



Hunting waterfowl in the crisp days of autumn is a favorite sport all over the United States. But if you hunt game birds, keep an eye to the cooking pot. Think ahead about getting the kill from hunting to home grounds. For best flavor and eye appeal, you need to know how to field dress, cool, transport, and pluck the fowl, as well as how to prepare it for the table.

Field Dressing

Use these steps to field dress waterfowl:

1. Field dress the bird immediately. Remove entrails, taking care not to break the gall bladder sac on the live because bile destroys the meat flavor. The shape of the bird's bill tells you about its diet. Broad and flat bills indicate plant eaters; pointed and serrated bills indicate fish eaters. (See preparation section about marinating fish eaters).
2. Wipe body cavity with a dry cloth, paper towel, or dry grass. Moisture spreads bacteria, which cause spoilage.
3. Cool bird by allowing air to circulate in body cavity. Hold the cavity open with a small stick to speed cooling. Bring a cooler for transporting birds.

4. When you get home, finish dressing birds. You can also age birds by hanging them for three or four days at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit, but do not pluck them. A fully dressed duck can be aged most safely by refrigerating for three or four days. This tenderizes and develops flavor. Many experts recommend that ducks and geese be plucked rather than skinned because the skin helps retain flavor and moisture during cooking. Dry pluck as many feathers as possible. To remove pin feathers and down, use a paraffin treatment. For four ducks, place two cakes of paraffin in four quarts of water, bring to a boil, and dip the birds one at a time. Cool to harden paraffin, scrape off wax, down, and pin feathers with a small, dull knife. (Many hunters skin birds because it is easier than plucking. They often use bacon strips to add moisture during cooking.) Handle geese in the same manner as ducks.

Freezing

Do not freeze birds without plucking and cleaning them first. Immediately after cleaning birds, wrap them in moisture/vapor-proof material. Freeze immediately and store up to six months. Thaw by placing frozen bird in refrigerator for 12 to 18 hours. This slow thaw will tenderize the meat and help prevent growth of bacteria.

To Prepare for Cooking

Fish-eating ducks (those with pointed or serrated bills) may need soaking or marinating. Use a marinade high in acid such as lemon or lime juice, vinegar, wine or buttermilk. You may soak older ducks and geese in a solution of ½ teaspoon salt and 1 tablespoon vinegar per quart of cold water for 4 to 12 hours in the refrigerator.

Wild duck meat is darker and somewhat dryer than domestic duck. To retain or add moisture when roasting skinned birds, cover the breast with strips of bacon or side pork and roast in a covered pan. In roasting or broiling ducks use a rack to keep them free of their own fat, and do not baste with fat. Ducks and geese may be baked, barbecued, breaded, broiled, fried, and combined in casseroles, chop suey, creoles, gumbos, and gravies.

How to Cook

Roast Wild Duck

Rub outside of duck with a slice of onion, then sprinkle with salt and pepper. You can flavor the bird and absorb strong flavors by placing a quartered peeled onion, grapes, quartered apples or potatoes, and a small bunch of celery in the cavity during roasting, but discard this stuffing before serving. If ducks are lean or have been skinned, place two or three strips of bacon or salt pork on each breast and secure with toothpicks. Place ducks on a rack in a covered roasting pan and bake in a 325 degrees Fahrenheit oven for three hours or until tender. If

ducks need basting, use orange juice, melted butter, or melted butter and red wine rather than pan drippings.

Roast Wild Goose

The “flavor dressing” of apple, onion, potatoes, and celery, as described for duck, can be placed in the bird during roasting. Place the goose on a rack in an uncovered roasting pan, and bake in a 325 degree Fahrenheit oven for three hours or until tender. Baste frequently with pan drippings. You can insert a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the breast muscle, without touching bone, to determine internal temperature. Goose is well done when the internal temperature is 180 to 185 degrees Fahrenheit. Serve with a tart jelly or relish.

Dressing for Duck or Goose

We recommend baking dressing separately to avoid any chance of the hazards from bacterial growth. Bake in a covered casserole in the oven while the bird is roasting. If you decide to stuff the birds, do so **just before** placing them in the oven, and have all ingredients hot before stuffing the birds. Use a meat thermometer to be sure internal temperature of the dressing reaches 165 to 170 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Adapted from: Mennes, M.E., and C.M. Dunn. 1974. *After the Duck and Goose Hunt*. Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service Fact Sheet B2597. 2 pgs.)

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Wild Rice Dressing

- 2 cups cooked wild rice (1/2 cup uncooked wild rice, cooked in 1 1/2 cups water or chicken broth)
- 1/4 cup butter or margarine
- 1/4 cup onion, minced
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1 4-ounce can mushroom pieces and stems
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon sage
- 1/2 teaspoon thyme or marjoram
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Braised Wild Duck

- 2 ready-to-cook wild ducks, cut up
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1/4 teaspoon pepper
 - 1 cup flour
 - 1/3 cup butter
 - 1/2 cup water, chicken broth, or light cream
- Optional:
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
 - 1/2 cup chopped celery

Sauerkraut Dressing

- 1 1-pound 12-ounce can of sauerkraut (#2 1/2-size can)
 - 1 tart red apple, unpeeled, chopped
 - 1/2 cup celery, chopped
 - 1 medium potato, peeled and grated
 - 2 tablespoons brown sugar
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt
 - 1/4 cup onion, chopped
- Combine all ingredients. Bake in a covered casserole at 325 degrees Fahrenheit.

Oven Barbecued Duck

- 2 ducks, cleaned and halved
- 1/4 cup melted butter or margarine
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1/4 cup salad oil
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon grated onion
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1/3 cup catsup
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper

Season duck pieces with salt and pepper and roll in flour. Melt butter or margarine in a heavy skillet and brown pieces on both sides (about 30 minutes). Turn only once. If you use onion and celery, remove duck pieces and cook onion and celery in the pan dripping for 10 minutes. Return pieces of duck to pan, add liquid, and cover pan tightly. Simmer on top of range slowly for 1 hour or until tender, or bake in a 325 degree Fahrenheit oven until tender.

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Cook onions and celery in melted butter or margarine until barely tender. Add drained mushroom pieces and continue cooking five minutes. Add cooked rice and all remaining ingredients. Bake in a covered casserole at 325 degrees Fahrenheit for 45 minutes.

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Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Place duck halves, split side down, in a shallow baking pan. Rub with crushed garlic and brush with melted butter or margarine. Roast, uncovered, for 10 to 15 minutes. Meanwhile, combine other ingredients and heat to simmering. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Baste with sauce every 10 minutes until ducks are tender, 40 to 50 minutes.

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