

Duck, Duck, Goose! (and Hens)

Turkey is so
Thanksgiving. Set your
holiday table with a bird
of another feather.

BY MOLLY STEVENS

IT'S TRUE THAT I NO LONGER lie in bed on Christmas Eve straining to hear reindeer on the roof, but that doesn't mean I have given up on the magic of Christmas. I've just transferred my fantasies from the prospect of new toys to a more grown-up enchantment: the promise of Christmas dinner. So while my practical friends are dutifully taking care of their shopping, I am dreaming up a special meal. To me, that often means a roast bird—especially goose, duck, and even game hens.

The rich, all-dark, almost beefy taste of goose makes it perfect holiday fare (plus, who can resist the lure of a traditional Dickensian Christmas?). Whole duck is delicious brushed with a flavorful glaze during the last minutes of roasting. And halved Cornish game hens are ideal individual servings for an elegant meal. In the following pages you'll find not only amazing recipes but also the best techniques for roasting each bird to perfection. Pair any one of them with your favorite sides, and you'll create some holiday magic of your own.



roasted ducks with tangerine-hoisin glaze

Rubbing the ducks with a mix of garlic, tangerine zest, five-spice powder, and coriander and then refrigerating for a day or two adds flavor and helps the skin crisp during roasting.

Serves 8

FOR THE DUCKS

- 4 medium cloves garlic, minced
- 4 tsp. finely grated tangerine zest
- 2½ tsp. coriander seed
- 2½ tsp. five-spice powder
- Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper
- 2 Pekin (Long Island) ducks (5 to 6 lb. each), giblets discarded

FOR THE GLAZE

- 3 Tbs. hoisin sauce
- 2 Tbs. orange liqueur, such as Grand Marnier or Triple Sec
- 1 Tbs. honey
- 1 Tbs. fresh tangerine juice
- 1 tsp. Asian sesame oil

SEASON THE DUCKS

In a mortar or spice grinder, grind the garlic, tangerine zest, coriander, five-spice, 2 Tbs. salt, and 1 tsp. pepper to a coarse paste.

Make 20 to 30 small slits in the skin of each duck, using a sharp paring knife held parallel to the duck surface so that you pierce the skin and fat but not the meat. Be sure to make slits on the backs and thighs as well as the breasts. Rub about two-thirds of the spice mixture into the duck cavities and then rub the remaining all over the skin. Set the ducks on a rack over a large rimmed baking sheet and allow to air dry uncovered in the refrigerator for 24 to 36 hours.

ROAST THE DUCKS

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Let the ducks sit at room temperature as the oven heats. Arrange the ducks breast down on two small V-racks in a large roasting pan and roast for 1¼ hours. Remove the pan from the oven and spoon or pour off most of the fat from the roasting pan—use a turkey baster if you have one. Flip the ducks, using sturdy tongs inserted in the cavities, and pierce the skin again all over with a knife. Continue roasting the ducks until the meat around the thighs feels tender when prodded (a skewer should penetrate the thigh with no resistance), the legs feel loose in their joints, and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the thigh near the joint reads 175°F, 45 to 60 minutes more.

GLAZE THE DUCKS

Remove the ducks from the oven, and increase the oven temperature to 500°F. In a small bowl, whisk the hoisin, orange liqueur, honey, tangerine juice, and sesame oil. Transfer the ducks (on the racks) to a rimmed baking sheet. With a brush, paint the breasts and legs with a thin layer of glaze and return to the oven. Paint again after 5 minutes and continue roasting until mahogany-color, 3 to 5 minutes more.

Let the ducks rest for 5 to 10 minutes before carving.


TO DRINK: A good match for the rich duck is a bright and acidic Riesling, like the Weingut Münzberg Riesling Kabinett 2007 (\$20). It's well balanced with sweet, juicy fruit and perfect acidity on the finish. Hints of pear and green apple, too.

THE TECHNIQUE



SLOW-ROASTING

Roasting the duck slowly at a low temperature (breast side down first) is the best way to render the fat from under the breast skin. It's key to remove the rendered fat from the pan partway through roasting, so the duck won't sit in its own fat as it finishes roasting, which would prevent it from crisping.



roasted goose with brandied prune stuffing and red wine gravy

If you have an oval roaster with a cover (either an old-fashioned speckled enameled one or a newer model), this is an ideal time to use it. If your roaster doesn't have a cover, you can use heavy-duty aluminum foil instead. You'll need to prepare the goose, make the broth, and prepare the bread and prunes a day ahead.

