

Healthy Honey Barbecue Chicken

There's nothing quite like the smoky, sweet aroma of barbecue chicken sizzling on the grill. Unfortunately, many traditional barbecue recipes rely on sugary sauces that can add hundreds of extra calories and large amounts of added sugar. This healthier version keeps all the bold barbecue flavor while using lean cuts of chicken, a homemade honey barbecue sauce, and simple pantry spices. Whether you prefer chicken breasts, thighs, drumsticks, or wings, this recipe gives you the flexibility to cook it your favorite way—on the grill or in the oven. The result is juicy, tender chicken that's packed with protein, lower in added sugar, and perfect for family dinners, backyard cookouts, meal prep, or game day gatherings.

Healthy Honey Barbecue Chicken

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Marinating Time (Optional): 30 minutes

Cook Time: 20–45 minutes (depending on the cut of chicken)

Total Time: 35–90 minutes

Servings: 4

Ingredients

Choose Your Chicken

Option 1 (Leanest Choice)

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 6 ounces each)

Option 2 (Juicier Choice)

- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs or drumsticks (about 2 pounds total)

Option 3 (Perfect for Parties)

- 2 pounds chicken wings (split into drumettes and flats if desired)

Chicken Seasoning

- 1 tablespoon avocado oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon chili powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon dried oregano
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper

Healthy Honey Barbecue Sauce

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup no-sugar-added tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce, regular or low-sodium
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon onion powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fine sea salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper
- Pinch of cayenne pepper, optional
- 1–2 tablespoons water, as needed

Instructions

Step 1: Make the Barbecue Sauce

Add all ingredients except the water to a small saucepan and stir well. Simmer over **low heat for 5–8 minutes**, stirring frequently. If the sauce is too thick, stir in **1 tablespoon of water at a time** until it reaches your desired consistency.

Taste and adjust as needed:

- Add up to $\frac{1}{2}$ **tablespoon more honey** for extra sweetness.
- Add $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ **teaspoon more smoked paprika** for a smokier flavor.
- Add another $\frac{1}{8}$ **teaspoon salt** if needed, especially when using low-sodium Worcestershire sauce.

Remove from heat and let cool slightly before serving. The sauce will thicken a little as it cools.

Helpful Tip

Keep the heat low while cooking. High heat can scorch the tomato paste and spices and give the sauce a bitter taste.

Step 2: Season the Chicken

1. In a small bowl, mix together the garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, chili powder, oregano, sea salt, and black pepper.
2. Pat the chicken dry with paper towels.
3. Rub with avocado oil.
4. Sprinkle the seasoning evenly over all sides of the chicken.
5. If time allows, refrigerate for **30 minutes** before cooking for even more flavor.

Option 1: Grill the Chicken

Boneless Chicken Breasts

1. Preheat the grill to **medium-high heat (about 400°F)**.
2. Grill for **6–7 minutes per side**.
3. Brush with barbecue sauce during the final **2–3 minutes** of cooking.
4. Cook until the internal temperature reaches **165°F (74°C)**.
5. Let rest for **5 minutes** before serving.

Bone-In Chicken (Thighs or Drumsticks)

1. Preheat the grill to **medium heat (about 375°F)**.
2. Grill for **10–12 minutes per side**, turning occasionally.
3. Brush with barbecue sauce during the final **5 minutes**.
4. Cook until the thickest part reaches **165°F (74°C)**.
5. Rest for **5–10 minutes** before serving.

Chicken Wings

1. Preheat the grill to **medium heat (about 375°F)**.
2. Grill for **20–25 minutes**, turning every **5–6 minutes**.
3. Brush generously with barbecue sauce during the final **5–7 minutes**.
4. Cook until the internal temperature reaches **165°F (74°C)**.
5. Let rest for **5 minutes** before serving.

