

DUCK

DONE DELICIOUSLY



FINALLY, SOME EASY WAYS TO COOK
MOUTH-WATERING WATERFOWL DISHES

MY INTEREST in dining on duck began in college. A group of us would cut class on Friday for the waterfowl opener and drive to a northern Minnesota lake covered in wild rice and wild mallards. On return to my apartment, I'd spend hours slowly roasting a duck, basting it in its juices then brushing on a fancy fruit glaze before serving.

Such a time-consuming treatment worked well when I bagged only a few ducks each season. But after my aim improved over the years and I began harvesting more birds each fall, I dreaded the hours-long process of roasting duck dinner. What's more, I could never cook a duck without getting that slight "liver" taste.

Then a friend told me his favorite way to cook these scrumptious birds. It's been a love affair ever since.

"I learned this method by reading how the old-time duck hunters prepared their birds," says Joe Kingman, a longtime North Woods waterfowler. "I decided to try it, and ever since it's been the best way I've found for cooking duck."

BY TOM DICKSON ■ PHOTOS BY BILL LINDNER



GREAT GRILLING Kingman Duck (shown here basted with optional orange-honey glaze— $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of orange juice mixed with 2 tablespoons of honey) cooks up in an amazing 15 minutes, producing arguably the best duck you've ever tasted.



The method, which I call Kingman Duck, goes as follows:

1. With game shears, cut the backbone from a plucked duck.
2. “Butterfly” the bird by spreading the body cavity and pressing it firmly against the countertop (breaking the breastbone).
3. Sprinkle both sides liberally with salt (preferably sea salt).
4. Slap the duck on a hot grill for—get this!—just ten minutes on one side, then five on the other.

A 15-minute duck? I couldn't believe it either the first time I cooked a bird this way. Then I took a bite from a breast slice: smoky and salty on the outside, pink and slightly bloody on the inside. I'd never tasted duck so good. Since then, I rarely prepare duck any other way.

Why is this easy and speedy recipe so tasty? I later learned the answer from an expert wild game chef: With duck—also with goose and venison—the rarer the meat, the sweeter the meat.

“If you prick your finger and lick the drop of blood, it's sweet,” explains Ken Goff, a game cooking expert who for years was executive chef at the renowned Dakota Jazz Club & Restaurant in the Twin Cities. “The same is true with game animals that have rich, red meat. The key is to not overcook the blood, which then turns bitter and gives the meat that ‘gamey’ taste.”

Another reason this method works so well is that by butterflying the duck, you make it flat rather than round, ensuring more even cooking top and bottom. (Grilling spherical shapes results in a burned exterior and raw interior.)

Another expert who advocates cooking waterfowl hot and fast is Eileen Clarke of Townsend, author of several wild game cookbooks, including *Duck & Goose Cookery*, published by Ducks Unlimited. Because she and her husband love to hunt geese, she has developed many delicious ways to cook the big birds.

“The easiest is to barbecue a whole plucked goose on a propane grill,” she says. “Our grill has two burners, and I turn just one on and heat the grill to 350 degrees. Then I place the goose over the other burner and put a pan underneath to catch the drippings. In an hour, I've got a perfectly cooked goose with a crispy skin and juicy meat.”

DUCK BREAST À LA RITZ

- 2 boneless, skinless duck breast halves
- ¼ C. all-purpose flour
- 1 egg, beaten
- ½ C. crushed Ritz crackers
- 1 T. butter
- 2 t. vegetable oil
- Salt
- 1 oz. cheese (blue or Gruyère, crumbled)

Heat oven to 375 degrees.

Score breasts with a sharp knife, slicing lines ¼ inch deep in both directions to create a grid.

Place breasts between sheets of plastic wrap and pound gently with a meat mallet until fillets are an even ½ inch thick.

Coat with flour. Dip into egg, then into crushed crackers.

In large oven-proof skillet, melt butter and oil over medium-high heat. When butter stops foaming, add coated meat in single layer. Reduce heat slightly and cook just 90 seconds. Flip pieces, salt lightly, and cook another 30 seconds.

