

# Game Birds from Field to Kitchen

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## *Game Birds 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 with proper 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 instructions given with the license.

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

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 paper towels, 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 effective with both waterfowl and upland game. Gutting the birds also helps cool them.

# Waterfowl

## Duck

Draw the birds as soon as you can. To remove the entrails, make a cut starting just below the breast bone up to the tail, and around the vent. Pull out the entrails, being careful not to break them or the gallbladder sac on the liver. Remove the gallbladder, 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 paper towels. Keep ducks, or any other 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. However, waterfowl are easier to pluck if it is done as soon as possible.

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 large feathers. You can save the clean dry breast and back feathers for pillow stuffing.

remove



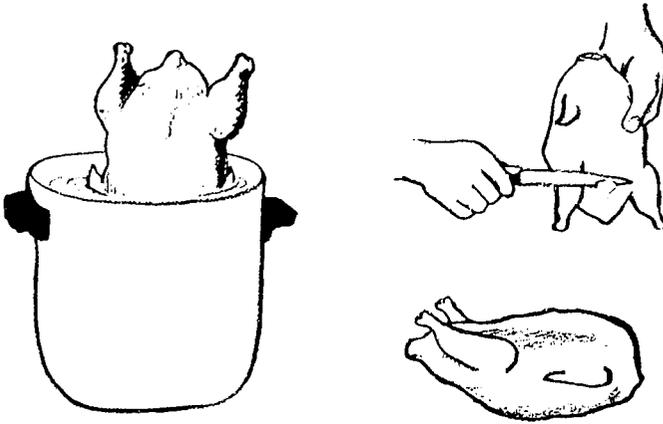
remove entrails

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, dull knife. A sharp knife will cut or tear the skin.

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 2½ 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 2 to 2½ 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 cavities of ducks 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.)

The duck is ready for the table if a pink-white juice appears when a toothpick is stuck into the duck.

## Braised Duck

<i>3-4 pound duck (½ pound per serving)</i>	<i>1 cup chopped celery</i>
<i>1 teaspoon salt</i>	<i>1 cup chopped carrot</i>
<i>¼ teaspoon pepper</i>	<i>2 cloves</i>
<i>3 tablespoons fat</i>	<i>1 bay leaf</i>
<i>1 quart boiling water</i>	<i>2 tablespoons chopped parsley</i>
<i>1 medium onion, chopped</i>	<i>1 tablespoon flour</i>

Wash and dry duck thoroughly. Sprinkle it with salt and pepper. Melt 2 tablespoons fat in large pan. Brown the duck on all sides over high heat. Add 1 quart boiling water and the onion, celery, carrot, cloves, bay leaf, and parsley. Cover and simmer until tender (about 1½ hours). Remove the duck. Blend flour and 1 tablespoon melted butter and add to the pan liquid. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Serve the duck on a hot platter with this gravy. A mushroom sauce of your own choosing may be used instead of the gravy.

Garnish with hominy grits or croquettes.

## Barbecued Duck

<i>4 large wild ducks</i>	<i>2 tablespoons butter</i>
<i>8 teaspoons lemon juice</i>	<i>2 teaspoons salt</i>
<i>2 teaspoons worchestershire sauce</i>	<i>1 teaspoon paprika</i>
<i>2 teaspoons mustard</i>	<i>Brown sugar</i>
<i>2 teaspoons ketchup</i>	<i>2 medium apples (optional), finely grated</i>

Cut breasts from 4 large wild ducks (8 pieces). Broil pieces until brown (about 15 minutes), basting continuously with barbecue sauce made from lemon juice, worchestershire sauce, mustard, ketchup, and butter. After the meat starts browning, sprinkle it with salt, paprika, brown sugar, and finely grated apple. Continue broiling for 45 minutes for well-done meat.

## Goose

Clean, pluck, and store the same as ducks.

### Roast Wild Goose with Apricot Stuffing

<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>⅛ 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. Allow ½ hour per pound. 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

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

<i>1 wild goose</i>	<i>salt and pepper</i>	<i>tart apples, sliced</i>
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Clean, stuff goose with apples, season, and truss. Roast a 6-7 pound goose uncovered at 325° F. for about 3 hours. For a 8-9 pound goose, roast for 4 hours. Check breast juice with toothpick; a pink-white color indicates that the goose is done.

## Roast Goose with Potato Stuffing

Prepare goose for roasting. Stuff with the following:

*2 cups hot potatoes, mashed or riced*

*1½ cups bread crumbs (soft)*

*¼ cup finely chopped salt pork or meat drippings*

*1 medium onion, minced*

*1 egg slightly beaten*

*1½ teaspoon salt*

*1 teaspoon sage (if desired)*

Be sure there are no lumps in the potatoes; a potato ricer can be used to remove lumps. Add other ingredients and mix lightly.

