



Culinary Craftwork

Newsletter: December 2010

All About Knives

The gift that lasts a lifetime.



I have a bittersweet relationship with the holidays. There's the part of me that remembers and yearns for those special days when my mother would go all out and cook up a feast for family and friends, but those days came to an end long ago, along with childhood. My mother was a brilliant cook who died much too young.

As an adult, I've often had to work on Thanksgiving, so I didn't have time to brood. I enjoyed working in restaurants and preparing special holiday food for strangers. Nowadays, I no longer work in restaurants, but I still enjoy preparing the old standbys. I cook without recipes trying to reproduce the flavors from my past. My mother was allergic to turkey, so typically we had capon or duck instead. I'll never forget the exasperating process of trying to peel orange sections (before I learned how to "supreme" an orange—slice between the sections) for Julia Child's canard à l'orange.

This holiday season I am once again busy cooking for others. I even cooked a duck the other day (in preparation for this newsletter), along with all the side dishes. And I've got an assortment of parties booked. Christmas is right around the corner—December will be gone before I know it. Time to start thinking about the January newsletter.... If you have any requests, questions or comments, please email me or join in the Discussion on Facebook. I love hearing from my readers.

This issue of the newsletter focuses on knives with recipes for whole, roast duck with holiday side dishes that you can take to a party: **Potato Gratin with Mushrooms & Gruyere (Page 7); Wild Rice with Leeks & Butternut Squash (Page 9); Roast Duck with Prunes & Braised Red Cabbage (Page 10); and Pineapple Upside-down Cake (Page 12).**



Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

Alyssa Salwen, Chef
Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com
Cell: (408) 429-0999
Office: (408) 372-2074

Visit me on the web

www.CulinaryCraftwork.com

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Knife Skills are very important.



Developing knife skills is integral to achieving competency in the kitchen. I teach knife skills classes at a low, introductory rate because I want to encourage people to learn more efficient ways to handle a knife and cut down on the amount of “drudgery” in food preparation.



The Knife Collector

I have a lot of knives, many of which I’ve had for 20 years or longer. But I have new knives too—not to replace my old knives, but to augment my collection. My knives have seen a lot of action in the trenches of restaurant kitchens, and while I have not always cared for them as they deserve, they have faithfully withstood the test of time.

Back when I was in restaurant school, most of us were eager to get top-of-the-line knives, and there were not nearly as many choices as there are today. In fact, the choice more or less came down to Henckels and Wusthof. Nowadays, many chefs use Japanese knives (of which there are many styles), but they were not available to purchase in the mid 1980’s.

For the purposes of working in a communal setting such as a restaurant kitchen where many of the cooks had the same knives, we would engrave our name or (in my case) use liquid green electrical tape around the handle to identify our knives. Cooks are very particular and proprietary about their knives; we don’t like them used by other people.

When I worked at Williams-Sonoma I took great pleasure in showing knives to customers. I focused on matching up the best option for each individual based on the size of their hand and how they would be using the knife. Part of the decision was based on how the handle felt and whether the blade was properly balanced. To my disappointment, one of my favorite knives in the store, an eight-inch Shun chef’s knife, was not balanced right for my hand; the handle was too long for my small hands. However Shun does make some smaller knives that I love.

While working at Williams-Sonoma, I entered an employee competition and won a set of Global knives. At first, I was not crazy about the look of the knives—very modern and high-tech with metal handles. But as I started using them I found I loved them.

Global, like Shun, is also a Japanese manufacturer. The grip felt right and the balance was excellent—even for my small hands—and they were made of high-carbon tempered steel, honed to an acute 15-degree angle that was very sharp. The hard steel keeps its edge well and requires little maintenance. The knives are also very light, which can be a good thing if you are engaged in a lot of repetitive motion.

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

If you talk to older cooks, they will extol the virtues of carbon steel knives. Carbon steel takes and holds a cutting edge easily, and sharpens quickly. My dad loved his ancient carbon steel knives and would not trade them for anything. True, they would get rusty and discolored, but he enjoyed taking care of his good and trusted friends. If you have carbon steel knives that are discolored, you can shine them with a little scouring powder on a cork or fine steel wool. Avoid using them for cutting acid fruits like lemons or tomatoes, as this does tend to turn the knives black. Don't put them in the dishwasher either, as the wood handles will eventually crack and dishwasher detergent is corrosive and will eat away at the edge.

