Prep Time: 15 minutes | Cook Time: 20 minutes | Total Time: 35 minutes
Yield: 4 servings | Intensity Level: Easy–Moderate

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Introduction

This Tender Chicken & Zucchini Skillet is the weeknight dinner that does it all: golden, juicy chicken breasts seared to perfection, nestled among tender-crisp zucchini, sweet cherry tomatoes, and aromatic garlic, all finished with a bright lemon-herb pan sauce. It’s a one-pan meal that comes together in about 35 minutes, keeps cleanup minimal, and delivers a lean, protein-rich plate that still feels vibrant and satisfying. The secret to the “tender” in the title

is a quick 10-minute brine-style marinade and a gentle sear that locks in moisture — no dry chicken here. Serve it over rice, orzo, or crusty bread to soak up every drop of the lemony sauce.

Ingredients

For the Chicken

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 1½ lb / 680 g), pounded to even ¾-inch thickness
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 2 tbsp olive oil (for the marinade)
- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

For the Skillet

- 2 medium zucchini (about 1 lb / 450 g), sliced into ½-inch half-moons
- 1 cup (150 g) cherry tomatoes, halved
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp red pepper flakes (optional)
- ¼ cup (60 ml) low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice (about 1 lemon)
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh basil
- 2 tbsp grated Parmesan (optional, for serving)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Equipment

- Large (12-inch) skillet or cast-iron pan
- Meat mallet or rolling pin
- Instant-read meat thermometer
- Tongs

Time & Intensity Breakdown

Stage	Time	Intensity	What's Happening
Prep & pound chicken	5 min	Low–Moderate	Flatten breasts to even thickness
Marinate chicken	10 min	Low (passive)	Rest in oil, lemon, and spices
Sear chicken	6–7 min	Moderate–High	Golden crust, 165°F internal
Sauté zucchini & tomatoes	5–6 min	Moderate	Tender-crisp vegetables, bloomed garlic
Build pan sauce	2–3 min	Moderate	Deglaze, reduce, finish with lemon
Rest & plate	3 min	Low (passive)	Juices redistribute; garnish

Total active time: ~15 minutes | Total passive time: ~20 minutes

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Instructions

Step 1: Prep and Pound the Chicken (5 minutes | Low–Moderate Intensity)

Pat the chicken breasts dry with paper towels — moisture is the enemy of a good sear. Place each breast between two sheets of plastic wrap or inside a zip-top bag. Using a meat mallet or the flat side of a rolling pin, pound to an even ¾-inch thickness. Even thickness means even cooking, which means tender chicken every time. Season both sides with the salt, pepper, garlic powder, and oregano.

Step 2: Marinate (10 minutes | Low Intensity, Passive)

In a shallow dish, whisk together the 2 tablespoons olive oil and 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Add the seasoned chicken, turning to coat. Let it sit at room temperature for 10 minutes — no longer, or the acid will start to break down the texture. (If you have 30 minutes, refrigerate covered and let it go longer, but 10 minutes is the sweet spot for weeknights.)

Step 3: Sear the Chicken (6–7 minutes | Moderate–High Intensity)

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat for 2 minutes, then add 1 tablespoon olive oil. When the oil shimmers, add the chicken. Sear undisturbed for 4 minutes — resist the urge to move it; this builds the golden crust. Flip and cook another 3–4 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer registers 165°F (74°C) in the thickest part. Transfer to a plate, tent loosely with foil, and rest while you cook the vegetables.

Step 4: Sauté the Zucchini and Tomatoes (5–6 minutes | Moderate Intensity)

Lower the heat to medium. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil to the same skillet. Add the zucchini in a single layer (work in batches if crowded — crowding steams instead of

sears) and cook 3 minutes without stirring, then toss and cook 1–2 minutes more, until golden at the edges and tender-crisp. Add the cherry tomatoes and cook 1 minute until they just begin to soften and burst. Add the minced garlic and red pepper flakes and stir constantly for 30 seconds — garlic burns fast, so keep it moving.

Step 5: Build the Pan Sauce (2–3 minutes | Moderate Intensity)

Pour in the chicken broth and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon — that's pure flavor. Let it bubble and reduce for 1–2 minutes until slightly thickened. Stir in the 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice and remove from heat. Taste and adjust salt and pepper.

Step 6: Rest and Plate (3 minutes | Low Intensity, Passive)

Slice the rested chicken against the grain into ½-inch strips. Return it to the skillet along with any accumulated juices, nestling it among the vegetables. Scatter with fresh parsley and basil, and finish with Parmesan if using. Serve immediately — over rice, orzo, mashed potatoes, or with crusty bread for dipping.

Serving Suggestions

Serve over lemon-herb rice, buttered orzo, cauliflower rice for a low-carb plate, or alongside a warm baguette. A crisp white wine (Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio) or sparkling water with lemon pairs beautifully.

Storage & Reheating

- Refrigerator: Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days. Keep the sauce with the

chicken so it stays moist.

- Freezer: Not recommended for the zucchini (it turns mushy), but the cooked chicken freezes well for up to 2 months.

- Reheating: Gently reheat in a covered skillet over medium-low heat with a splash of broth for 4–5 minutes, or microwave covered at 50% power for 90 seconds. Avoid high heat, which toughens chicken.

Nutrition Information (Per Serving, Based on 4 Servings)

Values are estimates and will vary by brand, portion size, and exact ingredients used.

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
Calories	~310 kcal
Total Fat	~17 g
— Saturated Fat	~3 g
Cholesterol	~95 mg
Sodium	~620 mg
Total Carbohydrates	~8 g
— Fiber	~2 g
— Sugars	~4 g
Protein	~32 g