

Cornish Game Hens with Apple-bacon Stuffing

Try something different than the usual poultry this fall. Try this recipe for Cornish game hens with apple-bacon stuffing. Prepare a succulent game hen.

Farm-raised or Wild?

This recipe calls for domestic birds. The flavors and ingredients given will also work well with wild game birds, but keep in mind that wild birds are usually leaner, with darker, dryer meat and a stronger game flavor.

Wild game birds usually benefit from less cooking time and the addition of fats such as butter or bacon to keep them from becoming too dry.

Preparation methods for wild game birds also vary depending on whether birds are skinned (leaving meat vulnerable to overcooking) or plucked (plucking is more work, but it leaves the skin and fat intact). Contrary to their name, Cornish game hens, also called Rock Cornish game hens, game hens, Poussin or Coquelet, are domestic, not game, birds and they aren't always hens, but rather can be male or female. These young chickens, bred for extra flavor and tenderness, and slaughtered four to five weeks after hatching (they must weigh no more than two pounds), are sold whole, with each bird considered a single serving.

Baked apples or fried apples and onions make good side dishes for these stuffed birds.

Ingredients 2, 1- to 1 1/2-pound Cornish game hens 1 tsp. salt 1 to 2 T. vegetable oil

For Stuffing 3 slices bacon 1/4 cup onion, finely chopped 1 1/2 cups dry bread cubes 1 cup apple, peeled and grated, tart or sweet according to preference 1 T. fresh parsley, chopped 1 1/2 tsp. dried thyme 1 1/2 tsp. dried marjoram Salt and pepper to taste 2 to 4 T. dry white wine

For Glaze 1/4 cup apple juice concentrate, thawed 1 T. lemon juice 1 T. butter, melted

Preparation

Remove giblets from hens and discard or save for another use. Rinse hens under cold water and pat dry. Season cavities with salt. Set aside in refrigerator until ready to stuff.

To prepare the stuffing, fry the bacon slices until crisp.

Remove bacon strips from pan and crumble. Sauté onions in the drippings until soft. Remove onions with a slotted spoon. Reserve 2 tablespoons of drippings. (If bacon does not yield 2 tablespoons of drippings, add melted butter to equal 2 tablespoons). Place bread cubes in bowl and drizzle over reserved bacon drippings. Add apples, bacon, onion, parsley and seasonings; stir to combine. The mixture should just stick together without being soggy; if mixture seems too dry, add 2 to 4 tablespoons of dry white wine.

Lightly stuff birds (do not pack firmly). If they still have their neck skin, pull the skin to the back and twist wing tips under back to hold the skin in place. If hens do not have neck skin, wedge a thick slice of apple or onion in neck cavity to hold stuffing in place. Tie legs to tail. Place hens, breast side up, on rack in shallow roasting pan. Brush with vegetable oil. Cover loosely with foil.

Roast in a preheated, 375-degree F oven for approximately 90 minutes or until you can move the drumsticks easily in their sockets and the meat is no longer pink. Remove foil after first 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine glaze ingredients. Brush hens with glaze two or three times during last hour of cooking, eventually using all of glaze.

If desired, use pan drippings to make gravy to serve with the birds: After birds are done, remove them from roasting pan and keep warm on a serving platter in the oven. Strain the pan juices, dilute with 1 to 2 cups chicken broth and heat to boiling. Thicken using your favorite method, either flour and water or cornstarch and water. Serves 2.