SAUTÉ: CHICKEN PAILLARD

Chef Thomas Keller / Chapter Three

MASTERCLASS

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"[Paillard] is great for a lunch, a light dinner. It will take all of five to six minutes to sauté."

CHAPTER REVIEW

Paillard is a French term for a boneless piece of meat that has been pounded thin or butterflied. Pounding the meat has the dual benefit of tenderizing the meat and creating a thinner cut that cooks faster with less moisture loss. Traditionally, a paillard is made with chicken or veal. But beef, pork, and certain fillets of fish, such as monkfish tail, work wonderfully as well.

In this recipe for chicken paillard, Chef Keller uses the flat side of a meat mallet to pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts to uniform thinness. It's not necessary to pound forcefully—a gentle, repeated tapping motion will do. To properly season the meat, shower it from high up with kosher salt. Lay the chicken in the pan working away from you—this will protect you from getting splattered with hot oil.

For sautéing, Chef Keller stresses the importance of high-quality cookware that conducts heat evenly and recovers its heat quickly. If your pan is large enough, you may be able to cook more than one paillard at a time. Chef Keller recommends sautéing with vegetable oil, not olive oil, because vegetable oil has a higher smoke point. Here he cooks with canola oil and uses olive oil as finishing condiment. Chicken paillard is a versatile dish, great in a range of preparations as lunch or as a light supper. Chef Keller serves it here with sauce vierge and a simple arugula salad, garnished with pickled red onion and marcona almonds. (For a demonstration on how to make sauce vierge, see Chapter 19: Vinaigrette.)

PREP & COOK TIMELINE

Bring chicken to temp — Pound chicken breast — Sauté chicken breast — Drain, plate, and serve

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PROTEIN

Mise en place

If preparing larger quantities, prepare in subsequent batches or use multiple pans to avoid overcrowding. If you're working in batches, keep the oven on 150°F to keep the chicken warm as you work.

Ingredients

1 boneless, skinless chicken breast, about 5 ounces (for a single serving)
Canola oil
Kosher salt

Equipment

Cutting board lined with plastic wrap
Mallet (smooth side)
12-inch sauté pan

METHOD

Lay the chicken breast on a large sheet of plastic wrap and fold the plastic wrap over the meat. Pound it out to an even thickness using the smooth side of a meat mallet.

Season both sides with salt. Pour canola oil into a sauté pan, using enough so that the layer of oil is about ⅛-inch deep. Heat the pan over high heat.

When the oil is shimmering and gives off the first faint wisp of smoke, lay the chicken into the pan, working away from you to reduce splattering. Give it a good shake so it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan. Turn down the heat to medium-high—enough heat to maintain the cooking action but to prevent burning. Cook until the underside is browned, about 3 minutes. Flip and cook until the chicken is cooked through and the second side is browned, about 5 or 6 minutes total. To accelerate the cooking process, you can spoon hot oil over the chicken as it sautés. When the chicken has just a slight resistance to the touch, it is done.

To plate and serve as Chef Keller does, follow the additional recipes below.

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ACCOMPANIMENTS

FOR THE PICKLED RED ONIONS:

Mise en place

Ingredients

Water
Sugar
White wine vinegar (or vinegar of your choice)
Red onions, sliced

Equipment

Saucepot
Canning jar

METHOD

Put the sliced red onions into a canning jar.

Use a ratio of 2:1:1—2 parts water, 1 part sugar, and 1 part vinegar. Adjust the amount of pickling liquid to match the size of the batch of pickled onions you want to make. If you are unfamiliar with ratios, 2 cups water, 1 cup sugar, and 1 cup vinegar in a 16-ounce canning jar is a good place to start. How many onions you use will depend on their size. Combine the water, sugar, and vinegar into a saucepot and bring to a simmer. Once all of the sugar has dissolved into the liquid, pour the hot pickling liquid over the red onions to submerge them and seal the jar. Store in the refrigerator.