Top with cheese and bake 5 minutes. Serve immediately.

—TERESA MARRONE (author of *Abundantly Wild*, a book on collecting and cooking wild edibles, northerntrailspress.com)





USING EVERY BIT

It pains me to see hunters breast out a duck or a goose, then throw the rest away like so much trash. It's illegal under the state's wanton waste regulations, disrespectful of the birds, and a poor ethical showing. It's also illogical, because that meat can be prepared to taste great.

I'll admit legs and thighs aren't the easiest parts to prepare. Unlike breast meat, they don't taste good cooked fast and hot. One easy solution is to slow-cook these portions in a little liquid (called braising). Teresa Marrone, a cookbook author in Minnesota, recommends cutting up goose or duck thighs and legs and placing the pieces in a crockpot or in a covered pot placed on the stove or in the oven. Add enough orange juice to soak but not cover the meat, a bit of chopped onion, and a few herbs (such as rosemary).

"Cook that for seven or eight hours over low heat—after first bringing it to a boil—and you'll end up with meltingly tender meat bathed in a sweet, citrusy sauce," Marrone says.

Another great way to use up duck, says Marrone, is to prepare duck burgers (see recipe at right), which works just as well for goose. With this dish, you can consume every last scrap of your bird, including the meat found along the muscular backbone.

Yet another way to enjoy extra waterfowl meat is to add it to the venison you use for sausage. Keep a bag in the freezer to store deboned duck and goose legs and thighs. When it's time to make venison sausage, chop up the waterfowl and add it to the other ingredients. The fowl adds an extra dimension to the taste and ensures not one scrap of duck or goose goes to waste.

"If I must choose among the sports that draw me into the open," wrote the great outdoors writer Gordon MacQuarrie, "it will be duck hunting. No other sport with rods or guns holds so much of mystery and drama. The game comes out of the sky."

Many of us feel about the sport as MacQuarrie did. By preparing the best waterfowl recipes we can find, using as much of our harvest as possible, we pay tribute to these indomitable birds and the marvelous sport they offer. 🦆



QUACKER CRUST Duck à la Ritz (above) combines supermarket crackers with crumbled fragrant cheese. Duck burgers (right) are a great way to use every last scrap of your waterfowl harvest.

BROWN SUGAR GOOSE BREAST

- 4 T. brown sugar
- One medium goose breast (snow or lesser Canada, or a large mallard)
- 1 T. vegetable oil

Place breast on cutting board. With a sharp knife, blade parallel to the board, cut the breast in half to create two flat fillets.

Dry fillets with paper towels.

Lightly oil the barbecue grill.

Heat on high until you can hold a hand just over the grill for no longer than 3 or 4 seconds.

Place both fillets on grill.

Rub 2 T. brown sugar on top of each fillet.

Grill 3 minutes on one side, turn carefully, and grill another 1 minute on the other.

Serve on a bed of wild rice or with parsleyed potatoes.

—EILEEN CLARKE (riflesandrecipes.com)

DUCK BURGERS

- 1 lb. skinless duck meat, chilled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 4 oz. thick bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/4 small onion, chopped into 1-inch pieces
- 1/2 t. salt
- Pinch of black pepper

Fit hand grinder with fine-cutting plate (or use a food processor). Grind duck first, add bacon, then onion.

In mixing bowl, combine meat mixture with salt and pepper. Mix gently but thoroughly with your hands. Shape into four patties. Grill, broil, or pan-fry until just done, about 4 minutes per side. Serve on toasted buns with hamburger fixings.

Option: Another method that has more of a traditional hamburger taste is to skip the bacon, grind the duck (use only 10 ounces) and onion together, then mix with 8 ounces of ground beef in the mixing bowl with the salt and pepper.

—TERESA MARRONE

Tom Dickson, the editor of Montana Outdoors, says he prefers a lunch of cold grilled mallard over any other. Look for photographer Bill Lindner's (blpstudio.com) new cookbook, Recipes from Nature, in early 2006. It will feature waterfowl and other game and wild edible recipes and photographs.