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**Cornish hens:** These hens make for an easy, yet elegant meal with ratatouille or roasted onion gravy.

## Cornish hens are an easy meal

The candles are lit, the champagne is chilling and the tulle is set.

The mood is definitely right for a b'hoistic Valentine's Day dinner for two. You want to serve something worthy of the setting, yet you don't have much time to spend preparing both the meal — and yourself — for the "big night."

Cornish hens are an elegant and easy meal to prepare and serve. For Valentine's Day, or any time you want to present a classic, yet special dinner, especially for an intimate gathering of two, Perdue Farms has developed a few delicious dishes that will help fan the "flames of love."

As an update of the old saying goes, "the way to a man's — or a woman's — heart is through their stomachs." The following easy-to-prepare, fool-proof recipes will ensure the path of romance is paved with tasty food. And, best of all, the cook can spend "quality time" with his or her special guest, as there's no lengthy preparation or cooking time required.

Cornish hen dishes should make Valentine's Day memo-

orable. For other recipe ideas, visit Perdue's website at [www.perdue.com](http://www.perdue.com).

### CORNISH HENS WITH ROASTED RATATOUILLE

- 1 medium eggplant, chopped
- 1 medium zucchini, chopped
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes seasoned with green peppers and onions
- 1/2 cup olive oil vinaigrette
- 8 sprigs fresh oregano
- 1 twin pack Cornish hens

In a large bowl, place eggplant, zucchini and tomatoes. Pour vinaigrette over mixture and gently stir to coat; set aside.

Remove giblets from hens. Gently loosen skin of each Cornish hen and tuck sprigs of fresh oregano under skin.

Preheat oven to 350° F. Place hens in a roasting pan and tuck vegetables around the hens in the pan. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, or until a thermometer inserted in the breast reaches 170° F. Serves 2 to 4.

### CORNISH HENS WITH ROASTED ONION GRAVY

- 1 twin pack Cornish hens
- 1 large sweet onion, chopped (about 3 cups)
- 4 bay leaves
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) Italian herb seasoned chicken broth
- 2 jars (12 ounces) chicken gravy
- Salt and ground pepper

Preheat oven to 350° F. Remove giblets from hens. Place hens in roasting pan. Spread onions around hens and top with bay leaves. Pour broth over onions. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, stirring onions occasionally, until a thermometer inserted in the breast reaches 170° F. Remove hens from pan; set aside and keep warm.

In medium saucepan, heat jarred gravy. Remove bay leaves from onions; discard. Stir onion and pan drippings into gravy; season to taste with salt and pepper. When heated through, serve with hens. Serves 2 to 4.

## Spice of Life recipes bring flare

See related story on Taste front. Recipes from "The Spice of Life Cookbook," by Jeffrey Leeds, published by Momentum Books in Troy.

### ROSE PETAL

- 1 pound, chicken breasts, boniless, skinned
- Petals from 2 roses, crushed just enough to release aroma and natural oils
- 1/2 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1/2 ounce almonds, sliced
- 1 tablespoon honey

Sauté breasts in half the butter on medium heat until golden, 4-5 minutes each side. Set aside. Sauté garlic in remaining butter 1 minute. Add almonds and cook 2 more minutes. Remove from heat. Gently stir in rose petals and honey. Spoon sauce over chicken and "serve with a kiss." Serves 2.

**Nutritional information:** Calories, 239; chol., 73.5 mg.; and sod., 75.9 mg.

### BRAZILIAN CHICKEN

- 8 (6 ounce) chicken breasts, boned and skinned
- 1/2 cup orange juice

- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1/4 cup Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- Zested rinds of 1 orange and 1 lemon
- 1 sprig of rosemary

Mix ingredients, add chicken and marinate overnight. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Bake one hour or until tender. Serve with couscous and fresh vegetables.

**Nutritional information:** Calories, 231; chol., 68 mg.; and sodium, 166 mg.

## Encyclopedic guide highlights chef's cutlery

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW YORK (AP) — "The Professional Chef's Knife Kit" (Wiley, \$34.95 paperback) is a sharply practical survey of tools for would-be masters of the cutting edge in the kitchen arts. It comes from the authoritative Culinary Institute of America. The chef's knife is the most versatile knife in a knife kit, the preface says, "generally the

knife a novice first learns to use, as well as the one a professional picks up most often."

But that's only the beginning. Then come the utility and paring knives, the specialized knives, the slicers, the boning and filleting knives. Don't forget the sharpening tools, the steels and stoners. And for advanced food dissecting and shaping, the pros turn to an even wider

repertoire of peelers, zesters, brushes, palette knives, oyster and clam knives, and metal and wooden spoons.

