

Crispy Pheasant Breasts in Gin Cream

By Tom Dickson

Preparation time: 10 minutes | Cooking time: 6 to 8 minutes | Serves 4



A few weeks ago when a friend came over for dinner, he noticed the open door of my liquor cabinet and commented on the rows of bottles inside. “Wow. Is that all yours?” he asked with a look of concern.

My liquor cabinet is well stocked. But before anyone signs me up for a 12-step program, know that, as I explained to my friend, most of those bottles contain liquids used for cooking, not drinking. Though I’ll down a whiskey and water before dinner or a small glass of Benedictine before bed, most of my Cointreau, Scotch, brandy, Calvados, vermouth, port, sherry, and gin is poured into a frying pan, not a shot glass.

I make Whiskey Chocolate Bundt Cake, Duck Breasts in Bourbon Maple Gravy, Mountain Grouse in Apple Brandy, Venison Sausage in Port Wine Sauce, Pheasant Poached in Tequila, and Beer-Batter Fried Fish, to name several favorite recipes. Readers may recognize a few from past issues of *Montana Outdoors*. Alcoholic beverages work especially well with game’s earthy flavors.

The point of adding liquor to dishes is the flavor, not the alcohol. A splash of sherry or port before serving can add freshness to a dish. Fortified wines and liquors add hints of fragrant, fermented fruits. Gin, vodka, and other spirits—made by distilling grains, botanicals, and native plants such as juniper—accentuate with aromatic undertones. The sugar in some alcoholic beverages balances the acid in tomato-based dishes and the sour or bitter taste of others. Alcohol also releases flavors in some foods that otherwise stay dormant, and interacts with other elements to create entirely new tastes on the tongue. Viewed that way, my liquor cabinet is simply an extension of my spice and herb rack.

Most of the alcohol burns off when added to long-cooking stews and braises. In sautés and other quickly prepared dishes, most of it remains in the dish. But don’t worry about becoming tipsy. The accompanying Crispy Pheasant Breasts in Gin Cream recipe—based on one from Jonathan Miles’s *The Wild Chef*—uses a quarter cup of gin. About half of that cooks off in the pan, leaving just 1.5 teaspoons of gin—diluted by cream—per serving.

If anyone staggers home after consuming this rich, delicious dish, they’ll have to blame the cream, not the booze. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of *Montana Outdoors*.

INGREDIENTS

1.5 pounds boneless pheasant, ruffed grouse, blue grouse breasts or chicken breasts flattened to ½ inch

½ c. flour

Salt and pepper

1 egg

1 T. water

3 ½ T. olive oil

½ c. panko bread crumbs

1 T. finely chopped shallots

¼ c. gin

1 ½ c. heavy cream

2 T. chopped fresh thyme or 1 t. dried

1 t. freshly squeezed lemon juice

¼ c. water

1 T. chopped parsley

DIRECTIONS

Place the flour in a shallow dish. Season with salt and pepper. Place panko bread crumbs in a shallow dish. Break the egg into another shallow dish, add water, and whisk.

Heat 3 T. oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Dip the breasts in the flour, then the egg mixture, then into the panko to coat. Cook in hot oil for about 1 minute per side or until the coating begins to brown and crisp. Remove to a plate. Tent loosely with foil.

Reduce heat to medium, add remaining ½ T. oil, then add the shallots.

Stir constantly for 1 minute, then add the gin. Simmer for 1 minute. Add the cream and herbs. Simmer for 5 minutes, then return the breasts to the skillet. Cover.

Simmer 5 minutes or until sauce thickens to where it coats the back of a spoon. Add lemon juice and water. Salt and pepper to taste.

Ladle a spoonful of sauce onto each plate, set the breasts on top, then top the breasts with more sauce and a pinch of chopped parsley.

Serve with potatoes or crusty bread to sop up every last drop of the sauce.

