

Pheasant Calvados

By Tom Dickson

Prep Time: 15 min.

Cook Time: 30 min.

Serves: 4 to 6



One day several years ago when my wife's sister and her husband, who live in Wales, were visiting, he offered to cook dinner. After a quick shopping trip in Helena, Graham returned with two frozen Cornish game hens (the ones tucked back in the freezer section with the turkeys), along with a Granny Smith apple, heavy cream, and a liter of Calvados (apple brandy). I didn't want to hover, so I watched from across the kitchen as he browned the quartered game hens in butter (after he'd thawed them thoroughly earlier in the day), then tossed the pieces into a large saucepan with sliced apples, cream, and a few globs of brandy. He brought the mixture to a boil, let it simmer 30 minutes, and served it on boiled new potatoes. Delicious.

After asking for seconds, I realized how well the technique would work for pheasants. One challenge with cooking this greatest of game birds (in my opinion) is to keep the breast from drying out. Cooking it in cream is a great solution.

Graham had no recipe to share ("I just sort of make it up as I go along"), so I went on-line and searched for something similar to what he'd prepared. The best and easiest I found was this recipe for game hens by Andrew Zimmern, Twin Cities food writer and television personality, which I adapted slightly for pheasants.

This would be an excellent holiday dish. The multiple layers of apple flavor give the luscious sauce a festive taste, and the cream and brandy make it decadent.

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors

INGREDIENTS

- 5 T. unsalted butter
- 2 pheasants, quartered (thighs and split breasts; save legs for another use, such as stock or soup)
- 1 c. flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 large shallots, finely chopped (about $\frac{1}{3}$ c.)
- 4 oz. mushrooms, sliced
- 1 c. apple cider
- 1 c. chicken stock
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. Calvados
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c. apple cider vinegar
- 1 Granny Smith apple—peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c. heavy cream
- $\frac{1}{3}$ c. dried currants
- 2 t. dried tarragon (or 2 T. fresh)
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. potatoes, mashed or boiled

PREPARATION

Begin cooking potatoes. Meanwhile, melt 4 T. butter in a large, deep skillet.

Dredge pheasant pieces in flour and shake off excess. Cook half the pieces over moderately high heat, turning once, until browned all over, about 8 minutes; transfer to a plate and keep warm. Repeat with remaining pheasant pieces. Do not overcook or meat will be dry.

Melt remaining butter in skillet. Add shallots. Cook over moderate heat until softened, about 3 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook about 5 minutes more. Add cider, stock, Calvados, and vinegar and simmer over moderately high heat, scraping up browned bits from the bottom of the pan, until slightly reduced, about 5 minutes.

Add apples and heavy cream and bring to a simmer. Return pheasant pieces to the skillet and simmer over moderately low heat until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest piece registers 160° F, about 10 minutes. Transfer pheasant pieces to a warmed platter.

Add currants and tarragon to the skillet, stir, and season the sauce with salt and pepper. Finish cooking potatoes. To serve, layer pheasant pieces over potatoes and spoon sauce, rewarmed if necessary, over the top. ■