

# Duck with maple bourbon gravy

By Tom Dickson

Cook Time: 40 min. | Serves: 4



Last year may have been the best waterfowl season any of us will have in a long time. Duck numbers were at record highs in the Central and Pacific Flyways and, from all reports, hunting was great across Montana. My family ate duck throughout fall and winter, and now, with the upcoming season fast approaching, we still have several birds remaining in the freezer. The same is likely true for many other waterfowl hunters.

As mentioned in a previous issue of *Montana Outdoors* (“Duck Done Deliciously,” September-October 2005), my favorite way to prepare duck is to butterfly it (by removing the backbone and cutting the wishbone in two from the back with game shears) and then make cuts lengthwise along either side of the breastbone to cook the breast meat faster. I rub olive oil on both sides of the now-flattened bird, sprinkle with Kosher salt, and cook over a hot, oiled grill for just five to ten minutes per side, depending on the size of the duck and my guests’ preference for doneness (my wife and I like ours medium rare). I always keep a container of table salt handy to extinguish the inevitable flare-ups caused by dripping fat.

This also produces the single best lunch afterward. I find cold grilled duck even more delectable than the hot version because the luscious fat becomes sweet when cooled. Best of all are the little duck ribs, which I pluck off one by one and strip clean between my front teeth.

As the weather cools and folks are less inclined to grill, I offer another way to prepare those last few ducks in the deep freeze. As is the case with so many great game recipes, this is based on one from Hank Shaw’s James Beard Award-winning blog *Hunter Angler Gardener Cook*. It’s simply a roasted duck topped with the world’s tastiest gravy. This thickened sauce is so yummy it could rescue a freezer-burned shoveler or shot-up goldeneye. Heck, you could pour this sweet, smokey goo over boiled raccoon, invite friends over for dinner, and they’d ask for seconds. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of *Montana Outdoors*.

## INGREDIENTS

2 ducks, thawed to room temperature, coated with olive oil, and salted well inside and out (If using just one duck, slightly reduce cooking times)

3 T. flour

⅓ c. bourbon, whiskey, or Scotch

½ c. beef stock or water

2 T. maple syrup

1 t. Tabasco sauce

1 to 2 T. heavy cream

Salt and pepper to taste

## PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 450°F.

Put the ducks breast side up in a cast-iron frying pan or other heavy, ovenproof container. Roast until the breast meat hits 135°F to 140°F, about 16 to 20 minutes. Remove the ducks from the oven and carve off the breasts. Set them skin side up on a cutting board. Return the ducks to the oven to cook the legs another 5 minutes.

Take the ducks out of the oven again. Move them to the cutting board and put the pan on the stovetop. Watch out for the pan handle; it will be very hot. Turn the heat to medium-high and crisp up the skin on the breasts. This should take about 2 to 4 minutes. Once the skin is crisp, move the breasts to the cutting board, skin side up.

Spoon out all but 3 tablespoons of duck fat from the pan, adding butter if you are short. Mix in the flour. Turn the heat to medium and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add bourbon, whiskey, or Scotch. Add the stock or water, stirring constantly to combine. Bring to a gentle simmer. Pour in the maple syrup and Tabasco, then add salt and pepper to taste. Simmer for a minute or two. If the gravy is too thick, add more stock. If too thin, let it boil down a bit. Once it’s the consistency of Thanksgiving gravy, add the cream and cook 1 minute.

Carve the ducks and give everyone some breast meat and a leg. Serve the duck with mashed potatoes, pouring the gravy over everything. ■