

# Enough to last a lifetime

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**MARION KANE**

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I spent a couple of days recently duck-hunting.

Before you assume I indulge in macho outdoor sports – or call me a "carnivore killer," as my vegetarian friend Sue does when referring to Dick Cheney types who get a kick out of shooting wild animals – let me explain.

This all dates back to Christmas Day spent with my mother at her home in the U.K.

You haven't experienced a quiet day until you've spent that particular holiday in London. Except for the odd corner store, a few eateries in that city's underwhelming Chinatown and a lone fish and chips shop in Camden Town, nothing is open.

Worse still, all public transportation – tube, buses, the whole shebang – is out of service. Even a cab is almost impossible to find.

What are two secular Jews with no extended family at hand whose friends are busy with their own celebrations to do? The answer turned out to be two things: a) visit the wonderfully bohemian Sir Richard Steeles pub in Belsize Park a few blocks away, miraculously open from noon to 3 p.m.; and b) roast a duck.

As my mum nursed a half-pint of cider amid the drinking establishment's cheery hubbub, a stocky black-and-white dog worked the room hoping for donations of the free stilton and crackers on offer.

It was on the way to getting some cheese that I noticed tall, handsome David Walliams (yes, that spelling is correct), co-star with fellow comedian Matt Lucas of the hot TV series *Little Britain*. Beside him, also quaffing a beer, was the equally dashing Anthony Head, who plays the Tony Blair-like prime minister on that hilarious show.

Suitably cheered by this lively episode, mum and I walked home for some serious poultry preparation.

My mother had once used a Jamie Oliver recipe that involves tenting the duck with foil set on a rack over boiling water, steaming it at a high temperature in the oven, then roasting it. We followed this prescription. It was tasty but I found the bird too fatty and a tad chewy.

Back home, my duck-hunting began. I scoured the supermarkets where I live in Stratford – no luck. "Too soon after the holidays," was the verdict. A trip to Toronto was just as duckless, until I visited Pusateri's downtown location. They sold me two fresh birds.

I roasted them in sequence using different seasonings and techniques, with some luck. Still experimenting, I found my local Zehr's was now well-stocked with frozen ducks.

Two ducks later, I came to the conclusion that slow-roasting is the trick to tender meat. Stuffing with oranges and ginger is a tasty touch. Brushing with rice vinegar, maple syrup and soy sauce at the end gives a rich glaze and crisps up the skin.

Thanks go to Winlai Wong, my savvy chef friend formerly of Toronto eatery Monsoon, with whom I was in constant phone contact for duck advice. But although all my efforts were good and, by the fourth duck, superb, I never want to see roast duck again – a little of this lusciously rich meat goes a long way.

Another caveat. The wings of a duck are so bony, they end up in stock. Breast and leg meat are fabulously juicy, tender and flavourful. However, even with two veg, one duck is barely enough for four people.

Watch this space, therefore, for recipes I've been sleuthing for braised and confit of duck using only the legs and breast.

## Roast Duck

Try this yummy idea: shredded roast duck, fresh coriander and matchstick carrots wrapped in a Boston lettuce leaf smeared with hoisin. Use carcass for soup.

Duck Stock:

1 carrot

1 celery stalk

1/2 medium unpeeled onion

A few sprigs fresh thyme

Roast Duck:

**5-lb/2.2-kg** duck

Kosher salt

**2 or 3** medium oranges, washed, pierced all over with skewer

**2-inch/5-cm** piece fresh ginger root, sliced

**1 tsp** Chinese 5-spice powder

**1 tbsp** rice vinegar

**1 tbsp** maple syrup or honey

**1 tbsp** soy or tamari sauce

Sauce:

**1-1/4 cups** Duck Stock

**1/4 cup** port

**3 tbsp** flour

**1 to 2 tbsp** red currant jelly or other tart jam

Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 325F.

For Duck Stock, remove giblets from duck cavity, reserving liver for another use. Place giblets in medium saucepan with carrot, celery, onion and thyme. Add about 4 cups cold water. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer, partially covered, about 1-1/2 hours or until reduced by almost half. Strain; discard solids. Chill; remove fat from surface.

Meanwhile, cut excess fat from neck end and hind cavity of duck. Rub duck lightly, inside and out, with kosher salt. Stuff cavity with oranges and ginger. Spread 5-spice powder between skin and flesh of breast.

Using pointed tip of steak or paring knife, pierce duck skin all over, especially in fatty parts.

Place duck, breast side up, on rack set in roasting pan with high sides. Roast in oven 2-1/4 to 2-1/2 hours or until nicely browned and legs are loose when wiggled.

In small bowl, combine rice vinegar, maple syrup and soy sauce. Brush duck with mixture. Return to oven for about 15 minutes, basting once or twice.

For Sauce, pour juices from duck cavity into roasting pan; transfer duck on rack to cookie sheet. Drain fat from roasting pan; reserve for another use. Add 1/4 cup of duck stock and port to roasting pan over low heat. With whisk, scrape up browned bits. Add flour, whisking, until mixture bubbles; cook 2 to 3 minutes. Add remaining stock and jelly. Increase heat to medium-high; bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer about 5 minutes, whisking. Add salt and pepper.

Makes 3 to 4 servings.

### Sweet and Sour Red Cabbage

The trick to my mum's version is cutting cabbage in large dice, about 3/4-inch square.

**1** smallish red cabbage, cut in large dice

**1** medium onion, cut in large dice

**1** large tart apple, peeled, cut in large dice

**2 tbsp** white or cider vinegar

**2 tbsp** granulated sugar

Salt and pepper to taste

Place all ingredients except salt and pepper in large saucepan. Add water to about halfway up. Bring to boil; reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, 1-1/4 to 2 hours or until cabbage is al dente. Add salt and pepper.

Makes about 6 servings.

*mkane@thestar.ca*