Serves 8 to 10

FOR THE GOOSE

- 1 12- to 14-lb. goose (with giblets)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE BROTH

- 1 Tbs. peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 medium carrot, coarsely chopped
- 1 medium celery stalk, coarsely chopped
- 2 fresh thyme sprigs
- 1 dried bay leaf
- Kosher salt

FOR THE STUFFING

- 1 cup prunes, chopped into ½-inch pieces
- 2 Tbs. brandy
- 5 cups lightly packed ¾-inch bread cubes (from a loaf of French or Italian bread)
- 2 cups chopped celery, including leaves (about 4 stalks)
- 1¾ cups chopped yellow onion (1 large)
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves, lightly chopped
- ½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tsp. finely grated orange zest
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest

FOR THE GRAVY

- ¾ cup dry red wine, such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Shiraz/Syrah
- 2 Tbs. all-purpose flour
- 2 Tbs. currant or plum jelly
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

PREPARE THE GOOSE

Pull the giblets out of the cavity. Refrigerate the liver for use in the stuffing and set the other giblets aside for the broth. Tear off any

loose deposits of fat from inside the cavity openings. With a chef's knife, cut off and reserve the two long outermost sections of each wing, leaving only the section nearest the breast still attached. Next, with a paring knife, prick holes in the skin around the thighs, being careful not to cut into the meat. Finally, season the goose generously inside and out with salt and pepper. Set on a rack on a baking sheet and refrigerate, uncovered, overnight.

MAKE THE BROTH AND START THE STUFFING

Using a cleaver, chop the neck and wings into 4-inch sections. Pat dry with paper towels. Heat the oil in a 5-quart soup pot over medium heat. Add the neck, wings, and giblets (excluding the liver). Cook, turning occasionally, until browned on all sides, 10 to 15 minutes. Add the onion, carrot, celery, thyme, and bay leaf and stir. Add 1 quart water and a small pinch of salt and bring to a boil. Immediately reduce the heat to medium low and simmer gently for 2 hours. Strain, discarding the solids, and cool to room temperature before refrigerating. You should have 1½ to 1¾ cups broth.

Combine the prunes and brandy for the stuffing in a small bowl, cover, and steep overnight. Arrange the bread cubes for the stuffing on a baking sheet and set aside, uncovered, to dry overnight.

STEAM THE GOOSE

Put the goose breast side up on a V-rack in a large flameproof roasting pan with sides at least 3 inches high. Set the pan on the top of the stove over the largest burner and add about 1 inch of water. Cover the roasting pan tightly with heavy-duty foil (or with the domed lid if using a covered roaster). Bring to a boil and lower the heat so the water just simmers. Steam the goose for 40 minutes. Check the liquid occasionally to make sure it hasn't evaporated and add hot water if necessary. Turn off the heat and uncover the pan, being careful of the steam. Remove the goose and rack from the pan and set aside for 20 to 30 minutes until cool enough to handle.

MAKE THE STUFFING AND ROAST THE GOOSE

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Spoon 2 Tbs. rendered goose fat from the steaming liquid in the roasting pan (reserving the rest) and put it in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the goose liver and sauté, turning a few times, until it browns and feels springy, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board to cool. Return the skillet to medium heat and add the celery, onion, garlic, thyme, and ½ tsp. each salt and pepper. Stir, cover, and reduce the heat to medium low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are soft, 10 to 12 minutes.

Transfer the vegetables to a large mixing bowl. Stir in the bread cubes, soaked prunes, parsley, orange and lemon zests, and ½ tsp. salt. Chop the liver and add it to the bowl.

Check the goose for pinfeathers or quills—these are most often found around the legs. Remove any with strong tweezers or pliers. Using a large spoon, loosely fill the large cavity of the goose with stuffing. If there is any leftover stuffing, use it to fill the smaller neck cavity.

Pour the steaming liquid from the roasting pan into a clean vessel and leave at room temperature until cool. When the liquid and fat are cool enough to handle, spoon the fat off, set aside 2 Tbs. for the gravy, and reserve the rest for cooking (see Test Kitchen, p. 99); discard the water.

Return the roasting rack and goose to the roasting pan. Roast for 1½ hours and then rotate the pan for even cooking. Continue roasting until the meat on the drumsticks feels very soft when pressed, ½ to 1 hour more. You can also check that the thigh (near the joint) is 175°F to 180°F and that the stuffing is at least 165°F. Remove the goose from the oven.

Set the goose in a draft-free spot to rest for 20 to 45 minutes. If the kitchen is cool, tent the bird loosely with foil.

MAKE THE GRAVY

Pour off the fat from the roasting pan, being careful to leave behind all the tasty pan drippings. Set the roasting pan over medium heat on the largest burner and add the wine, stirring and scraping with a wooden spoon to loosen all the pan drippings. Bring to a boil and reduce by about half, stirring often, about 3 minutes. Scrape the contents of the roasting pan into a strainer set over a bowl.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat the 2 Tbs. reserved goose fat. Whisk in the flour and continue whisking for about 1 minute. Slowly whisk in the liquid from the roasting pan and then whisk in the broth. Simmer, whisking frequently, until thickened and full-flavored, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the jelly until melted. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and keep warm while you carve the goose.

Serve the goose and stuffing with the gravy on the side.

TO DRINK: Try the Juan Gil Monastrell 2006 (\$16) from Jumilla, Spain. It's zesty and spicy, with deep layers of cassis and a long finish.

