

Roast Muscovy Duckling with Port Wine and Cherry Sauce

By Chef Bob Skolnick Photography by Marty Snortum Studio

TYPES OF DUCK

Most ducks raised in this country, including the well-known Long Island duck, belong to a breed called White Pekin. This is a mild flavor duck with a large quantity of fat under the skin. A second variety raised here is called Muscovy duck, or musk duck. This bird is also found in France, where it is called a Barbary Duck. Muscovy duck has a more pronounced flavor than the White Pekin, but cooks disagree about its quality. Some say the flavor is strong while others say it has a rich, full flavor, and the more common Pekin duck is bland by comparison. A third type of duck occasionally seen here is the Millard (sometimes called Moulard). This is a hybrid duck that has a thick meaty breast and a good flavor, and is more commonly found in Europe. Duck is a key menu item in France where they feature their famous Rouen duck. The Rouen is a fine-quality duck that is killed without being bled. The blood stays in the flesh giving it a reddish-brown color and a pronounced flavor. Another type of French duck is the Nantes duck.

COOKING THE DUCK

There are a variety of techniques on how to best cook a duck. The heavy layer of fat under the skin makes roasting a duck somewhat different from roasting a chicken or other fowl. The objective is to cook the duck while releasing as much fat as possible, creating a crispy skin without over cooking and drying out the meat. In fact, it is now fashionable in this country to serve duck breast with the flesh pink and juicy, a style Europeans have enjoyed for years.

I prefer to poach the duck first to loosen the fat under the skin plus add moisture and infuse flavor before roasting. It also ensures a very crispy skin when roasting. Place the duck in a large stockpot and cover with water approximately 2 inches over the top of the duck. Season the water with fresh ginger root, peeled and chopped, and crushed garlic cloves. Bring the liquid to a boil over high heat and boil for 3 minutes. Drain the duck thoroughly and discard the cooking water but save the ginger root. Air-dry the duck for about 15 minutes and pat dry with a towel. Take the point of a kitchen paring knife and puncture the duck's skin all over to help release the fat while roasting. Be very careful only to pierce the skin; do not pierce the meat or the juices will be lost during roasting.

Prepare a spice rub of salt, pepper, garlic powder and ground thyme and rub down the inside of the duck. Then wet the remaining spice rub with a tablespoon of olive oil and coat the outside of the duck with the spice rub. Insert fresh gingerroot in the duck cavity along with one orange and one lemon cut into quarters and fresh thyme. Place the duck in a roasting pan on a raised roasting rack.

In a preheated, 350-degree oven, roast the duck for 40 to 45 minutes. After 15 minutes, add a cup of mild chicken stock into the roasting pan and mix with the pan drippings. Baste the duck periodically while roasting. Do it quickly so you will not lose too much oven temperature while basting. After 40 minutes, increase the heat to 500 degrees and roast breast side up until done about an additional 20 minutes. To determine doneness, examine the inside of the thigh or insert a meat thermometer into the inside thigh to check the inside temperature. Care should be taken not to over cook the breast. You may need to remove the duck from the oven when the breast meat is cooked, remove the legs and return them to the oven for additional cooking time.

SERVING THE DUCK

Remove the duck from the roasting pan and set in a warm platter to rest for ten minutes. Remove the legs. Make an incision along both sides of the breastbone taking care not to tear the skin beyond the cut along the breastbone. Cut the front breast bone (wishbone) connecting the wings to the rib cage. Grab the front

of the breast with a towel and peel back the breast meat from the bone. Serve each person with one breast, one leg and one thigh. The cutting of the duck can be done in the kitchen or at the table depending on your carving expertise.

Serves 4

THE DUCK

- 2 female Muscovy ducks, 3 pounds each oven ready
- 4 half-inch pieces of ginger root, peeled and sliced
- 2 oranges, quartered
- 2 lemons, quartered
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 2 cups of mild chicken stock
- 1 bunch of fresh thyme
- 1 ounce each of salt, pepper and garlic powder for the spice

PORT WINE & CHERRY SAUCE

(Sauce Montmorency) Makes 2 pints when reduced

- 2 pints of Ruby Port
- 12 ounces orange juice
- 4 strips orange zest
- 3 pints chicken stock (stock should be strong and darkened by roasted bones or adding Kitchen Bouquet)
- 8 ounces butter
- 4 ounces Crème de Cassis
- 2 cups dried, pitted cherries



TO PREPARE THE SAUCE

Combine the port wine, cassis, orange juice and zest. Boil until well reduced and syrupy. Add the darkened chicken stock and reduce by one half. Add the dried cherries and simmer slowly for 15 minutes to reconstitute the cherries and infuse their flavor. Just before service, whisk in the softened butter. If the sauce has not thickened enough through reduction you can thicken slightly with Wondra flour.



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