After stuffing, truss goose and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place in a roasting pan and bake in hot oven (400° F.). As soon as the fat and juices start coming out of the goose, use them for basting. Baste every 10 minutes during roasting.

A medium size goose will need about 2 hours of roasting at 400° F.

Place on a hot platter. Remove strings and skewers. Garnish with watercress or parsley and bright red cranberries.

## 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 may 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. Add ¼ cup water if necessary. Cover tightly and simmer for 2 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 set 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 is preferred and 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 somewhat dry. The use of cream, bacon, or salt pork keeps it from drying out when cooking. This is particularly true with older birds. Small sweet onion rings and/or mushroom also add flavor. These can be used with other ingredients.

## Smothered Pheasant

<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

<i>1 pheasant</i>	<i>1 teaspoon salt</i>
<i>1 quart of boiling water</i>	<i>⅛ 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 into 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 into 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

<i>2 cups cooked wild rice</i>	<i>½ soup can of 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 10 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

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

## Deep Fat Fried Pheasant

<i>1 pheasant/cut like chicken</i>	<i>1 tablespoon worchestershire sauce</i>
<i>1 egg beaten</i>	
<i>½ cup milk</i>	<i>½ teaspoon allspice</i>
<i>¼ cup flour</i>	<i>salt and pepper to taste</i>

Mix milk, worchestershire sauce, flour, and seasonings with beaten egg. Dip pieces of pheasant in batter and lower into hot fat. Have enough fat to cover pieces while frying. Heat fat to 350° F. and regulate heat so pheasant fries at 300° to 325° F. Cook about 10 minutes until golden brown and tender. Drain on paper towels. Keep hot in heavy, heated pan until serving time.

## 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 25 to 30 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. Butter instead of bacon strips can be used for basting. Serve with orange sauce.

### Orange Sauce

<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

<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>¼ 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. Unsalted ice cold water can be used if you enjoy a genuine grouse flavor. 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.

### **Braised Grouse or Partridge Breasts**

<i>2-3 grouse breasts or 6 partridge breasts</i>	<i>6 peppercorns</i>
<i>¼ pound butter</i>	<i>salt and pepper to taste</i>
<i>2 large bay leaves</i>	<i>1 10-ounce can of mushroom soup</i>

As soon as birds are skinned and cleaned, remove the bones and cut the meat into serving pieces. Saute in butter, add seasonings, and simmer for 2½ hours. Add water as needed to keep from cooking dry. Add mushroom soup and thicken the gravy to desired consistency. Serve over potatoes or biscuits. Yield is approximately 4-6 servings.

### **Grouse or Partridge in Cream**

<i>2 to 4 birds depending on species</i>	<i>2 cups heavy cream</i>
<i>flour seasoned with salt and pepper</i>	<i>Dash of paprika</i>
<i>½ cup small cubes pork fat</i>	<i>1 cup mushrooms</i>
<i>¼-½ cup butter</i>	

Cut up the birds as you would for fried chicken. Brown the pork cubes to render the fat. Add melted butter equal to the quantity of the fat. Dip the birds in flour seasoned with salt and pepper, and delicately brown the pieces in the fat.

Remove the meat and add cream. Season the sauce in the pan to your taste. Add mushrooms. Thicken sauce if desired with seasoned flour and fat. Replace the pieces of meat and reheat. Serve with buttered toast.

# ***Woodcock and Quail***

## **Baked Woodcock or Quail**

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 or Quail**

*Woodcock or Quail*

*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.

## **Broiled Woodcock or Quail**

After dressing the bird, wash it carefully. Wipe with a damp cloth. Fasten strips of bacon around the bird with toothpicks. Broil 10-12 minutes. Remove the bacon strips.

Serve the bird on toast, buttered bread, or garlic-butter bread together with a sauce made of equal amounts of melted butter and lemon juice. Add chopped parsley if desired.

## **Woodcock or Quail on Toast**

Wash the bird carefully after dressing. Wipe with a damp cloth. Place a tablespoon of highly seasoned dressing of your choice in each bird. (The birds are small and need only a small amount of dressing or seasoning).

Truss carefully as is usually done with chicken so the legs are up instead of down. Fasten a slice of bacon around each leg with tooth picks. Roast in a hot oven (450° F.) *at least* 20 minutes. Baste frequently with a mixture of equal amounts of butter and hot water seasoned with salt and pepper. Serve on slices of toast moistened with broth from the bird. Garnish with parsley and with grape or currant jelly if desired.

## Boiled Wild Rice

*¾ 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 2¾ cups, or 3 servings.

## Wild Rice Stuffing

*½ lb. sliced mushrooms or 4 oz. can mushrooms*      *¾ teaspoon salt*  
*½ cup chopped celery*      *⅓ cup water*  
*¼ cup minced onions*      *2 cups cooked wild rice*  
*¼ cup minced parsley*      *(directions on pkg.)*  
*few grains pepper*

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 bird.

## *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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