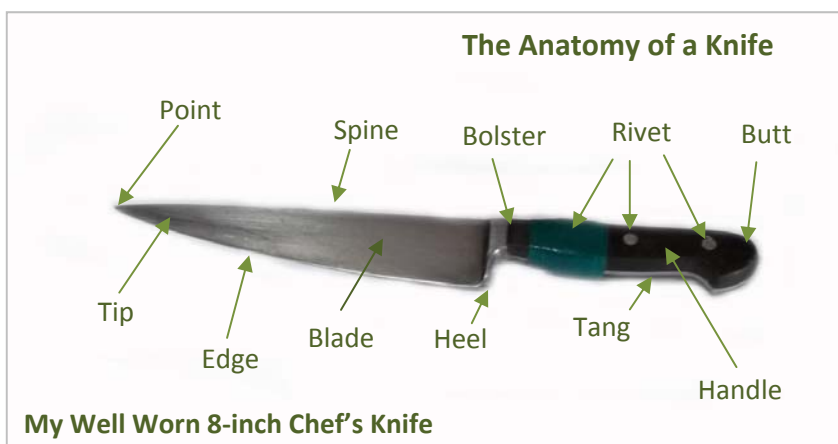
Since the market has become flooded with Japanese knives, the competition has introduced new virtually rust-free blades that made from a new kind of stainless steel that sharpens easily. It is surgical quality steel, with small proportions of carbon, chromium, molybdenum and vanadium added. These blades are sharper, easier to sharpen, and hold the edge longer.

How Knives Are Made

Knife blades are either stamped or forged, and the difference in quality and handling is evident in balance. A stamped blade—which is die cut in a press bearing the basic blade configuration—is lighter and less expensive than a forged blade. Its steel is comparatively thin and flat to allow for stamping, but the final product, after numerous processes including grinding and polishing, is a simple, clean-edged tool that is back-heavy in the hand. Consequently, more force is required for cutting.

In contrast, the forged knife begins as a steel blank that is heated to a high temperature, set into a die, and beaten with a multi-ton hammer to form the basic blade. The metal is then hardened through heating to temperatures up to 1700°F and cooled in a caustic chemical bath to contract the steel and make it dense. This produces a brittle blade, so a second heating and cooling treatment relaxes internal stress and makes the blade more flexible. Successive grindings create the taper and give the blade the desired amount of flexibility. This process creates a heavier, tougher, more front-weighted blade with a distinct bolster (a thick band of steel that lies flush against and perpendicular to the handle).

A knife blade starts at the point and ends in the tang, which is the part that is hidden in the handle. A full tang, running the length of the handle to the butt gives the knife better balance and strength. Most of my knives are full tang, but those that are partial tang are also of very good quality and have withstood the use and abuse of working in restaurant kitchens as well as the full tang knives. The knife handle should be virtually indestructible, hi-impact resistant plastic, unaffected by moisture, acids or dishwashing water, chemicals or temperatures within reason.



Japanese Santoku Knives

Hollow-ground santoku knives are Japanese designed all purpose cutting tools. The blade does not have as pronounced a curve as a chef's knife has.

Made of a high-carbon stainless steel that is tempered for strength, these knives have become very popular in recent years. They tend to be expensive, but worth the extra money.



6-inch hollow-ground santoku knife by Shun



7-inch hollow-ground santoku knife by Global

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Essential Knives



3 ½ inch paring knife



Serrated bread knife



Flat-sided diamond dust sharpening steel—my personal favorite.

Essential Kitchen Knives

The “Chef’s Knife” is the most versatile tool in the kitchen. If you have a limited budget, this is where you splurge. A chef’s knife is an all-purpose knife, used for chopping, mincing and slicing. The blade is generally 8 to 12 inches long; the 8-inch blade is most common, but for the experienced cook, it is worth hunting down a 9-inch blade. I have a number of chef’s knives from different manufacturers.

