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Game Birds from Field to Kitchen

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Game Animals from Field to Kitchen

Game birds are among our most delicious wild meats. They offer much variety in flavor as well as the sport of hunting them.

This publication is intended to help you use and enjoy the birds you shoot. With proper care in the field and cooking methods to enhance the distinctive flavors, you add good eating to the pleasure of hunting.

Check the current hunting regulations with regard to transporting and shipping game. Or, contact your local game warden regarding procedures not listed in the booklet given with the license purchase.

Care and preparation of duck, goose, coot (mudhen), pheasant, grouse and woodcock are discussed. The same principles may be applied to similar birds such as Hungarian partridge not listed.

The distinctive flavor of game birds is quite different from the off-flavors caused by improper handling.

Four basic rules apply to the handling of any game:

1. Remove entrails as soon as possible after shooting, plus the crop (craw) in ducks and geese.
2. Allow air to circulate in the body cavity.
3. Cool the carcass quickly and thoroughly.
4. Keep the meat cold until it is cooked.

Prompt cleaning of the body cavity and cooling will help prevent growth of dangerous bacteria and retain the natural meat flavor.

Field Care of Game Birds

When you go out, take the following in addition to your gun and shells: ice chest with ice, a few small plastic bags, paper bags, some cleaning tissue and a sharp hunting knife. The ice chest may not be necessary on a short trip or in cold weather. In any case, avoid piling the warm birds together in a mass. A small wire loop or old-fashioned buttonhook is handy for quick gutting of birds in the field. This is particularly effective with waterfowl.

Waterfowl

Duck

Draw the birds as soon as you can. To remove the entrails make a cut starting just rearward of the breast bone and around the vent. Pull out the entrails being careful not to break them, or the gall bladder sac on the liver. Remove the gall bladder, wipe out and put the liver with the heart and gizzard in a small plastic bag. You can save time and mess by cutting off the fleshy ends of the gizzard and throwing away the center part. If the crop did not come out with the entrails make a slit on the back of the neck and remove it. Examine the contents to determine the diet of the bird. A fish eater is likely to taste fishy and needs extensive soaking and marinating.

Wipe out the bird with clean grass or cleansing tissue. Keep ducks, or any game, as dry as you can. Water spreads bacteria causing spoilage.

If there isn't time to do a thorough job of drawing the ducks, remove the crop and intestines. Insert a buttonhook or similarly shaped wire into the vent about 2 or 3 inches, give it a turn or two, and pull out the intestines. Make a small opening at the neck and pull out the craw.

Ducks may be hung in a cool place 3 or 4 days to tenderize and develop the flavor. Leave the feathers on.

If ducks are plucked soon after shooting, they should age in the refrigerator 3 or 4 days. Ducks that are frozen immediately after shooting, cleaning and cooling, will tenderize by thawing very slowly in the refrigerator.

With the exception of coots, ducks should not be skinned. Dry pluck the birds by taking small pinches of feathers and pulling them out smartly against the grain. Grasp the feathers close to the skin. Roll your hand against the skin to remove the down and pinfeathers. Remove the large feathers by twisting them gently but firmly. On small birds cut the wings off at the first joint saving yourself the bother of pulling the larger feathers. One could save the clean dry breast and back feathers for pillow stuffing.

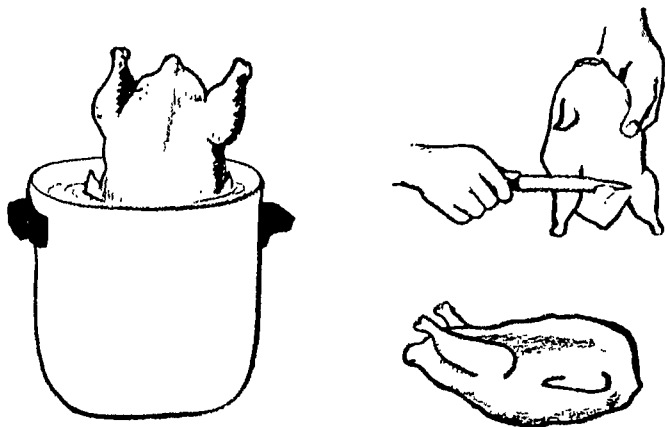


Make a taper of rolled brown paper; light and singe off the down.

