PAN ROASTING: DUCK BREAST

Chef Thomas Keller / Chapter Seven

MASTERCLASS

PAN ROASTING: DUCK BREAST

"Gentle cooking is the ticket for pan-roasting."

CHAPTER REVIEW

Pan-roasting, like sautéeing, is a stovetop cooking technique that involves lower temperatures and longer cooking times. Here, Chef Keller pan-roasts a boneless breast of Pekin duck, which is often labeled as Long Island duck. The duck breast has been air-dried for three days in the refrigerator, which removes moisture from the skin so that it can crisp more readily during cooking. Prior to pan-roasting, Chef Keller tempers the duck, letting it come to room temperature, and pierces the skin, which allows the fat to render faster. The faster the fat renders, the crispier the skin gets and the easier it is to control the cooking temperature. Chef Keller prefers his duck breast medium rare. Rare duck tends to be chewy, he says, while duck prepared well-done can take on a livery taste. In this preparation, Chef Keller serves the duck with braised endive and a honey-orange gastrique, or sweet-and-sour sauce, a combination that he loves for its wonderfully contrasting flavors and textures.

PREP & COOK TIMELINE

- Braise endive
  Bring duck to temp
- Trim duck breast
- Pan roast duck
  Make gastrique
  Caramalize endive
- Pull endive off heat to rest
- Pull gastrique off heat and finish
- Slice duck, plate, and serve

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PROTEIN

Mise en place

Ingredients

1 Pekin duck breast
Canola oil

Equipment

Cutting board
Knife
Sausage pricker
12-inch sauté pan
Rack over a half-sheet pan or towel-lined plate

METHOD

Rinse and pat the duck breast dry and set on a baking sheet or plate skin side up. Set uncovered in the refrigerator to allow the surface of the skin to dry for three days.

Begin by trimming the silver skin off the duck breast, taking care to not trim too close to the meat. Then prick the skin of the duck using a sausage pricker to allow the fat to render out. (You could also score the skin using a knife, but Chef Keller advises that this is more difficult. Take care not to pierce the flesh.)

Heat the sauté pan over medium heat and pour in a thin layer of canola oil. Lay the duck breast into the pan skin side down, starting with the end of the breast nearest to you and laying away from you to avoid splashing. Since pan-roasting is a more gentle, slower cooking process than sautéing, there will only be a subtle sizzle when the duck breast hits the oil. Give the pan a little shake to keep the skin from sticking. Continue cooking, pressing down on the duck with the palette knife anywhere that the skin needs more contact with the pan in order to crisp—but not moving the breasts around. When the duck breast is about 80% done, baste with the rendered fat. Cook until medium rare, or an internal temp of 123°F.

When the duck breast is 90% done, pour off excess fat from the pan, add the endive (cut-side down if not left whole), and flip the duck breast to "kiss" the meat side. Increase the heat slightly and cook the duck breast just long enough to color it. Transfer the duck breast to a rack or paper towel-lined tray skin side down to drain. Let rest at least 5 minutes.

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PROTEIN

TO COMPLETE:

To serve the duck as Chef Keller does, prepare the braised endive before cooking the duck and make a honey-orange gastrique using the recipes on the following pages. Slice the duck breasts and fan across the plate. Place the endive below the duck (if using) and spoon sauce around the duck and endive.

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ACCOMPANIMENTS

HONEY-ORANGE GASTRIQUE:

Mise en place

Makes 240 grams

Ingredients

50 grams honey
150 grams orange juice
150 grams roasted veal stock*
10 to 15 grams lemon juice
A couple of scrapes of orange zest
5 to 10 grams butter (optional)

**Ingredient Note: Chef Keller teaches you how to make roasted veal stock in Chapter 16: Roasted Veal Stock.*

Equipment

Saucepot
Rasp grater

METHOD

Put orange juice and honey into a medium saucepan, bring to a simmer over medium heat, reduce until the orange juice and honey reach a syrupy consistency. As the bubbles increase in size, the gastrique becomes more viscous. Increase the heat slightly to speed up the cooking process, looking for large bubbles around the edges of the pot and light caramelization. Swirl the gastrique to check the changing consistency. Be careful not to let it caramelize or burn.

Slowly add the veal stock, swirl to mix, and return to simmer, cooking until the sauce is reduced to your desired flavor (by about one third). Add in orange zest, adjust with lemon juice or vinegar if you find that the gastrique needs more acid, and season with salt to taste. To finish the gastrique, remove from heat and stir in the cold-cubed butter, which will soften the flavors (if desired) and provide a velvety texture and mouth feel.

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ACCOMPANIMENTS

BRAISED ENDIVE:

Mise en place

Ingredients

6 yellow Belgian endives
(1 to 1 ½ inches in diameter)
Kosher salt
Canola oil
720 to 960 grams orange juice

Equipment

Cutting board
Knife
Tray
Large pot

METHOD

If the endives are thicker than one and a half inches, remove enough outer leaves to reduce them to that size. Cut off the bottom of each endive so that it will stand upright. Cut out and remove the conical core from the root end of each, following the shape of the endive so that the walls of the endive will be about the same thickness and the endives will cook evenly. Pack the inside of each endive with kosher salt, sprinkle a little additional salt over the outside, and stand them up on a tray. Let them sit for 30 minutes, then rinse to remove the salt.

Heat ¼ inch of canola oil in a pot large enough to hold the endive in one layer. Add the endive and lightly brown on all sides. Add the orange juice to cover, then cover with a cartouche made from parchment paper (see Chapter 13: Red Wine Braised Short Ribs for instructions on how to make a cartouche). Simmer for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the endive is fully cooked. Set aside in the liquid until ready to caramelize before plating. If serving the braised endive with your pan-roasted duck breast, caramelize the endive in the pan with the rendered duck fat.

You can make the endive up to one week in advance; if you do so, refrigerate in the cooking liquid. Making the endive in advance will intensify the flavor as it marinates.

Note: If you end up with leftover braised endive, use for a salad or as a side for another dish. It will last a week in the refrigerator stored in its juices.

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LEARN MORE

- Chef Keller recommends that you always try to source fresh duck. If you're unable to find fresh duck at your local grocery story, check ethnic grocers and local butchers or boutique grocers or online markets. Prioritize freshness and quality over breed.

- Chef Keller refers to several breeds of duck. Learn more about these breeds and the ideal uses for them.

- ***Pekin:*** Pekin duck is the most commonly available in the United States. Also known as Long Island duck, it is mild-flavored, meaty, and an all-around great choice. It's also relatively easy to source. The breasts of Pekin ducks take well to pan roasting, while their legs are better suited to braising and oven roasting.

- ***Muscovy:*** Native to South America but widely domesticated in this country, the Muscovy duck—also known as the Barbarie or Barbary duck—is thinner-skinned and more intensely flavored than the Pekin. Its breasts are also larger. The meat of a Muscovy duck is deep red, with a gamier taste than Pekin duck. It takes well to roasting and stewing, and is also frequently used for making soups and stock.

- ***Moulard:*** A cross between a Muscovy and a Pekin, the Moulard is a large duck with a stout constitution, making it the preferred duck for foie gras. It is also commonly used in duck confit.