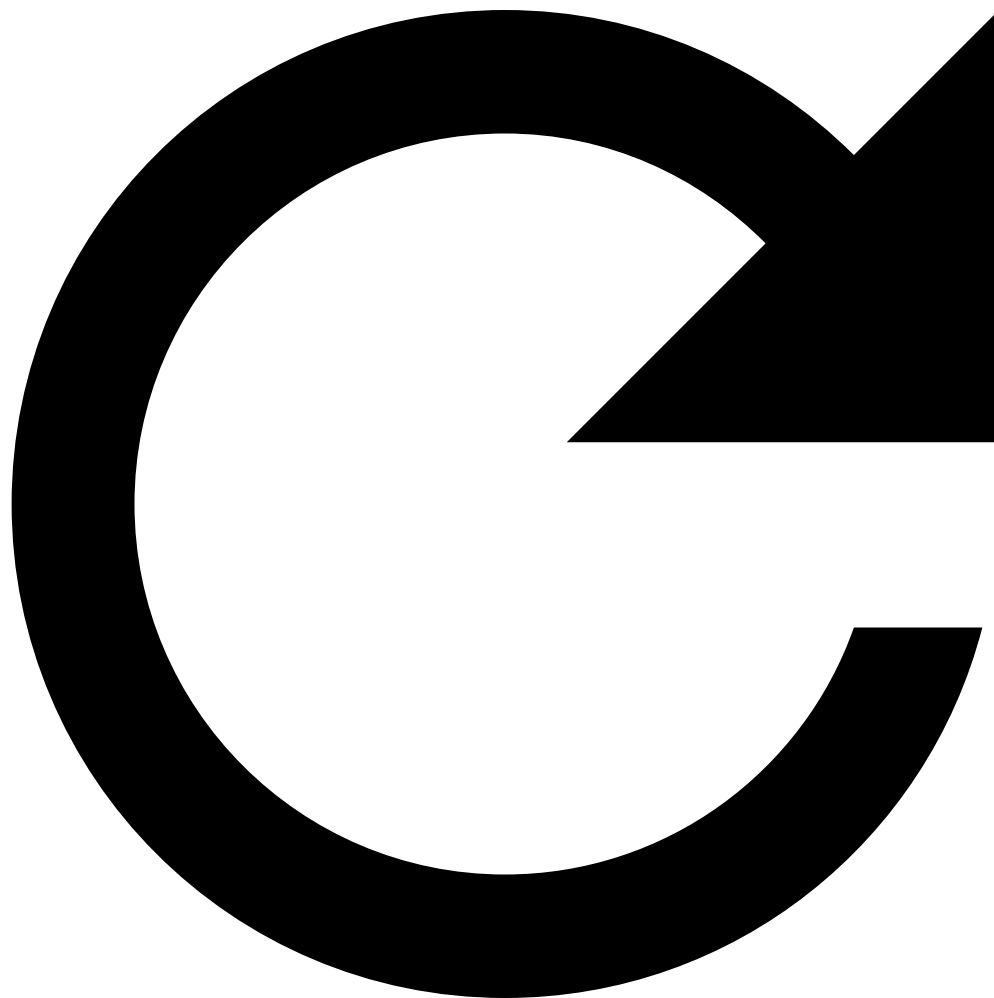


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