



GAME BIRDS

There is a wealth of game-bird farms around Australia. With air-freight being far more efficient than it used to be, we can now get very good quality birds, almost year round and within a time frame that means that they don't need to be frozen. In Tasmania, we have access to quail only. They are fresh and come in two forms, bone in or bone out. The bone-out, birds have the rib cage removed and are slit down the back. They cook in about 15 mins in an oven or not much longer on a barbeque.

The partridge, guinea fowl, squab, (baby pigeon) and pheasant come from very good farms in Victoria. We can be assured that we have a good product to work with. It must be remembered that all these birds are farmed and not wild. Cooking a wild game bird is a different prospect altogether. You don't know what they have been eating, how far they have flown or where they have been shot. They are generally leaner, more muscular and probably have bits of shot in them. They do, however taste far better and in the recipes following, it is safer to follow the slow-cooked method than the fast.

The farmed birds are also lean. The only fat is beneath the skin, make sure there is sufficient skin covering the breast to maintain moisture. If not, lay pork belly fat over the breast. The flavours are milder than the wild bird, yet still stronger than a domestic one. It is important to compliment, not swamp that flavour.

Complimentary flavours include:

Olive oil, onions, garlic, mushrooms, spinach, bay leaves, rosemary, thyme, sage, majoram, fortified wines, bacon or belly fat, aniseed, soy sauce, ginger, honey, cardamom, cumin, coriander, juniper, allspice (carefully) and any amount of pork, goose or duck fat you care to add. Starchy foods, like potatoes, beans, lentils, polenta, cous cous, root vegetables and rice, also go well, especially if the meat juices have dripped into them.

There are two ways to cook these birds. Either hot and fast, or slow and long. The first method asks you to protect the flesh, with a layer of fat. The second, to cook covered with plenty of sauce or stock, and in the case of the rillettes, plenty of fat.

Recipes

Stuffings

- 1 slice fresh white bread, 6 tbs milk, 150 gms chicken livers, 2 eggs, 1 tbs chopped parsley, 1 clove garlic, 1 tsp green peppercorns, ½ tsp ground allspice, 4 crushed juniper berries, 6 tbs cognac, salt and pepper, 1 rasher bacon, 6 tbs cream, 1 tbs roasted pinenuts. Soak the bread in the milk then add the rest of the ingredients. Mix well to make a creamy consistency.
- 1 finely chopped onion, 2 tbs butter, 1 cup rice, 1 cup stock, salt and pepper, 3 dried apple rings, 6 dried apricots, ¼ cup currants. Cook rice in the stock, sauté onions in the butter. Mix together with the fruit that has been soaked in water overnight. Mix to a creamy consistency.
- 1 cup prunes, 1 granny smith apple, chopped coarsely, 1 red onion chopped coarsely, finely grated zest of 1 orange, 2 tbs orange juice. Combine ingredients and leave for several hours, the prunes will soak up any extra liquid. Mix to a paste.
- 1 small onion, chopped, 100 gms butter, ½ cup pearl barley, 1 tsp cumin seeds, juice and zest of a lemon, ½ cup currants, 1 ½ cups stock and salt and pepper to taste. Sauté onions in butter then add the rest of the ingredients. Bring to the boil and cover tightly. Cook at 150 C for two hours.

Red wine marinade, suitable for hare, venison or pheasant, squab or guinea fowl

1 lt red wine	4 tbs olive oil
2 onions, diced	2 carrots diced
1 stick celery, diced	2 bay leaves
2 sprigs thyme	2 sprigs parsley
2 sprigs rosemary	3 cloves garlic, crushed

