

Rock Cornish Hens

For 12 people

6 Rock Cornish hens

Preparing the hens: With a sharp knife, cut down each side of the backbone from neck to tail, and remove backbone. (Chop the backbone into 2. or 3 pieces and reserve for stock.) Turn the birds flesh side up and pound breast flat with your fist. Tie drumsticks together with kitchen twine. Fold wings akimbo behind backbone

Ingredients for marinade:

Salt and pepper

3 tsp dried tarragon

4 Tb finely minced shallots

1 cup dry white French vermouth

6 Tb light olive oil

Salt and pepper the birds on both sides and sprinkle with tarragon. Arrange in a bowl, sprinkling each with shallots, wine, and olive oil. Cover and refrigerate. Marinate for 3 to 4 hours (or longer), turning and basting the birds with the marinade several times. When you are ready to proceed, scrape off marinade and reserve in bowl, dry the birds with paper towels.

Ingredients for Brown Poultry Stock and Sauce (about 3 cups):

2 medium carrots and 2 onions, chopped

3 cups chicken stock cup and 1 cup dry white French vermouth

2 imported bay leaves

2 small stalks celery with leaves

After the birds have marinated, prepare the stock and sauce. Brown the reserved backbones, necks, and giblets and the chopped carrot and onion in a frying pan with a little oil. Scrape into a saucepan, discard browning oil, and rinse frying pan with the stock or broth to dislodge all flavorsome browning particles; pour liquid into saucepan. Add the wine or vermouth, ingredients from the marinade, bay leaf, and celery. Bring to the simmer, skim off surface scum for a few minutes, then cover pan loosely and simmer slowly for 1 hour. Strain, skim off surface fat, and stock is ready to use.

Other Ingredients to complete the dish:

Melted butter

2 or more heads garlic

About 2 cups coarsely grated Swiss cheese

1 cup dry white French vermouth)

2 pounds fresh mushrooms, trimmed, washed, and quartered
4 Tb or more butter for sauce enrichment (optional)

Browning under the broiler:

Having dried the birds, brush with melted butter and arrange in one layer skin side down in a broiling or roasting pan. Preheat broiler and set pan so surface of meat is about 3 inches from heat source; brown, basting several times with melted butter, for about 5 minutes on the flesh side; turn, and brown nicely on skin side.

After initial browning, sprinkle hens with grated cheese.

Separate garlic cloves and drop into a sauce pan of boiling water; simmer 3 or 4 minutes to soften slightly, then slip off the skins and reserve garlic in a small bowl. Grate the cheese, set out the wine, and prepare the mushrooms.

Roasting:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Salt and pepper the skin side of the birds lightly, divide the cheese over them, and strew the garlic around them. Pour in enough wine to film pan by about 1/4 inch. Place pan in upper middle level of oven. Baste every 6 minutes or so with the liquids in the pan as the birds slowly brown on top. After about 20 minutes, strew the mushrooms around the birds, basting with liquids in pan. Continue until birds are tender when thighs are pierced with a sharp-pointed fork; juices should run clear yellow with no trace of rosy color.

Finishing the sauce:

Remove the birds to their platter; arrange around them the mushrooms and half the garlic, scooped out with a slotted spoon. Keep warm for a few minutes in turned-off oven, door ajar, while you complete the sauce. Pour the brown poultry stock into the roasting pan and set over high heat to dislodge any roasting juices, scraping them up with a wooden spoon. Strain them into a small saucepan, leaving garlic in sieve. Skim surface fat off liquid, and rub garlic through sieve with wooden spoon, scraping it off bottom of sieve into the liquid—garlic puree will thicken the liquid as you rapidly boil it down for a moment to concentrate its flavor. When lightly thickened, taste sauce carefully for seasoning. Off heat, if you wish, beat in the enrichment butter by spoonfuls.

Serving

For this menu, the birds are arranged on a giant potato galette (following recipe), with the mushrooms and garlic. Either spoon the sauce over the hens, or pass in a warm bowl.

Straw Potato Galette

Make 2 - 9 to 10-inch galettes each serving 6 people

About 12 medium potatoes, preferably "baking"
12 Tb or more clarified butter
Salt and pepper

a nonstick frying pan 12 inches
a cover of some sort for each pan
a long-handled pancake turner

Just before you are to cook the galette, peel the potatoes, drop into a bowl of cold water and then cut them into matchstick-sized pieces. Do not wash the potatoes once cut; simply dry them in a kitchen towel.

As soon as the potatoes are cut and dried, film the frying pan with a 1/16-inch layer of clarified butter, and heat to very hot but not browning. Turn in the potatoes, making a layer about 3/8 inch thick. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, and 2 (in each pan) spoonfuls more butter, then press them down firmly all over with the spatula so they will mat together as they cook. Frequently press them down while they slowly brown on the bottom and shake pan gently by its handle to be sure potatoes are not sticking to the pan.

When browned, in 2. to 3 minutes, cover the pan and lower heat to moderate. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender on top, but watch they do not burn on the bottom. Press them down again, and the galette is ready to brown on its other side.

To turn it: either slide it out onto an oiled baking sheet, turn the frying pan ups: down over it, and reverse the two so the galette drops into the pan, browned side up. Raise heat slightly and brown lightly on the other side (which will never show, but browning crisps it). Slide the galette onto its platter, and plan to serve it as soon as possible.