Note: Chef Keller demonstrates how to pickle in Chapter 12: Pickling of his first MasterClass.

FOR THE ARUGULA SALAD:

Mise en place

Ingredients

Arugula
Olive oil
Kosher salt
Pickled red onions (recipe above)
Marcona almonds
Balsamic vinegar

Equipment

Mixing bowl
Salad tongs

METHOD

Lightly dress the arugula with oil olive, using just enough that the leaves take on a light sheen, and toss. Sprinkle with salt. The oil will help the salt cling to the arugula. Garnish with almonds and pickled red onions and toss with balsamic vinegar.

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FOR THE SAUCE VIERGE:
Mise en place

Ingredients

Tomatoes, peeled, cored, and diced
1 shallot, minced
Olive oil
Maldon salt
Balsamic vinegar
(or a vinegar of your preference)
Lemon

Equipment

Mixing bowl
Spoon

METHOD

Place tomatoes and shallots in mizing bowl and coat with olive oil, u
enough to soak the tomatoes. Sprinkle with Maldon salt.
Add a drop of balsamic vinegar and a squeeze of lemon juice.
Mix gently.

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LEARN MORE

- Chef Keller prefers to work with kosher salt, which is not iodized. He finds iodized salt to have a bitter taste. Additionally, he finds the flake size of kosher salt, which is larger than the size of table salt flake, to be easier to handle and apply with precision. (Chef Keller recommends that you always avoid iodized table salt.) When shopping for kosher salt, look for the larger, diamond crystals and lighter, fluffier salt flakes rather than the dense or heavy kind. While Chef Keller uses kosher salt for seasoning throughout the cooking process, he prefers the flaky crunch and light clean flavor of Maldon sea salt for finishing. Fleur de sel has a similar flavor and texture but is higher in moisture. Sel gris has more minerality which pairs well with red meats, so you'll see him finishing most dishes in this class with it.

- Before cooking with any oil, it's good to know its smoke point. The smoke point refers to the temperature at which an oil stops shimmering and starts, yes, smoking. Smoking oil isn't always a problem; there are times when it's inevitable, such as when you're stir-frying in an extremely hot wok. But smoke can be a sign that the oil is breaking down. And when oils break down, they can release chemicals that give food an undesirable burnt or bitter flavor. Familiarize yourself with oils and their smoke points in the chart on the following page.

- Paillard is a technique that can be applied to other proteins, such as monkfish, beef, and pork. The technique for pounding and cooking doesn't change. Choose other proteins with tender cuts like beef tenderloin and pork loin—a tough brisket or short rib will never break down through pounding. Try sautéing with different fats like clarified butter instead of oil for monkfish. The wiener schnitzel in the following chapter also follows the same technique as chicken paillard.

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OIL SMOKE POINT CHART

Type of Fat	*Smoke Point*		*Neutral?*
Safflower Oil	510°F	256°C	Yes
Rice Bran Oil	490°F	260°C	Yes
Light/Refined Olive Oil	465°F	240°C	Yes
Olive Pomace Oil	460°F	238°C	Yes
Soybean Oil	450°F	230°C	Yes
Peanut Oil	450°F	230°C	Yes
Clarified Butter	450°F	230°C	No
Corn Oil	450°F	230°C	Yes
Sunflower Oil	440°F	225°C	Yes
Vegetable Oil	400-450°F	205-230°C	Yes
Beef Tallow	400°F	205°C	No
Canola Oil	400°F	205°C	Yes
Grapeseed Oil	390°F	195°C	Yes
Pork Lard	370°F	185°C	No
Avocado Oil	375-400°F	190-205°C	No
Chicken Fat (Schmaltz)	375°F	190°C	No
Duck Fat	375°F	190°C	No
Vegetable Shortening	360°F	180°C	Yes
Sesame Oil	350-410°F	175-210°C	No
Butter	350°F	175°C	No
Coconut Oil	350°F	175°C	No
Extra Virgin Olive Oil	325-375°F	165-190°C	No