

General Tso's Pheasant

By Tom Dickson | Preparation time: 30 minutes | Cooking time: 40-45 minutes | Serves 2-4



Around this time of year, I start digging in the back of my basement freezer to see what remains from last year's hunting season. I always find a package or two labeled "Shot-Up Pheasant Breast." During the past months I've put off thawing and preparing these in favor of more-intact birds. But with upland season fast approaching, it's time to make room for the 2021 harvest.

Because it calls for bird meat cubes, this recipe is a great way to use pheasant or mountain grouse breasts that are a bit mangled, which usually comes from shooting the bird when it's too close or having it retrieved by a hard-mouthed dog. The dish also works well with intact breasts, or with skinless chicken breasts or thighs.

This delicious dish consists of marinated meat that is breaded, deep-fried, then coated in a sweet and spicy sauce. Found in Chinese restaurants worldwide, General Tso's Chicken was named after a 19th-century military leader, though no one knows why, since it was actually invented by a Taiwanese refugee from Hunan Province in the 1950s.

I learned about preparing game bird breasts this way from Hank Shaw's recently published *Pheasant, Quail, Cottontail*, hands down the best upland game bird cookbook I own. The version here is my own adaptation, drawn from Shaw's recipe and others I found online. All ingredients (other than the upland birds) can be found in chain grocery stores across Montana.

—Tom Dickson is the editor of Montana Outdoors.



INGREDIENTS

1½ lb. pheasant or mountain grouse breasts (or skinless chicken breasts or thighs), sliced into 1-inch cubes
 1½ c. cornstarch
 ½ t. salt
 ½ t. freshly ground black pepper
 3 c. vegetable oil for frying, plus 1 T. for stir-frying
 ¼ t. dried chili flakes
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 t. white sesame seeds, for garnish
 Scallions, thinly sliced, for garnish

MARINADE

1 T. soy sauce
 1 T. white wine, vermouth, or dry sherry
 2 egg whites

SAUCE

½ c. chicken stock or water
 3 T. tomato paste
 2 T. soy sauce
 2 T. rice wine vinegar or white vinegar
 2 t. hoisin sauce
 2 t. chili paste (Sambal Oelek is a common brand)
 2 t. sesame oil
 2 T. sugar
 2 t. cornstarch

DIRECTIONS

Marinade: In a large bowl, combine soy sauce, white wine (or vermouth or sherry), and egg whites. Coat the meat cubes in the marinade mixture and let sit for 10 minutes.

Sauce: In a small bowl, combine chicken stock, tomato paste, soy sauce, vinegar, hoisin sauce, chili paste, sesame oil, sugar, and 2 t. cornstarch. Stir until sugar and cornstarch dissolve. Set aside.

Meat: In another large bowl, toss the 1½ c. cornstarch with the salt and pepper. Coat the marinated meat in the cornstarch and shake off excess before frying.

Cooking: Heat 3 c. of oil in a deep pot until it reaches 350°F. Working in 2 or 3 batches, add the first batch of cubes and fry until golden brown on the outside and cooked through, about 4 to 5 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.

Heat a wok or skillet over medium-high heat and add 1 T. of oil. Add chili flakes and garlic and stir until just fragrant, about 20 seconds. Pour in sauce mixture and stir until thickened, about 1 to 2 minutes.

Add meat to wok or skillet, stir well to coat with sauce, and transfer to a serving dish. Garnish with sesame seeds and sliced scallions. Serve with cooked white rice and steamed broccoli or other vegetables. ■