

Chicken Cordon Bleu

from Leah Smith

8 chicken breast halves, skinless and boneless

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

8 thin slices deli ham

16 thin slices Gruyere or Swiss cheese

2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves

1/4 cup flour

1 cup panko bread crumbs

1 teaspoon olive oil

2 eggs

2 teaspoons water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lay the chicken between 2 pieces of plastic wrap. Using the flat side of a meat mallet, gently pound the chicken to 1/4-inch thickness. (Or, cheat like I do and buy the thin-sliced chicken breasts) Take care not to pound too hard because the meat may tear or create holes. Lay 2 slices of cheese on each breast, followed by 2 slices of ham, and 2 more of cheese (actually this won't all fit - just do what you can); leaving a 1/2-inch margin on all sides to help seal the roll. Tuck in the sides of the breast and roll up tight like a jellyroll. Squeeze the log gently to seal.

Season the flour with salt and pepper; spread out on waxed paper or in a flat dish. Mix the breadcrumbs with thyme, kosher salt, pepper, and oil. The oil will help the crust brown. Beat together the eggs and water, the mixture should be fluid. Lightly dust the chicken with flour, then dip in the egg mixture. Gently coat in the bread crumbs. Carefully transfer the roulades to a baking pan and bake for 20 minutes until browned and cooked through.

Quick version: skip flour (and thyme and oil, if desired). Just put roulades in the pan and then brush tops with egg (only takes 1 this way) and sprinkle bread crumbs on each.

Yield: 8 servings

This freezes really well: Just make sure the pan is wrapped tight and then thaw the roulades in the fridge when you're ready. When fully thawed, baked for 20 minutes at 350 (until internal thermometer reaches 165).

Optional sauce: 1 can cream of chicken + 2/3 cup milk

Or 1 can cream of chicken + 1/2 cup sour cream + 1t. lemon juice