After all these years my 8-inch blades are now 7 inches, (see photo on page 3) and my very special 9-inch knife measures 8 ½ inches. This is largely because I sent my knives out for servicing because I did not own an electric knife sharpener, and the restaurants I worked for had a contract with a knife sharpening service (or I should say, disservice, because it is not generally a good thing to subject a quality knife to such rough-shod treatment).

The chef’s knife is probably a cook’s most important tool, and given the amount of time it spends in your hand, it’s definitely worth making sure you have a good one. Here’s a quick video tutorial on the various parts of a chef’s knife, what they do and why they’re important. Click here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lt1LG6Nnsd8>

Probably the second most important knife in your arsenal is the paring knife. Paring knives are generally 3 or 4 inches in blade length and are invaluable for mincing garlic and shallots. Nowadays, paring knives are used very infrequently for actual paring, as there are many fine gadgets available to do that job better, one of my favorites being a ceramic blade peeler. I’ll talk about ceramic blades further on—they’re pretty neat.

Paring knives make great box cutters, but you should never use them for doing that. Why? Because the cardboard dulls the blade and then you won’t be able to mince shallots, and shallots should always be minced by hand, not in a food processor. It is also dangerous, as the knife can slip. I have a nasty scar on my left calf from doing that very thing.

The third most important knife is, arguably, either a slicer or a serrated slicer/bread knife. Bread, like cardboard, will dull your blade in record time, so you really want to use a serrated knife with teeth to cut through the crust. A slicer differs from a chef’s knife in that the surface of the blade is narrower, which limits drag.

Other knives that you might want to consider adding to your collection are a thin, flexible boning knife or fillet knife and a 5- or 6-inch utility knife, which is great for cutting fruit. Another “must have” is a sharpening steel, which is a bit of a misnomer because a sharpening steel does not actually sharpen/hone knives; the steel is a maintenance tool designed to bring back the edge that has been dulled by microscopic nicks.

Basically, sharpening steels realign the molecules along the edge resulting in greater cutting power. Sharpening steels may be made of steel, diamond dust or ceramic. Personally, I like the flat ones coated with diamond dust that never seem to wear out, but most stores don’t carry them. Although some high-end kitchenware and cutlery shops do carry them, you’ll probably be most successful shopping on the internet.

When shopping for knives it can be tempting to purchase a whole set (purchasing a set may save you some money, but I’d rather pick and choose the particular knives I want in my collection, and they are not always going to be from one set or one manufacturer). However, if it is important for you to have a coordinated group of knives from one manufacturer, I’d still recommend that you select the individual knives that will be most useful to you. Generally speaking, sets contain knives that you don’t need and may not use very often. So, if money is not a concern, build your collection slowly with the best knives you can afford. A quality knife can last a lifetime.

In the case of knives, quality and price usually go hand in hand. Never purchase a knife without handling it first to see whether the weight is properly distributed and if the grip fits comfortably in your hand. With that said, buying knives as a gift for another person is a wonderful idea. It is literally a gift that will keep giving—and hopefully, last a lifetime.

If you're not certain whether the knife will suit the giftee, be sure to purchase it from a reputable store such as Williams-Sonoma or Sur la Table that will take it back or exchange it for another with no hassle. Don't buy it on the internet. Internet purchasing is fine if you've already done the research and you know that a particular knife is right for you (because you've tried it out in the store), but not convenient for returning/exchanging products.

Another knife that has become very popular is the Santoku style knife, which can be used in lieu of a chef's knife. Santoku knives come in a variety of lengths, generally 5 to 7 inches. Many of these knives are "hollow ground," meaning that small divots or little dimples have been ground out of the knife blade to reduce friction and cut more cleanly. Santoku knives are of Japanese design, but the German manufacturers, Wusthof and Henckels, now offer them as well.

These Japanese style knives are ground to a more acute angle on the edge—15 degrees as compared with the typical 20 degrees of a traditional chef's knife. High-end Japanese knives are also tempered in a different way—similar to the process of creating samurai swords and Damascus blades. I have a few different sized Santoku knives (from Global and Shun), and I just love them. In fact, I hardly use my chef's knives anymore—sadly, they just take up space in my drawer.