If plucking doesn't remove an abundance of pinfeathers and down, the birds may need a paraffin treatment. For 6 ducks, place 3 cakes of paraffin in 6 quarts of water in a deep vessel. Bring to a boil and remove from the heat. The melted paraffin will float on top of the water. Immerse the ducks singly in the water so that a coating of paraffin adheres to the feathers. Set the birds aside to cool. When the paraffin has hardened, the small feathers and down may be removed by scraping with a small knife.

Finish cleaning the inside of the bird being sure to remove all the entrails and lungs. Remove the oil sac at the top of the tail as it imparts an undesirable oily flavor.

Freezing: Wrap birds in heavy duty aluminum foil or place in heavy plastic bags. Seal, label, freeze, and hold at 0 degrees F. Use within 9 months. Thaw slowly in wrapper in the refrigerator to tenderize and cut down moisture loss.



Roast Wild Duck I

Rub outside of duck with flour, salt and pepper. Place a whole peeled onion, quartered apples or a handful of celery leaves inside each duck. Or stuff with wild rice dressing. If they are lean, place two or three strips of bacon or salt pork on each breast, securing with toothpicks. Use a self basting roaster. Cover bottom of roaster with water, put in ducks, cover tightly and oven cook at 350° F. for 2 hours. Remove the cover the last 15 to 20 minutes to allow the skin to brown.

Note: bacon may be parboiled 10 minutes to remove the smoky taste.

Roast Wild Duck II

- 1 young duck*
- 2 cups quartered apples*
- 1 slice onion*
- 2 teaspoons salt*
- ¼ teaspoon pepper*
- 1 cup orange juice*

Fill cavity of duck with peeled quartered apples. Close with skewers and tie legs and wings close to the body. Rub ducks with slice of onion, then salt and pepper. Roast uncovered at 325° F. for 1½ to 2 hours. Baste occasionally with orange juice.

Roast Ducks with Kraut Dressing

- 1 1 pound 12 ounce can of sauerkraut, drained*
- 1 apple pared and chopped*
- ½ cup finely chopped celery*
- 2 2 to 3 pound wild ducks*
- ½ teaspoon salt*
- pepper to taste*

Combine kraut, celery and apple. Stuff into cavity of duck and close with string or skewers. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast at 325° F. 2 hours or until ducks are tender.

Smothered Wild Duck

- 1 duck*
- 1 teaspoon salt*
- ¼ teaspoon pepper*
- ½ cup flour*
- ½ cup fat*
- 1 cup milk*

Cut cleaned duck into 6 or 7 pieces.

Season with salt and pepper and roll in flour.

Fry duck slowly in hot fat until brown on both sides, about 30 minutes, turning only once.

Add the milk, cover tightly and simmer slowly for 1 hour or until tender. (It may be baked in slow oven, 325° F.)

Goose

Clean, pluck and store the same as ducks.

Roast Wild Goose with Apricot Stuffing

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| <i>1 young wild goose</i> | <i>1 cup chopped dried apricots</i> |
| <i>juice of 1 lemon</i> | <i>3 cups soft bread crumbs</i> |
| <i>salt and pepper</i> | <i>½ teaspoon salt</i> |
| <i>¼ cup butter</i> | <i>½ teaspoon pepper</i> |
| <i>¼ cup chopped onion</i> | <i>4 to 6 slices parboiled bacon</i> |
| <i>1 cup chopped tart apple</i> | <i>butter</i> |

Sprinkle goose inside and out with lemon juice, salt and pepper. Melt ¼ cup butter in a large sauce pan, add onion and cook until tender. Stir in apples, apricots, bread crumbs, salt and pepper. Spoon stuffing lightly into cavity. Close opening with skewers and string. Cover breast with bacon slices and cheesecloth soaked in butter. Place goose breast up on rack in roasting pan. Roast at 325° F. for 2½ to 3 hours. Baste frequently with pan drippings. If age of goose is uncertain pour 1 cup water in pan and cover during last hour of cooking.

Roast Stuffed Goose

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| <i>1 young goose</i> |
| <i>4 cups poultry stuffing seasoned with onion and sage.</i> |

Lightly stuff goose. Truss legs and wings to lie close to the body. Roast at 325° F. for 3 to 4 hours, basting occasionally with pan juices. Simmer giblets until tender.

Prepare gravy by pouring off most of the fat and adding some brown flour, the cooked, chopped giblets and a little parsley. Use cooking broth from giblets for liquid. To brown flour, spread on a pie plate and set in a very hot oven. When it begins to color, stir until it is uniformly brown. Store in a tightly closed container.

Serve a tart jelly with goose.