Option 2: Bake in the Oven

Boneless Chicken Breasts

1. Preheat the oven to **400°F (204°C)**.
2. Place the seasoned chicken on a parchment-lined baking

- sheet or in a lightly greased baking dish.
3. Bake for **20–25 minutes**.
 4. Brush with barbecue sauce during the final **5 minutes** of baking.
 5. Cook until the internal temperature reaches **165°F (74°C)**.
 6. Let rest for **5 minutes** before serving.

Bone-In Chicken (Thighs or Drumsticks)

1. Preheat the oven to **400°F (204°C)**.
2. Arrange the chicken skin-side up on a parchment-lined baking sheet or in a baking dish.
3. Bake for **40–45 minutes**.
4. Brush with barbecue sauce during the final **10 minutes** of baking.
5. For crispier skin, broil for **2–3 minutes** after applying the sauce, watching carefully.
6. Cook until the internal temperature reaches **165°F (74°C)**.
7. Let rest for **5–10 minutes** before serving.

Chicken Wings

1. Preheat the oven to **425°F (218°C)**.
2. Arrange the wings in a single layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet. For extra crispiness, place them on a wire rack set over the baking sheet.
3. Bake for **40–45 minutes**, flipping halfway through.
4. Brush generously with barbecue sauce during the final **10 minutes** of baking.
5. For extra crispy wings, broil for **2–3 minutes** after applying the sauce, watching closely to prevent burning.
6. Cook until the internal temperature reaches **165°F (74°C)**.
7. Let rest for **5 minutes** before serving.

Nutritional Facts (Approximate Per Serving*)

Nutrient	Amount
Calories	285
Protein	39 g
Carbohydrates	10 g
Fiber	1 g
Total Sugars	8 g
Added Sugars	6 g
Fat	8 g
Saturated Fat	1.5 g
Cholesterol	110 mg
Sodium	420 mg
Potassium	640 mg
Iron	8% DV
Vitamin C	10% DV

*Nutritional values are based on **boneless skinless chicken breasts** and will vary depending on the cut of chicken selected.

Why You'll Love This Recipe

- Juicy, tender, and packed with smoky barbecue flavor.
- Homemade barbecue sauce with less added sugar than many bottled sauces.
- High in protein to help keep you satisfied.
- Choose between chicken breasts, thighs, drumsticks, or wings.
- Includes both grilling and oven-baking instructions.
- Great for meal prep, family dinners, and backyard cookouts.

Women's Health Benefits

Chicken is an excellent source of high-quality protein, which supports muscle maintenance, tissue repair, and long-lasting fullness. Whether you choose lean chicken breasts or juicy bone-in chicken, you're getting a nutrient-rich source of protein that pairs well with a balanced eating pattern. Preparing your own barbecue sauce allows you to control the amount of added sugar and sodium while still enjoying classic barbecue flavor. Tomatoes provide lycopene, a naturally occurring antioxidant, while garlic, paprika, and oregano add bold flavor without relying on excess salt.

Recipe Tips

- **Chicken breasts** are the leanest option and highest in protein.
- **Bone-in thighs and drumsticks** stay especially juicy and flavorful.
- **Chicken wings** are perfect for parties and game day while still being healthier than deep-fried wings.
- Use a meat thermometer to ensure the chicken reaches an internal temperature of **165°F (74°C)**.
- Brush on the barbecue sauce near the end of cooking to prevent it from burning.
- Let the chicken rest for **5–10 minutes** before serving to help keep it juicy.
- Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to **4 days**.

Delicious Serving Ideas

Serve this Healthy Honey Barbecue Chicken with:

- Healthy Oven-Baked French Fries
- Healthy Creamy Potato Salad
- Roasted sweet potatoes

- Grilled corn on the cob
- Steamed broccoli
- Grilled asparagus
- Brown rice or quinoa
- Fresh garden salad
- Coleslaw made with Greek yogurt dressing

Disclaimer: Nutritional values are estimates and may vary depending on the ingredients, brands, and cut of chicken used.