Earlier in this article I mentioned ceramic knives. Ceramic knives, I have to admit, look a little bit funny, (to my eye, they look like plastic knives), but they are incredibly strong, sharp and durable. Moderately priced compared with traditional high-end knives, ceramic knives have an ultra-sharp blade made of zirconia, a material second in hardness to diamonds. Kyocera and Starfrit both make ceramic knives as well as a variety of ceramic slicers and mandolines, which never get dull. As for where to buy them—Williams-Sonoma, Sur la Table, Whole Foods and Harbor Freight Tools all carry them from time to time. This year I'm giving ceramic knives as Christmas gifts.

In addition to maintaining your knives with a few swipes (front and back) on a sharpening steel, I recommend getting a two- or three-stage electric knife sharpener, such as Chef's Choice by Edgcraft. Unless you really know what you're doing, I don't recommend using a whetstone. It is a lot of work, and it is very difficult to control the angle. The electric sharpeners have angled slots for sliding the knives through while diamond dust grinding wheels do the work of honing from coarse to fine.

The electric sharpeners generally run between \$79 and \$149, and there is a two-stage model specifically designed for Asian (Japanese) knives, which, as I mentioned before, are ground to a more acute angle than Western knives. I use the Asian sharpener on all my knives (Asian and German) every few months.

In addition to having the right tools it is equally important to develop the right skill for using them. Knife skills are so fundamental to cooking, and it can make a huge difference in the amount of time you spend preparing a recipe—the difference between efficiency and drudgery in the kitchen. I teach specific knife skills classes—you can find them on my website with a special, low introductory rate.

The recipes I include with this issue of the newsletter are not specifically related to knife skills, though I have received several inquiries recently about knife skills classes. In light of the holidays, I thought it would be nice to include recipes for festive side dishes that **COULD** be brought to a pot-luck party or prepared together for a feast.

The Ken Onion all purpose knife by Shun



Notice the striations on the blade of the knife. While decorative, the striations show how the blade was formed by heating, folding and hammering the steel.



The Chef's Choice electric knife sharpener

Use an electric sharpener every few months to keep your knives in tip-top shape. Maintain your knives on a daily basis with a sharpening steel.

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Zeni Ethiopian Restaurant



1320 Saratoga Avenue
San Jose, CA 95129
(408) 615-8282
www.zenirestaurant.com

Addis Ethiopian Cuisine



836 W Hamilton Ave.
Campbell, CA 95008 Telephone
(408) 379-8700

I've always loved spicy, exotic ethnic food and have actively sought out restaurants that fulfill my craving. These two restaurants, which operate under different ownership, have nearly identical menus—only Zeni has a handful of additional dishes and a much larger following. I've been going to Zeni for several years now, while I only discovered Addis a few months ago when I learned about the Oakmont Produce market just a couple of doors down from the restaurant.

Zeni is quite popular among ex-pat Africans and Asians and so I have to assume the food is fairly authentic. I've been to a number of Ethiopian restaurants, and have enjoyed the food, but I'm not sure what constitutes authentic Ethiopian cuisine. The dishes I've had certainly bear no resemblance to those I've seen on Andrew Zimmern's television series, "Bizarre Foods" on the Travel Channel. And a good thing too, I say. Zimmern's palate is a far more 'adventurous' one than my own!

Both Zeni and Addis offer meat based and vegetarian dishes, and they are served plentifully—so much so that ordering appetizers is a mistake. (In the case of Zeni, the only time I ordered appetizers they left a lot to be desired.) In fact, the menu is hit-and-miss, despite the restaurant's popularity.

After trying several disappointing chicken and beef dishes, the vegetarian combo plate was an out-and-out hit. It features red lentils in a rich, spicy berbere sauce (my personal favorite), yellow split peas with turmeric, braised cabbage with potatoes and carrots, stewed collard greens, a tomato salad with lemon, green chiles, and injera (a moist and spongy type of pancake made from teff flour), and a lettuce salad in the center—all of which are served on a giant platter lined with injera. I find the vegetarian combo subtly addictive.