THE TECHNIQUE



STEAM-ROASTING

This combination cooking method involves steaming on the stovetop and then slow-roasting in the oven. Steaming eliminates the need to remove hot fat from the oven during roasting. Also, it renders a maximum of fat cleanly (without any roasted or caramelized bits), leaving you with lots of pure white goose fat to cook with (for ideas, see Test Kitchen, page 99). After pouring off the fat, the goose roasts slowly for 2 to 2½ hours, making it tender and succulent, with crisp, handsomely browned skin.





roasted cornish game hens with cranberry-port sauce

This is a great dish for company because much of the work, from preparing the hens to making the broth for the sauce, can be done a day ahead.

Serves 8

FOR THE HENS

- 4 Cornish game hens (1½ to 2 lb. each)
- 4 tsp. finely chopped fresh sage (stems reserved for the broth)
- 4 tsp. chopped fresh thyme (stems reserved for the broth)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter

FOR THE BROTH

- 2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups lower-salt chicken broth
- ½ cup chopped shallot

FOR THE SAUCE

- ½ cup ruby port
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 1 Tbs. minced shallot
- 1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

PREPARE THE HENS

Using poultry shears, remove the backbones from the hens by cutting along both sides. Set each hen breast side up on a cutting board and flatten by pressing down on the breastbone with your palms. With a chef's knife, split each hen in two along the breastbone. Extend the wings on each side and chop off the last two joints. Discard any large deposits of fat. Chop or break each backbone into 2 pieces and set aside with the wing tips. **In a small bowl**, combine the sage and thyme with 1 Tbs. salt and 1 tsp. pepper. Pat the hens dry and rub the herb mixture on both sides of each hen. Arrange the hens skin side up on a rimmed baking sheet so they aren't touching and refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 12 hours or overnight.

MAKE THE BROTH AND START THE SAUCE

Pat the reserved wings and back bones dry. Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a 3- to 4-quart saucepan. Add the wings and back bones and cook, stirring a few times, until

browned on all sides, about 8 minutes. Add the chicken broth, chopped shallot, and reserved sage and thyme stems. Simmer gently, adjusting the heat as needed, for 30 minutes. Strain, discarding the solids. Cool the broth and refrigerate overnight.

Combine the port and cranberries for the sauce in a small bowl, cover, and let sit overnight.

ROAST THE HENS

An hour before roasting, remove the hens from the refrigerator and let sit at room temperature. Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. **Melt the 1 Tbs. butter** and brush it lightly over the hens. Roast, rotating the pan about halfway though, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a thigh reads 175°F to 180°F, about 30 minutes. Let rest at least 5 minutes before serving.

MAKE THE SAUCE

While the hens roast, skim the fat from the broth and heat the broth in a small saucepan. Heat the 1 Tbs. butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the minced shallot and cook, stirring occasionally, until the shallot is tender, about 2 minutes. Stir in the flour and cook, whisking gently, until it forms a thick paste, about 30 seconds. Strain the port through a fine sieve into the saucepan, reserving the cranberries (don't press down on the berries). Whisk for about 30 seconds. Slowly whisk in the broth until the sauce is smooth, adjusting the heat to maintain a steady simmer. Simmer, whisking occasionally, until reduced by about one-third, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in the reserved cranberries. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Keep warm.

Just before serving, pour any accumulated juices from the hens into the sauce. Serve the hens drizzled with the sauce.

TO DRINK: Fleur Vineyards Petite Sirah 2007 (\$16) from the north coast of California has exceptionally dark red fruits and soft, delicate tannins, a perfect balance for this dish.



THE TECHNIQUE



DRY-BRINING AND SPLITTING

A dry brine of salt, pepper, and fresh herbs combined with air drying the hens in the fridge overnight helps crisp the skin during roasting.

Splitting the hens in half before roasting is convenient for serving (half a hen makes a perfect single portion) but also has benefits for the cook: It's neater and eliminates any need for tableside carving; the split hens roast more quickly and evenly; and best of all, it leaves you with a pot full of backbones and wingtips that become the base for a rich sauce.

The Big Thaw

While Cornish hens and ducks may be available year-round, goose tends to be a wintertime specialty. Even so, many markets only sell these birds frozen, so be sure to allow time for thawing. The best way to thaw poultry is in its original wrapper in the refrigerator. (Put the birds on a rimmed tray in case of any leaks.) Allow three full days for a goose, two days for a duck, and one for a hen.

Molly Stevens is a Fine Cooking contributing editor and cookbook author. She is currently working on a book about roasting, which will be out next year. □

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- **Cornish game hen**, 1.25 to 1.5 lb. for \$12.98, lobels.com, 877-783-4512.
- **Oxo poultry shears**, \$24.99, oxo.com, 800-545-4411.
- **Large nonstick roaster with V-rack**, \$69.95, crateandbarrel.com, 800-967-6696.
- **Great White Heirloom serving platter** (oval), \$49, potterybarn.com, 888-779-5176.
- **Apilco beaded hemstitch dinnerware**, \$80 for a set of 4 salad plates, williamssonoma.com, 877-812-6235.
- **Mercury glass mini ornaments by Roost**, \$29 for a set of 9, napastyle.com, 866-776-6272.

From dartagnan.com, 800-327-8246:

- **Whole Pekin duck**, 5 to 5.5 lb. for \$26.99.
- **Whole goose**, 12 to 14 lb. for \$184.99, dartagnan.com.

