

Goose confit

By Tom Dickson

Preparation Time: 12 hours

Cooking Time: 3 to 5 hours

Serves: 4



For years I never knew how to cook the tough, chewy legs of the Canada and snow geese I shot. Then I visited southern France.

There I learned the French have for centuries prepared a dish called confit (*kone-FEE*)—duck or goose thighs braised (slow cooked at low heat) in liquefied duck fat. Traditionally this was used as a method of preservation. The slow-cooked, salt-cured meat was then put in ceramic jars with a thick layer of duck fat that sealed out moisture and thus bacteria. French farmers could keep jars of confit in the root cellar throughout the winter.

Though refrigeration has made the preservation process unnecessary, chefs worldwide still prepare duck and goose confit for its rich flavor. While cycling through France's Dordogne region one September several years ago, my wife and I were surprised to find that nearly every restaurant featured confit. We gorged ourselves. I couldn't wait to get home for the waterfowl season and make it myself.

It took much experimentation to make the process work for wild geese and modern tastes. Many of the traditional recipes I found call for using lots of salt (to draw out moisture from the meat and inhibit bacterial growth) and duck fat (as the braising liquid). Contemporary chefs, concerned more with taste than long-term storage, use far less salt. As for duck fat, there's no beating its phenomenal flavor (many chefs consider it essential for any well-stocked refrigerator), and I admit to buying a gallon online every year from a duck farm in upstate New York. But olive oil is a suitable substitute. If your Canada goose legs are especially fatty, render the fat to use as the braising liquid (see the No. 3a alternate in the directions at right). 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

INGREDIENTS

4 Canada or 8 snow goose legs,
rinsed and patted dry

1½ t. kosher salt

1 t. freshly ground black pepper

2 cloves garlic, mashed

1 T. sugar

½ t. dried thyme

Optional: Pinch each of powdered ginger,
powdered nutmeg, and powdered cloves

1 bay leaf, crumbled

Olive oil, duck fat, or rendered goose fat

Roasted or mashed potatoes

Optional: Arugula (a peppery leafy green
found in the produce section of most
grocery stores)

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small bowl, combine salt, pepper, garlic, sugar, spices, and bay leaf. Press the mixture firmly into the skin of the legs. Place legs in a pan in one layer. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate 8 to 12 hours.

2. The next day, heat oven to 225 degrees. Thoroughly wipe off the salt and spices. Place goose legs, fat side down, in a large ovenproof skillet, with legs fitting snugly in a single layer.

3. Pour in olive oil or melted duck fat to nearly cover the legs. Cover skillet with lid or foil.

3a. (alternate) Heat legs over medium-high heat until fat starts to render. After about 20 minutes, or when there is about ¼ to ½ inch of rendered (liquefied) fat in the pan, flip goose legs, add enough olive oil to nearly cover the legs, and cover skillet with foil or lid.

4. Place skillet in oven and braise legs, flipping them once, for 3 to 4 hours or until the meat is almost falling off the bone. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees. Remove legs from skillet (reserve the fragrant fat or oil for other uses) and place them skin side up on a cooling rack set on a baking sheet. Roast for 20 to 40 minutes until the skin crisps. Alternatively, place legs skin side down in a nonstick skillet over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes or until the skin crisps.

5. Serve duck hot or warm over roasted or mashed potatoes with the arugula on the side.