Addis also offers a vegetarian combo which contains some of the same elements, minus the salads. It is very good and portions are large. Each time I've been to Addis, I've been the only customer. Unfortunately, the restaurant has yet to generate a following. The décor is Spartan, and the service, as such, well meaning, but the server is frequently out of sight for considerable periods of time.

Recently I sampled a dish called chicken tibs fir fir, which is white meat chicken pieces sautéed with tomatoes and onions in a spicy berbere sauce. It was quite tasty, though the chicken was a bit dry, and there was enough food for two more meals. I had wanted to order a vegetable side, but unlike Zeni, they don't do side orders.

The bottom line is if you happen to be in the area shopping at Oakmont or the Euromarket, Addis is worth a try, but if you want a nicer dining experience, then Zeni is your ticket. Be prepared to eat with your hands, however, as Ethiopians do.

Zeni Ethiopian Restaurant ★★✂

[See what others have to say about Zeni Ethiopian Restaurant in San Jose on Yelp.](#)

Addis Ethiopian Cuisine ★★

[See what others have to say about Addis Ethiopian Cuisine in Campbell on Yelp.](#)

Potato Gratin with Mushrooms & Gruyere

7



This potato gratin, also known as scalloped potatoes, is an indulgence. Rich and creamy, oozing with cheese (and for this recipe, don't skimp—buy a good quality aged gruyere), this recipe is sure to set you back on your diet after the holidays, but it is too good to pass up. I used a combination of fresh shiitake and cremini mushrooms, but you could also use assorted dried mushrooms for a more pronounced mushroom flavor.

Ingredients make a difference.



You can use any mushrooms that you like for this recipe, but shiitake and other fresh, “wild” mushrooms have superior flavor over domestic white mushrooms.

Russet potatoes are fine, but Yukon Gold potatoes are naturally sweeter and have a dense texture, which is desirable in a gratin.

Potato Gratin with Mushrooms & Gruyere

Makes 1-9x13x2-inch baking dish, approx. 8–10 servings

Ingredients

- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 2 Tbs. butter
- 4 cups finely chopped leeks (white and pale green parts only)
- 1 ½ lbs. assorted mushrooms, cut in ½-inch chunks or slices
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 lbs. Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled, cut in 1/8-inch slices
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 tsp. salt (to taste)
- ½ tsp. freshly ground pepper
- 2 cups grated gruyere cheese

Directions

Preheat oven to 375°F.

1. Heat olive oil and butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add leeks; sauté until soft and lightly browned, 10–12 minutes. Add mushrooms, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and sauté until soft and liquid evaporates. Add garlic; sauté for 1 minute. Set aside. (Can be made up to 4 hours ahead.)
2. Pat potato slices dry with kitchen towel. Combine cream, 1 tsp. salt, and ½ tsp. pepper in a large pot. Add potatoes. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove lid; simmer until cream is reduced by about half and potatoes are partially cooked, stirring often and watching to prevent mixture from burning, about 3 minutes. Check seasoning.

(Continued on page 8)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Use an aged cheese.



Such as cave-aged gruyere for flavor. Again, the outcome of the recipe is dependent on the quality of the ingredients.

Potato Gratin with Mushrooms & Gruyere (Cont.)

3. Brush or spray a 9x13x2-inch glass or ceramic baking dish with oil. Transfer half of potato mixture to dish, spreading out in an even layer. Spoon mushroom mixture over in an even layer. Sprinkle with 1 cup of grated gruyere cheese.

4. Spoon remaining potato mixture over, spreading in an even layer. Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top. Cover with foil, tenting in center to prevent cheese from sticking to foil. Bake 30 minutes. Uncover; bake until potatoes are tender and top is brown, 20–25 minutes longer. Let rest 10 minutes before serving.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)



Wild rice is a natural complement for roast duck, and the roasted squash gives it a wonderful contrast in flavors and textures with a very festive appearance. Roasting the squash brings out its natural sweetness, while the rice is earthy and nutty. Like the other dishes, this can be prepared ahead and finished in a pan “a la minute.”

