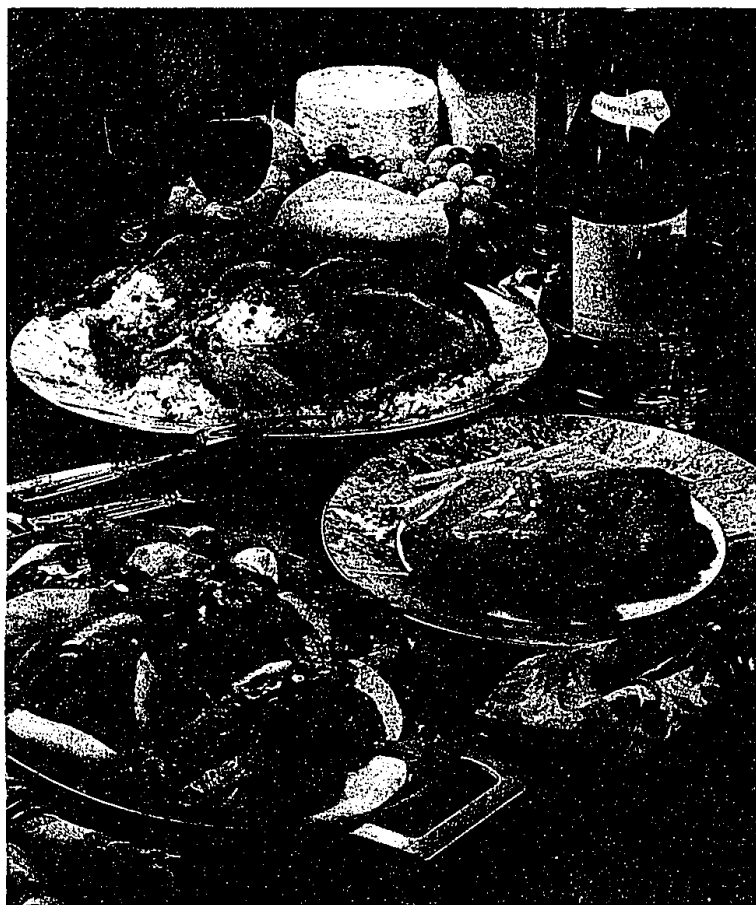


PLAYING THE GAME WITH FRENCH FLAIR



When mornings range from chilly to goosebumps, the hunt is on. Whether the game's afoot with feathered or furred creatures, it's time for golden hours in the countryside bagging great dinners. Hunting for the pot provides pleasure unknown to supermarket shoppers — field and table have a special mystique for those who follow the delights of the chase.

Since game is a rarity, prepare yours to best advantage — French style. In France they have wonderful ways with game; farmers and countryfolk have always been enthusiastic hunters. Rural France is dotted with hunting cottages, and many of the great châteaux of the Loire Valley, for instance, were built because of the hunting passions of kings. A great cuisine has evolved around venison, emerald-crowned mallard, pheasant — the "king of the feathered game" — and the like.

Not the least of their charms is that virtually no other food teams so marvelously with the bouquet and flavor of fine wine. The recipes that follow all do beautifully with red Hermitage from the Côtes du Rhône vineyards, full flavored, rich, smooth, or a velvety red from Burgundy's famous wine towns. And, since some of these recipes use white wine, serve the same wine with the meal — a dry, flinty Graves from Bordeaux, for example.

Wild duck is most unusual and absolutely delicious stuffed with couscous and served with green peppercorn sauce. Couscous is a wheat semolina relished in Morocco — and a favorite in southern France as well. It teams with pinenuts, currants and green peppercorns — the fresh zesty version of the familiar black or white dried spice. The ducks are basted with French white wine, enlivened with Dijon mustard, roasted, and flamed with Cognac, the world's finest brandy. Serve the ducks with their wine-and-green-peppercorn sauce, and there you have an incomparable duck dish.

If luck didn't serve you at the marsh, never mind — the supermarket can help with Long Island ducklings. You can still prepare them memorably with French white wine and French red currant preserves, the latter a classic game accompaniment.

Venison is always prize meat, and we offer a blue-ribbon version. The steaks are served with a deluxe sauce based on French chestnuts; the buttery, mellow taste of chestnuts especially successful with game. The great *marrons* of the world come from Privas, France, in the Ardèche region in central France, a gift of nature enjoyed by food fanciers since Roman times. The chestnuts go into a magnificent sauce of French red wine, minced French shallots, cream and Cognac.

As for pheasant, it comes to the table with onions, apples and cabbage. What lends the dish real pizzazz is its sauce — made with French red wine, cassia and French red currant preserves. Cassia, the delectable syrup made from black currants, teams with the preserves for the fruity taste so traditional and pleasant with game.

These rich meats are generally served with simple salads, followed by cheese and fruit platters. We suggest a trio of cheeses: Pipo Crem', an unusual *bleu* that slices nicely; Tommes des Pyrénées, a satiny, tangy semisoft cheese from the Basque region; and Chaumes, a soft-ripened cheese with an orange rind and distinctive flavor and aroma.

There you have game meals fit for kings and princes — queens and princesses, too. Be assured that the royalty who hunted the fields and forests of France wouldn't have eaten better than your own guests when you have such splendid recipes.

