

Waterfowl – From First Shot to the Cooking Pot

Many waterfowlers flare from cooking their game, fearing a “gamey” taste or dry, tough meat. With years of duck hunting experience and his own flock of products, including calls, videos and a line of Cajun seasonings, Phil Robertson, a.k.a. the Duck Commander, will have you ready to bag your limit with his tips and tasty recipes for delicious waterfowl meals.

What’s on the Menu?

According to Robertson, how a duck tastes varies greatly depending upon the species and their diet. Most diver ducks, such as bufflehead, goldeneyes, and mergansers, feed predominantly on invertebrates and fish, which explain their strong, objectionable taste. On the other hand, puddle ducks that feed mainly on aquatic vegetation and agricultural grains and seed are more desirable for the table. Robertson’s favorites include green wing teal, wood ducks and pintails. “Woodies,” he explains, “eat corn and rice, but they’d rather have those pin oak acorns, just like deer, while the green wing teal like to skim little grass seed and rice.” Mallards, the perennial favorite of duck hunters, tend to be a little coarse, according to Robertson and wigeons eat a lot of moss which can affect their flavor. His least favorite - the shoveler. “They always have that wide bill groveling around in the mud and they smell about the same.”

Duck Prep

Ducks shot at the first of the season while the weather’s still warm should be gutted in the field and continue their migration to your kitchen on ice. In the wintertime, however, Robertson waits until he gets home to begin dressing his ducks. “We get back from our hunt and immediately hand-pick our ducks,” a skill he claims few women know. “There ain’t nothing better on the face of this earth than a duck-pickin’ woman, but they’re getting harder to find every day.”

After picking, he removes the wings with game shears, leaving the head, neck, legs and tail feathers. Holding the bird by the head and feet, he quickly singes the tiny downy feathers, or “hairs” off the body over a gas burner. Next, he cuts off the head and neck, legs and tail feathers, including the small pointed oil bag. Robertson then makes an incision with the shears in the duck’s belly up to its breastbone and removes the windpipe and entrails. Any “blue ducks” as he calls them – those with protruding breastbones or very little fat – should be discarded. Examine ducks carefully for shot which can be picked out easily with tweezers or the point of a sharp knife. Leave the skin on to help keep the meat moist and with a thorough rinsing in water, your ducks are ready for storage or cooking. Ducks can be frozen in doubled-up freezer bags with a little water added for up to three months, but in the Robertson household, they’re typically eaten the same day they’re shot.

While there are many recipes for grilled or barbequed duck, Robertson believes that ducks are best cooked slow. “When you’re too tied up that you can’t take time to cook something slow, you’re just too doggone tied up – you need to lighten your load.” So follow his advice - fire up your oven and enjoy!

Recipes

Baked Duck

Ingredients:

4 or 5 whole ducks with skin on
Peanut oil
Flour
1 large onion (quartered)
1 bell pepper (quartered)
3-4 celery stalks
6-8 garlic cloves (whole or chopped)
2 large oranges (peeled, seeded and quartered)
1 pound of Cajun style sausage, cut into ½ inch slices
1 cup wine (red or white as desired)
Salt
Pepper
Phil Robertson Cajun Style Seasoning (mild or spicy)
Cooked rice

Directions:

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Brush duck carcasses with a little oil and then roll in flour that's been seasoned with salt, pepper and cajun seasoning. Brown duck in a heavy dutch oven in a quarter inch of peanut oil, turning to ensure even browning. Remove from fire and add wine, sausage, onion, bell pepper, celery, and garlic, top with oranges and season with salt, pepper and cajun seasoning. Cover with lid and bake in oven for 2 ½ hours. When done, ease ducks and sausage out onto a serving platter and spoon remaining vegetables over the top. Return dutch oven to stove top and add ¼ cup flour and seasonings to remaining drippings. Stir over a low to medium fire for 20 minutes or until brown, adding a little water as necessary to make gravy the desired consistency. Serve gravy over cooked rice. Serves 8-10.

Duck Gumbo

Ingredients:

5-6 whole ducks with skin on
3 cups flour
2 ¾ to 3 cups peanut oil
2-3 medium onions, chopped
3 bundles of shallots, chopped
Handful of parsley, chopped

1 head of garlic, finely chopped
2 pounds of hot link sausage, sliced into half-inch pieces
2 packages of cut okra (12 oz. each)
1 bay leaf
Salt
Pepper
Phil Robertson Cajun Style Seasoning (mild or spicy)
Rice

Directions:

Boil ducks for 2 hours or until tender, uncovered in a large heavy pot of water seasoned with salt, pepper and bay leaf. Hint: If using more than one pot to boil ducks, add a bay leaf to each pot.

While ducks are boiling, begin making roux: In a large heavy pot over a low fire, stir together flour and peanut oil, making a paste. Stir constantly, scraping the bottom in a figure-eight pattern to avoid burning and ensure even blending. Gauge the doneness of the roux by its color: peanut butter color- halfway done; rich hazelnut color – done. During final minutes, heat onions, $\frac{3}{4}$'s of shallots, parsley and garlic until wilted in a separate pan and add to roux. Season with salt, pepper and cajun seasoning and simmer for 10 minutes.

When ducks are done, remove from pot and discard bay leaf. Save the broth as this will be added to the roux and used to make your rice. Debone the meat and cut into chunks, watching for any hidden shot.

Add broth to roux, filling pot to three-quarters full. Hint: When pouring broth into roux, pour all but about 1 cup and swirl around remaining broth. Any missed shot loosened by boiling will clank in the pot.

Finally, add duck meat, sausage and okra. Turn fire up and bring to a boil. As the mixture boils, the oil from the roux will rise to the top and can be skimmed off and discarded. Cover, reduce heat and simmer four hours.

Use remaining broth to cook rice: two parts broth to one part rice. Serve gumbo over rice with a sprinkling of chopped shallots. Serves 10-12.

Quick tip: Large ducks, such as mallards, will serve two people each. Wood ducks and pintails are smaller with three ducks serving four people. Even smaller are teal – allow one per person.

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