Wild Rice with Leeks and Butternut Squash

Makes 8–10 servings

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups wild rice
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 3 cups chicken broth + 3 cups water
- 3 cups peeled butternut squash in ½ -inch cubes
- 3 Tbs. olive oil
- 6 Tbs. butter (reserve 2 Tbs.)
- 1 ½ cups finely chopped leeks (white part only)
- 1 Tbs. chopped Italian parsley

Directions

1. Rinse rice in strainer under cold water; drain. Bring chicken broth and water + salt to a boil in a large saucepan. Add rice; bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer uncovered until rice grains begin to split and are tender but still slightly chewy, about 45 minutes. Drain. Spread on a rimmed baking sheet to cool. Transfer to a bowl (this can be done a day ahead). Cover and chill.
2. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Toss squash cubes and 3 Tbs. olive oil in a medium bowl. Spread squash in a single layer on prepared sheet; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast just until tender but firm enough to hold shape, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes. Transfer squash to bowl. Cool (this can also be done a day ahead).
3. Melt 4 Tbs. butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add leeks and ¾ cup water; simmer until leeks are tender, about 7 minutes. Add rice and butternut squash; simmer until heated through and liquid is absorbed, about 4 minutes. Stir in 2 Tbs. butter and chopped parsley. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

About Wild Rice.



This highly nutritious grain is not actually rice, but an annual water-grass seed, “zizania aquatic.”

Naturally abundant in the cold rivers and lakes of Minnesota and Canada, wild rice was the staple in the diet of the Chippewa and Sioux Indians, native to Minnesota.

About butternut squash.



Butternut squash is a winter squash related to the pumpkin with sweet, starchy flesh. In fact, in some countries it is called pumpkin.

Butternut squash can be difficult to peel. Try microwaving the squash for 3 minutes; this will help soften the skin. Cut off both ends of the squash with a heavy chef’s knife. Then set the squash on its now flattened end. Use a vegetable peeler to remove the skin.

Shopping for duck.



Duck is not always easy to find at your neighborhood grocery. Some of the high-end groceries, including Nob Hill, do carry duck, but you may need to special order it.

Asian groceries, such as the Ranch Market and Lion Market carry duck throughout the year, as it is a staple of the Asian diet.

Look for a large, plump duck that seems heavy for its size. Duck wings typically have little meat on them, but the breast should be full and plump.

Roast Duck with Prunes & Braised Red Cabbage



Roast duck is one of my favorite things, is something that I prepare very rarely. I used to cook a lot of duck when I worked in New York; we would separate the raw breasts and thighs/legs to be cooked to different temperatures. Generally speaking, with a whole roast duck (or chicken or turkey) by the time the thighs/legs are done, the breast is overcooked. You can avert that problem by cooking the duck parts separately.

If a medium-rare duck breast is your goal, I would recommend quartering the raw duck and starting it in a pan with just a little oil, skin side down until the fat renders out and the skin is crispy and golden brown, then pouring off the fat and transferring the duck to a 400° oven to roast (skin side up, for about 10 minutes) until the desired doneness is reached. The same procedure can be applied to the thighs/legs, adding a bit of chicken broth to the pan to keep the duck moist for the longer cooking period (about 40 minutes).

The cabbage recipe is simple to prepare, beautiful to look at, and deliciously sweet/tart. If you can't find cranberry-blackberry juice, you can use cranberry-raspberry or cherry juice. The object is to braise the cabbage with a mixture of sweet and tart components to offset the fatty richness of the duck.

Roast Duck with Prunes & Braised Red Cabbage

Serves 2-4

Ingredients

- 1 duck (approx. 5 ½ -6 lb.)
- 26 large pitted prunes
- 1 Granny Smith apple, halved, cored, sliced
- 2 oz. diced bacon
- 2 oz. butter (½ stick)
- 1 sweet apple, peeled, cored & diced
- 6 cups thinly sliced red cabbage
- 3 cups blackberry-cranberry juice (reserve 1 cup)
- 1 ¾ cups red wine (reserve ¾ cup)
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ orange, sliced
- 1 cinnamon stick