ROAST DUCK WITH GREEN PEPPERCORN SAUCE

(Makes 4 servings)

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| 2 T. (1/4 stick) butter | 1 1.94-oz. can French green peppercorns, drained |
| 1 medium onion, chopped | 1 egg, lightly beaten |
| 1/3 cup chopped celery | 2 2-1/2 lb. mallard ducks |
| 1/4 cup pinenuts or sliced, blanched almonds | Salt and pepper |
| 3 whole cardamom pods | Vegetable oil |
| 3-1/2 cups chicken stock | 1/2 cup dry French white wine |
| 1 cup couscous | 1 T. imported Dijon mustard |
| 2 T. currants | 1/4 cup Cognac |
| | 1 T. all purpose flour |

Melt butter in large, heavy Dutch oven over moderate heat and sauté onion, celery, pinenuts and cardamom 1 minute. Cover; sweat 5 minutes. Add 2 cups stock, bring to boil. Add couscous and currants; cover, let stand 10 minutes or until liquid is absorbed. Fluff with fork; add 1 tablespoon peppercorns and egg; cool. Meanwhile, salt and pepper cavities of ducks. Stuff lightly with couscous mixture (reserve any leftover to heat during last half hour of roasting time). Close cavities. Place ducks on rack in roasting pan; rub tops with oil; sprinkle with salt and pepper. In small bowl, combine 1/2 cup chicken stock, wine and mustard; brush ducks with part of mixture. Roast in preheated 375°F. oven, brushing occasionally with wine mixture and basting with pan juices, 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes, or until ducks are done as desired. Heat Cognac; pour over ducks; ignite. When flames subside, transfer ducks to heated serving platter; keep warm. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from roasting pan; whisk in flour; heat, stirring, 1 minute. Add remaining wine mixture, remaining peppercorns and remaining 1 cup chicken stock. Cook, stirring, until mixture thickens slightly. Stir in juices that have accumulated in serving platter. Cut ducks in half with poultry shears. Serve with sauce and remaining couscous mixture.

BRAISED PHEASANT WITH RED CABBAGE

(Makes 4 servings)

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| 1 3-1/2 lb. pheasant, cut up | 1 small red cabbage, quartered, cored and sliced |
| All purpose flour | 2 cups dry French red wine |
| Salt and pepper | 1/2 cup French crème de cassis |
| 4 T. (1/2 stick) butter | 1 3-inch piece stick cinnamon |
| 1 large onion, chopped | 2 green apples, quartered, pared and sliced |
| 2 green apples, quartered, pared and sliced | 1/3 cup French red currant preserves |

Remove excess fat from pheasant; dredge in mixture of flour, salt and pepper. Melt butter in large Dutch oven over moderate heat and sauté pheasant until browned on all sides (saute in batches if pot is not big enough). Remove pheasant, keep warm. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons fat from pot. Sauté onion and apple 5 minutes. Add cabbage; sauté three minutes. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon flour over vegetables, then pour in wine and crème de cassis. Return pheasant to pot, pushing into cabbage mixture; add cinnamon stick. Bring to boil; cover, lower heat. Simmer 45 minutes, or until pheasant is tender. Remove pheasant from pot; keep warm. Degrease pan juices. Add preserves; simmer until melted. Place cabbage mixture on heated serving platter; top with pheasant pieces. Garnish with additional apple slices, if desired. Pass sauce separately.

VENISON STEAKS WITH CHESTNUTS AND COGNAC

(Makes 4 servings)

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| 1-1/2 cups peeled, roasted, whole French chestnuts | 3 T. butter |
| 1 cup dry French red wine | 1/4 cup Cognac |
| 1-1/2 pounds loin of venison, diagonally sliced into 1/2-inch-thick steaks | 2 T. minced French shallots |
| All purpose flour | 1 cup heavy cream |
| Salt and pepper | Bottled gravy seasoning and browning sauce (optional) |

In small saucepan over moderate heat, heat chestnuts and red wine just until wine begins to boil. Remove from heat; let stand 1/2 hour. Dredge steaks with flour, salt and pepper. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in large deep skillet over high heat; sauté steaks 1 to 2 minutes on each side, or until done as desired. Remove steaks to heated serving platter; keep warm. Remove pan from heat; pour off fat (wipe pan with paper towel if fat is very dark). Pour Cognac into pan; let bubble up, then return pan to heat; add shallots, wine and chestnuts and cream. Simmer until sauce is reduced by about half. Swirl in remaining 1 tablespoon butter. Taste and add gravy seasoning, if desired, and additional salt and pepper to taste. Pour sauce over steaks and serve.

DUCK WITH SPICY CURRANT GLAZE

(Makes 4 servings)

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| 2 Long Island ducklings, quartered | 1 cup dry French white wine |
| 1 medium onion, halved and sliced | 1/3 cup French red currant preserves |
| Salt and freshly ground pepper | 2/3 tsp. cracked black pepper |
| Curry powder | |

Place duck pieces, skin side up, on rack on foil-lined roasting pan, do not crowd (use 2 pans if pieces fit too tightly). Scatter onion slices over duck, then sprinkle with salt, ground pepper and curry powder. Pour 1/3 cup wine over all. Roast in top third of preheated 350°F. oven for 30 minutes. Prick skin with fork; continue roasting 1 hour, pricking skin once or twice. Meanwhile, heat currant preserves, remaining 2/3 cup wine and cracked pepper in small saucepan over low heat until mixture bubbles and preserves melt. Remove onion slices from duck; discard. Brush duck with glaze. Continue roasting 30 minutes, brushing every 10 minutes with glaze. Carefully pour off fat from pan. Increase oven temperature to 500°. Roast 15 minutes longer, or until skin is crisp and golden brown.