Roast Wild Goose

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| <i>1 wild goose</i> | <i>tart apples, sliced</i> |
| <i>salt and pepper</i> | |

Clean, stuff goose with apples, season and truss. Roast uncovered at 325° F. for about 3 hours.

Coot

It may surprise many that coots are edible. They have considerable meat on the breast and legs. The dark purplish meat may not look appetizing to many people, but if properly prepared it can be quite tasty.

Coots must be skinned and all the fat removed. After cutting into pieces, soak overnight in the following marinade.

1 cup vinegar
several bay leaves
6 tablespoons salt
sufficient water to cover

Drain and dry pieces. Brown in butter in heavy skillet. Add 1 cup water, and season to taste. Cover tightly and simmer for 1½ hours. Add two 4 ounce cans mushrooms and 6 tablespoons of soy sauce. Simmer ½ hour longer. Remove from heat, add ½ cup sherry wine. Replace lid and let stand 10 minutes before serving.

Upland Game Birds

Pheasant

Field Care: Pheasants may be field dressed the same as ducks. The defeathering process differs, however, since pheasants may be scalded. If convenient, they may be easily dry plucked when warm, but this is difficult with a cooled bird. Dry plucking enables you to save the feathers.

To scald a pheasant or any upland game bird, hold it by the feet and dip it rapidly in a deep vessel of hot water 150 to 155° F. until the feathers pull free easily. Let hang for a few minutes to drain and pluck. Down and hairs may be removed by singeing with a torch made from brown paper.

After scalding, finish dressing the bird being sure to remove lungs, all of the entrails, crop and oil sac.

Some hunters prefer to skin pheasants. This method allows you to skin and eviscerate the bird in one operation. Remove the legs and wings at the second joint. Lay the bird on its breast. Slit or break the skin at the back of the neck. Pull the skin outward and downward, slipping it over the wings and legs. Do not pull the skin off the tail piece. With the bird lying on its breast, cut along each side of the backbone, cutting the muscles that join the backbone to the ribs. Turn the bird on its side, breast to your left. Insert two fingers of your left hand into the depression where the neck goes into the breast cavity. Grasp neck with right hand and pull apart. The neck, backbone, entrails, and skin will be in your right hand, in the left will be the rest of the bird. Salvage the heart, liver and gizzard. Cut the gall bladder off the liver being careful not to break it.

Opinion varies regarding the need to age pheasants before cooking. Two to four days in the refrigerator is considered by some to be sufficient. A slow thaw in the refrigerator for frozen birds tenderizes and develops the flavor.

To freeze, handle pheasants the same as ducks. Partridge, grouse and woodcock are handled like pheasants. Woodcock should be plucked rather than skinned.

Preparation for Cooking: The meat of upland game birds tends to be somewhat dry. The use of cream, bacon, or salt pork keeps it from drying out when cooking. This is particularly true with older birds.

Smothered Pheasant

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| <i>1 pheasant cut in pieces</i> | <i>1 teaspoon paprika</i> |
| <i>½ cup flour</i> | <i>¼ cup butter</i> |
| <i>½ teaspoon salt</i> | <i>1 cup light cream</i> |
| <i>⅛ teaspoon pepper</i> | |

Dip the pheasant pieces in flour seasoned with salt, pepper and paprika. Brown in butter in heavy skillet. Add cream. Cover and simmer for 1½ hours or bake at 325° F. until pheasant is tender. Serve with gravy made from cream in pan.

Roast Pheasant

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| <i>1 pheasant</i> | <i>1 teaspoon salt</i> |
| <i>1 quart boiling water</i> | <i>½ teaspoon pepper</i> |
| <i>3 stalks celery</i> | <i>4 strips bacon</i> |
| <i>1 onion</i> | <i>1 cup water</i> |

Place cleaned bird in pan. Pour boiling water over and into the cavity. Discard the water. Put celery and onion into the bird. Do not sew up. Rub bird with seasonings. Place in roasting pan and put bacon over breast. Add 1 cup of water and roast in a moderate oven, 350° F. uncovered for 2 hours or until tender.

Pheasant with Wild Rice Casserole

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| <i>2 cups cooked wild rice</i> | <i>½ soup can milk</i> |
| <i>1 onion finely chopped</i> | <i>1 cup grated cheddar cheese</i> |
| <i>1 cup fresh parsley finely chopped</i> | <i>2 pheasants cut in pieces</i> |
| <i>1 10½ ounce can cream of mushroom soup</i> | <i>flour</i> |
| | <i>shortening</i> |
| | <i>a few shakes of paprika</i> |

Heat mushroom soup and milk. Add cheese. Add to wild rice, onion and parsley. Roll pheasant in flour. Brown in shortening.