This is an encyclopedic guide to the whole range, carefully illustrated with many black-and-white photos and some line drawings. Clearly it's of most use to professional chefs, but keen amateurs will savor the book's know-how.

## Love from page D1

If you prefer meatless, omit the rack of lamb as a principal plate and scale up the proportions to make more wild mushroom risotto. Change the beef broth to chicken or vegetable broth.

All recipes, except the dessert, serve two but can easily be scaled up in multiples of two in case a group of guys would like the culinary challenge for their sweethearts. Or vice versa, ladies.

### Setting the mood

A romantic dinner is not only about special dishes. Ambiance adds a lot. Twelve-inch tapers,

cast a spell. Put them in the freezer for a few hours before lighting and they won't drip.

Valentine's Day calls for red roses and romantic music. Have your favorite CD at the ready.

For champagne, use flute-shaped glasses. The Charles Heidsieck, Mis en Cave 1998 Champagne selection costs \$45. We recommend it because it verifies the date of disgorgement on the back of the necker. With champagne, fresh is best. Chill it for several hours in the refrigerator.

A mixture of half water, half ice in a champagne bucket will keep the bubbly stuff at the right

temperature tableside.

Thin-lipped over-sized quality glassware will make the ultra-rich Beringer Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon \$75 taste even better. Ramos-Pinto Porto Quinta da Urtila \$17 is a vintage character, single vineyard Port that makes an amazingly perfect pairing with chocolate.

See recipes on D3.  
Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food and wine for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

## Wine from page D1

■ Cabernet franc produces very aromatic wines with raspberry and violet accents. As a blending wine, it has much the same flavor and structure as cabernet sauvignon, but without the high tannin profile.

■ Petit verdot produces wine similar to the color and flavor of syrah. It adds fragrance interest and spicy, peppery flavors.

■ Malbec is rich in color and tannins. It has softer flavors to merlot, but is similar than cabernet sauvignon and carries the flavors of blueberries.

We put some Bordeaux-varietal blends to a blind test with 15 knowledgeable consumers.

They rated wines on a 10-point scale. Not all wines came from wineries in the Meritage group, but all were blends of allowed Bordeaux varieties. Some were French ringers. Here's the shakeout rating from 1-12:

- 1996 Chateau St. Jean Cinq Cepages, Sonoma County \$35
- 1994 Ferrari-Carano Trésor Reserve Sonoma County \$65
- 1993 Joseph Phelps Insignia, Napa Valley \$75
- 1997 Pine Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford \$26
- 1897 Dry Creek Vineyard Epoch, Dry Creek Valley, \$60
- 1997 Pine Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District, \$50
- 1997 Dry Creek Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County \$20
- 1996 Bernardus Winery Marinus, Carmel Valley \$40

- 1996 Clos du Bois Marlstone Alexander Valley \$30
- 1988 Shafer Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District \$40
- 1995 Chateau Grand-Puy-Lacoste, Paillassin \$70
- 1995 Chateau Lafon-Rochet, Saint-Estephe \$35

What does this tell you? (1) The 1988 Shafer got an unfair shake amid so many younger wines, (2) our tasters preferred California-style fruit to that of Bordeaux, (3) the most expensive wine is not always the best, and (4) the Wine Spectator deservedly gave our Number 1 wine first place in its best 100 list.

Look for Focus on Wine on the first and third Sunday of the month in Taste. To leave a voice mail message for the Healds, dial (734) 953-2047, mailbox 1864.

## A grilled cheese like no other one

### THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

- 1/2 cups (4 ounces by weight) shredded Jarlsberg cheese
- Gottuce leaves
- to 3 ripe tomatoes, sliced
- avogetto(es), cut into 8 sandwich lengths and toasted

Spray a nonstick frying pan with cooking oil. Sprinkle shredded Jarlsberg, about 4 loose tablespoons, into the pan to create a rectangle about the size of a bacon strip. Repeat to fill the skillet, leaving about 1 inch between strips. Place over medium-high heat and cook until crisp, about 3 minutes or until as crisp and dark as desired. With a spatula, remove

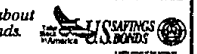
cheese strips to a paper towel and blot. Wipe down the skillet with paper towel between batches. Repeat until all cheese is used. Place tomato slices, cheese strips and lettuce on toasted baguette. Add reduced-fat Mayo if desired.

Note: Cheese strips may be made in advance and refrigerated, covered. Warm in oven at 300° F. for 3 minutes and cool on a rack.

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