

— AMERICA'S —
TEST KITCHEN

Whole Roast Ducks with Cherry Sauce

YIELD Serves 8

TIME 3 hours, plus 6 hours salting

Why This Recipe Works

The qualities that make duck special to eat—it contains all dark meat that's rich in flavorful fat—also make it a challenge to cook well. We began by trimming the birds thoroughly of excess fat around the neck and cavity, and then scored the skin extensively to create channels for rendered fat to escape. Salting the ducks for at least 6 hours helped keep them juicy and thoroughly seasoned the rich meat, highlighting its full flavor. We also used a two-part cooking method: We gave the tougher legs a head start by submerging the bottom half of the ducks in water in a roasting pan and vigorously simmering them on the stove until the leg quarters registered 145 to 160 degrees. Meanwhile, because the breasts didn't have contact with the water, they cooked more slowly. We then moved the birds to a V-rack and finished them in the oven, glazing them first with a soy sauce—maple syrup glaze to encourage deep browning. A bright, fruity cherry sauce made for a vibrant accompaniment that balanced the rich meat..



Gather Your Ingredients

Ducks

- ☐ **2** (5½- to 6-pound) Pekin ducks, necks and giblets reserved if making stock
- ☐ ¼ cup kosher salt, divided
- ☐ **2** tablespoons maple syrup
- ☐ **1** tablespoon soy sauce

Cherry Sauce

- ☐ ⅓ cup maple syrup
- ☐ ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- ☐ **4** teaspoons soy sauce
- ☐ **2** teaspoons cornstarch
- ☐ ½ teaspoon pepper
- ☐ **2** sprigs fresh thyme
- ☐ **18** ounces frozen sweet cherries, thawed and quartered

Before You Begin

- * Pekin ducks may also be labeled as Long Island ducks and are typically sold frozen. Thaw the ducks in the refrigerator for 24 hours. Use a roasting pan that measures at least 14 by 12 inches. This recipe was developed with Diamond Crystal kosher salt. If using Morton kosher salt, use 25 percent less. Do not thaw the cherries before using. If desired, pulse the cherries in a food processor until coarsely chopped. In step 4, the crumpled aluminum foil prevents the rendered fat from smoking. Even when the duck is fully cooked, its juices will have a reddish hue.

Instructions

- 1. FOR THE DUCKS:** Working with 1 duck at a time, use your hands to remove large fat deposits from bottom of cavity. Using kitchen shears, trim excess neck skin from top of breast; remove tail and first 2 segments from each wing, leaving only drumette. Arrange duck breast side up. With tip of sharp knife, cut slits spaced ¾ inch apart in crosshatch pattern in skin and fat of breast, being careful not to cut into meat. Flip duck breast side down. Cut parallel slits spaced ¾ inch apart in skin and fat of each thigh (do not crosshatch).
- 2.** Rub 2 teaspoons salt into cavity of 1 duck. Rub 1 teaspoon salt into breast, taking care to rub salt into slits. Rub 1 tablespoon salt into skin of rest of duck. Align skin at bottom of cavity so 1 side overlaps other by at least ½ inch. Use sturdy toothpick to pin skin layers to each other to close cavity. Place duck on rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with second duck. Refrigerate uncovered for 6 to 24 hours.

- 3.** Place ducks breast side up in roasting pan. Add water until at least half of thighs are submerged but most of breasts remain above water, about 14 cups. Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to maintain vigorous simmer. Cook until thermometer inserted into thickest part of drumstick, all the way to bone, registers 145 to 160 degrees, 45 minutes to 1 hour 5 minutes. After 20 minutes of cooking, adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Stir maple syrup and soy sauce together in bowl.
- 4.** Set V-rack on rimmed baking sheet and spray with vegetable oil spray. Remove roasting pan from heat. Using tongs and spatula, lift ducks from pan one at a time, allow liquid to drain, and transfer to V-rack, breast side up. Brush breasts and tops of drumsticks with approximately one-third of maple syrup mixture. Flip ducks and brush remaining mixture over backs and sides. Transfer braising liquid to pot or large bowl to cool. (Once cool, defat liquid and reserve liquid and/or fat for another use, if desired.) Rinse roasting pan and wipe with wad of paper towels. Crumple 20-inch length of aluminum foil into loose ball. Uncrumple foil and place in roasting pan. Set V-rack on foil. Roast until backs are golden brown and breasts register 140 to 150 degrees, about 20 minutes.
- 5.** Remove roasting pan from oven. Using tongs and spatula, flip ducks breast side up. Continue to roast until breasts register 160 to 165 degrees, 15 to 25 minutes longer. Transfer ducks to carving board and let rest for 20 minutes.

6. **FOR THE CHERRY SAUCE:** Whisk maple syrup, vinegar, soy sauce, cornstarch, and pepper together in small saucepan. Add thyme sprigs and bring to simmer over medium-high heat, stirring constantly with rubber spatula. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens, 2 to 3 minutes longer. Stir in cherries and cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce has consistency of maple syrup, 5 to 8 minutes. Discard thyme sprigs and season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving bowl. Carve duck and serve, passing sauce separately.