

Grilled Soy-Basted Pheasant Thighs with Spicy Cashews

Preparation time: 25 minutes | Cooking time: 20 minutes | Serves 3-5



GRILLED SOY-BASTED CHICKEN THIGHS BY JESSICA EMILY MARX

Almost all the “game” recipes featured on this page over the years are variations of ones originally written for chicken, pork, or beef. That’s because almost all recipes are made for domestic meats. Cooks and cookbook writers aiming to elevate game dishes usually tweak their favorite standard recipes so they work for venison, upland birds, and waterfowl—like adding extra fat when using venison in a beef recipe, or braising wild ducks a bit longer in a dish created for pen-raised birds.

The quick and delicious recipe featured here is no exception. It’s an adaptation of one by *New York Times* food editor Sam Sifton for skinless, boneless chicken thighs.

Pheasant thighs and drumsticks can be difficult to prepare. Both are easy to overcook, and there’s not much meat on the drumsticks. But grilled quickly over an open flame, the meat in this recipe browns while being lacquered with a sugary soy basting sauce. I serve the thighs with rice (or a rice substitute, such as sautéed finely shredded cauliflower) and steamed broccoli, and eat the drumsticks for lunch the next day.

The recipe works just as well for fewer pheasant pieces, and feel free to add or substitute pheasant breasts (or chicken breasts, if flattened to one-half inch thick).

Toasted sesame oil, Sriracha sauce, and hoisin sauce are available in the Asian aisle of most Montana grocery stores.

Though the recipe calls for only one-third cup of the Sriracha-roasted cashews, I’ve increased that to a full cup. You’ll definitely want to save the extras as snacks. As Sifton writes, “They are addictive.”

—Tom Dickson is the Montana Outdoors editor.

HOT COMMODITY

Ten years ago, Sriracha sauce was hardly known in the United States. No longer. Thanks to social media influencers and television chefs, this Asian blend of hot chili peppers, distilled vinegar, garlic, sugar, and salt is heating up Lays potato chips, Doritos tortilla chips, Heinz ketchup, and other brand-name foods—not to mention the spicy cashew recipe featured here.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 c. unsalted cashews (whole or pieces)
- 1 T. honey
- 2 T. Sriracha sauce
- 3 T. toasted sesame oil
- ½ c. plus 3 T. soy sauce
- 2 T. hoisin sauce
- 1 T. cracked black pepper
- 10 pheasant thighs and 10 drumsticks (or 2.5 pounds of skinless, boneless chicken thighs)
- Note: Fewer pheasant or chicken pieces work with this same recipe. No need to adjust other ingredients.
- ¼ c. brown sugar
- 2 T. peeled and minced fresh ginger
- 4 scallions, sliced thin
- 5 or 6 sprigs cilantro, tough stems removed and roughly chopped (about 2 T.)

DIRECTIONS

Heat oven to 300 degrees. Put honey in a small bowl and microwave on high for 10 seconds to melt. Add cashews and Sriracha sauce and stir until nuts are coated. Line a small baking pan with foil and cover with the coated cashews, then place in the oven and bake 20 minutes. Remove the nuts from foil and let cool, then set aside two-thirds for later snacking and chop the rest roughly and set aside in a small bowl.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk together toasted sesame oil, ½ c. soy sauce, hoisin sauce, and black pepper. Add pheasant pieces and stir to coat. Refrigerate 15 minutes to 1 hour until you are ready to cook.

For the basting sauce, combine the remaining 3 T. soy sauce, brown sugar, and ginger in a small bowl, and whisk until the sugar has dissolved.

Fire up your grill and bring to medium heat. Coat grates with vegetable oil. Using tongs, remove pheasant pieces from marinade and cook, turning every few minutes, until they are well-browned but not crusty, approximately 6 minutes total (8 to 10 minutes for chicken thighs). Using a pastry brush, begin to baste them with the soy-ginger-sugar mixture, until they develop a lacquer, which takes another 4 minutes (8 to 10 minutes for chicken), again turning several times.

Transfer pheasant to a warmed platter, sprinkle with the chopped cashews, scallions, and cilantro, and serve. ■