Pour rice mixture into greased casserole. Top with pheasant. Sprinkle with paprika. Cover and bake at 325° F. for 1 hour.

Pheasant with Mushrooms

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| <i>3 pheasants cut in serving pieces</i> | <i>black pepper</i> |
| <i>2 cups sliced fresh mushrooms</i> | <i>½ cup butter</i> |
| <i>2 tablespoons lemon juice</i> | <i>1 cup dry white wine or tart fruit juice</i> |
| <i>½ cup chopped mild onion</i> | <i>1 teaspoon salt</i> |

Saute pheasant in butter until golden brown. Remove pheasant and saute mushrooms in remaining butter until golden brown. Return pheasant to skillet. Add wine or fruit juice, lemon juice, onions, salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 1 hour or until tender.

Grouse and Partridge

Larded Grouse or Partridge

On each bird lay thin slices of bacon to cover the bird completely. Wrap with string to keep the bacon in place. Put in roasting pan and pour in enough water to cover the bottom. Bake at 400° F. for 20 to 25 minutes. Remove bacon, brush birds with melted butter. Sprinkle with flour and bake again until the birds turn a rich brown. Thicken the liquid in the pan, add ½ cup of port or sherry wine, heat and season. Arrange the birds on a platter and garnish with rings of green pepper and strips of bacon used to cover the birds while roasting. Serve with Orange Sauce.

Orange Sauce

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| <i>6 tablespoons currant jelly</i> | <i>2 tablespoons orange juice</i> |
| <i>3 tablespoons sugar</i> | <i>2 tablespoons lemon juice</i> |
| <i>grated rind of 2 oranges</i> | <i>¼ teaspoon salt</i> |
| <i>2 tablespoons port wine</i> | <i>dash of cayenne</i> |

Pour jelly, sugar and grated orange rind in bowl and beat well. Add remaining ingredients and stir until blended thoroughly.

Stuffed Grouse or Partridge

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| <i>1 grouse or partridge</i> | <i>1 cup cooked rice</i> |
| <i>½ teaspoon poultry seasoning</i> | <i>2 tablespoons chopped onion</i> |
| <i>1 tablespoon chopped green pepper</i> | <i>½ cup chopped mushrooms</i> |
| <i>2 slices bacon</i> | <i>salt and pepper to taste</i> |

Soak bird in salted water (2 tablespoons salt to 1 quart of water) for 1 hour. Dry thoroughly.

Combine remaining ingredients except bacon. Stuff bird; close opening with a skewer. Wrap bird with bacon, place in covered roaster and bake at 375° F. for 1 hour. Remove cover toward end of roasting period to crisp bacon and brown bird.

Woodcock

Baked Woodcock

Split birds into serving pieces, dip in milk and dredge with seasoned flour. Brown in butter. Place in a casserole and cover with sweet or sour cream. Bake uncovered in a moderate oven, 350° F., until tender.

Roast Woodcock

Woodcock

1 tablespoon butter

salt and pepper

Split birds as for broiling. Place in dripping pan with butter. Bake in 450° F. oven for 5 minutes; then reduce to 325° F. and bake 15 to 25 minutes longer, depending on size. Baste frequently with drippings. Season to taste.

Boiled Wild Rice

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raw wild rice

2 teaspoons butter

1 teaspoon salt

dash pepper

3 cups boiling water

Wash rice well in 3 or 4 changes of cold water, removing foreign particles. Add salt to boiling water; add rice very slowly so that water keeps boiling. Boil, covered, stirring occasionally with fork, 30 to 45 minutes or until rice is tender and all water is absorbed. Add butter, pepper. Use with game or poultry. Makes $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups, or 3 servings.

Wild Rice Stuffing

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. sliced mushrooms or 4 oz.

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

can mushrooms

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped celery

2 cups cooked wild rice

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter

(directions on pkg.)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced onions

few grains pepper

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced parsley

Cook mushrooms in butter 5 minutes. Remove mushrooms; add onions, parsley and celery; cook until onions are yellow. Add rest of ingredients and mushrooms; simmer 15 minutes. Enough for 4 pound chicken.

Acknowledgements

There are many variations of the methods outlined in this bulletin. If you follow one of these and have enjoyed your game, continue to do so. Many resources were used in compiling the information and recipes. Among them are:

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