

Prep Time: 10 minutes | Cook Time: 25 minutes | Total Time: 35 minutes
Servings: 4 | Category: Main Course | Cuisine: American | Method: Air Fryer

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Introduction

If you've been searching for a way to get golden, shatteringly crispy chicken skin without heating up a vat of oil, your search ends here. These Crispy Air Fryer Chicken Thighs deliver everything you love about fried chicken — the crunch, the juiciness, the deeply seasoned crust — with a fraction of the mess and guilt. Bone-in, skin-on thighs are the ideal cut for the air fryer: the circulating hot air renders the fat under the skin, basting the meat as it crisps,

while the bone keeps the interior tender and succulent.

In just 35 minutes from fridge to plate, you'll have a main course worthy of a Sunday dinner but easy enough for a Tuesday night. Serve them with roasted vegetables, rice, or a fresh salad, and watch them disappear.

Ingredients

- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 1.5–2 lbs / 680–900 g)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon black pepper

- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt (plus extra for finishing)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional, for heat)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder (optional, for extra-crispy skin)
- Cooking spray or a light drizzle of oil, for the basket

Optional Garnishes: Fresh parsley, lemon wedges, flaky sea salt

Equipment

- Air fryer (4-quart or larger recommended)
- Paper towels
- Small mixing bowl
- Tongs
- Instant-read meat thermometer

Instructions

Step 1: Prep the Chicken (3 minutes)

Pat the chicken thighs completely dry with paper towels. This is the single most important step for crispy skin — any surface moisture will steam the chicken instead of crisping it. If you have time, let the thighs sit uncovered in the refrigerator for 20–30 minutes before cooking for even drier skin.

Step 2: Make the Seasoning Blend (2 minutes)

In a small bowl, whisk together the smoked paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, thyme, oregano, black pepper, kosher salt, cayenne (if using), and baking powder (if using). The baking powder is a restaurant trick that raises the skin's pH, helping it brown and crisp faster.

Step 3: Season the Thighs (3 minutes)

Drizzle the olive oil over the chicken and rub it into all sides. Sprinkle the seasoning blend evenly over the thighs, massaging it into the skin and underneath. Make sure the skin side gets a generous coating.

Step 4: Preheat the Air Fryer (2 minutes)

Preheat your air fryer to 380°F (193°C) for 2 minutes. Preheating ensures the skin starts crisping immediately on contact.

Step 5: Arrange in the Basket (1 minute)

Lightly spray the air fryer basket with cooking spray. Place the thighs skin-side up in a single layer, making sure they don't overlap. If your air fryer is small, cook in batches — crowding steams the chicken and ruins the crunch.

Step 6: First Air Fry — High Heat (12 minutes at 380°F / 193°C)

Cook at 380°F (193°C) for 12 minutes. This initial high-heat phase renders the fat and begins the browning process. Do not flip the chicken — keeping the skin up allows the fat to pool and baste the meat.

Step 7: Second Air Fry — Crisping Phase (8-10 minutes at 400°F / 204°C)

Increase the temperature to 400°F (204°C) and continue cooking for 8-10 minutes, until the skin is deep golden brown and blistered. The total cook time should be 20-25 minutes depending on thigh size and air fryer wattage.

Step 8: Check Temperature (1 minute)

Insert an instant-read thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh, avoiding the bone. The chicken is done when it reaches 165°F (74°C). If it's not there yet, cook in 2-minute increments at 400°F.

Step 9: Rest and Serve (5 minutes)

Transfer the thighs to a plate and let them rest for 5 minutes. This allows the juices to redistribute. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt, garnish with parsley, and serve with lemon wedges.

Time & Intensity Guide

Phase	Temperature	Time	Intensity
Prep & Seasoning	—	8 min	Low
Preheat	380°F (193°C)	2 min	Low
First Fry	380°F (193°C)	12 min	Medium

Phase	Temperature	Time	Intensity
Crisping	400°F (204°C)	8–10 min	High
Rest	—	5 min	None
Total	—	~35 min	Medium

Intensity Note: The “intensity” here refers to both the heat level and the level of attention required. The first fry is hands-off; the crisping phase requires a quick visual check at the 8-minute mark to prevent burning, since air fryers vary in power.

Tips for Perfect Results

1. Dry skin = crispy skin. Never skip patting the chicken dry.
2. Don’t overcrowd. Air needs to circulate on all sides.
3. Skin-side up always. Flipping lets the skin steam against the basket.
4. Baking powder is your secret weapon. A half-teaspoon makes a noticeable difference.
5. Watch the last few minutes. Air fryers run hot and can go from golden to burnt quickly.
6. Reheat leftovers at 350°F for 5 minutes to bring back some crisp.

Nutrition Information (Per Serving)

Based on 4 servings, using bone-in, skin-on thighs. Values are estimates and will vary by brand and exact thigh size.

Nutrient	Amount
Calories	320 kcal
Total Fat	22 g
— Saturated Fat	6 g
— Trans Fat	0 g
Cholesterol	130 mg
Sodium	480 mg
Total Carbohydrates	2 g
— Dietary Fiber	0 g
— Total Sugars	0 g
Protein	26 g
Vitamin D	0.2 mcg
Calcium	18 mg
Iron	1.4 mg
Potassium	290 mg