(Continued on page 11)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Roast Duck with Prunes & Braised Red Cabbage (Cont.)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Melt butter in a large, heavy pot over medium heat. Add the diced bacon; cook until golden. Add cabbage; sauté 5 minutes, till wilted. Add the diced apple.
3. Add 2 cups juice, 1 cup of wine, vinegar, sugar, orange and cinnamon. Simmer until cabbage is tender and almost all liquid has evaporated, about 1 hour. Discard orange slices. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
4. Place duck on a rack in roasting pan. Place 10 prunes and apple slices in duck cavity. Prick the duck all over with a fork (this will allow the fat to escape). Season the duck with a generous amount of salt and pepper.
5. Roast duck for 25 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F. Continue roasting until meat thermometer inserted into thickest part of thigh registers 160°F, about 1 hour +.
6. Meanwhile, combine the remaining juice and 16 prunes in a saucepan. Cook over medium heat until prunes absorb almost all liquid, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes.
7. Transfer duck to platter. Tent with foil to keep warm. Pour off fat from pan (you might want to save and strain the fat for future use). Add remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup wine to roasting pan, set over medium heat and bring to a boil, scraping up any browned bits. Add wine mixture to prunes; simmer until sauce is reduced to 1 cup, about 4 minutes.
8. Slice the duck and arrange on plates. Spoon prune sauce over and serve cabbage alongside.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Red cabbage.



Red cabbage gets its color from growing in acidic soil. The same cabbage will turn blue when grown in an alkaline soil. The juice of the cabbage can be used as a homemade pH indicator.

In order to keep its red color while cooking, add some acid in the form of wine and/or vinegar to the pot.

Selecting a pineapple.



The best pineapples have a golden sheen on the outside and a fragrance typical of pineapple. They generally are picked green and need to ripen at room temperature.

To determine whether the pineapple is ripe, pull out one of the serrated leaves from the center of the cluster. If it comes out easily, the pineapple is ripe. If there is a good deal of resistance, give it more time to ripen.

Did you know? The pineapple is the international symbol of hospitality.

Pineapple Upside-down Cake



Pineapple upside-down cake is one of those oldies but goodies. It is retro in all the right ways. Typically, recipes for pineapple upside-down cake call for filling in the pineapple rings with Maraschino cherries, but I prefer pecans (you could also leave the holes as is). This recipe calls for using fresh pineapple cooked in brown sugar and butter, but you could use canned pineapple in a pinch. Be sure to cook the pineapple, as directed, to evaporate some of its water content.

Pineapple Upside-down Cake

Makes a 10-inch Cake; Serves 8-10

Ingredients

- ½ cup butter (4 oz.)
- 1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 pineapple, peeled, cored and sliced into ¼-inch rings
- Pecan halves (opt.) to fill in the holes

Batter

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 stick (4 oz.) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup pineapple juice
- ½ cup milk, at room temperature

(Continued on page 13)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Pineapple Upside-down Cake (Cont.)

Directions

1. Place oven rack in middle position and heat oven to 350°F.
2. For the topping, melt butter in a 10-inch cast-iron skillet or cake pan placed in hot oven. When melted, swirl to coat evenly with butter, then spread brown sugar evenly over the butter. Increase the heat to medium high and cook until the sugar mixture is bubbly, about 2 minutes.
3. Pat pineapple slices between several thicknesses of paper towel. Cut pineapple slices in half, reserving one whole slice. Place whole pineapple slice in center of skillet, then arrange half-slices in spoke fashion around whole slice in center. Continue to cook for 2 minutes, or until the sugar mixture turns an amber color. Turn the pineapple slices over and remove the pan from the heat.
4. To make batter, in a small bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon. In a large bowl with an electric mixer, cream the butter with the sugar until the mixture is light and fluffy, add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition, then beat in the vanilla. Add the flour mixture alternately in batches with the milk and pineapple juice, beginning and ending with the flour mixture, and beating well after each addition.
5. Spoon, or carefully pour batter over brown-sugar-pineapple topping in bottom of skillet, and spread evenly. Bake until top is golden and toothpick inserted into cake center comes out clean, 45 to 55 minutes.
6. Let cake cool in skillet on a rack for 5 minutes, run a thin knife around edge of cake to loosen from skillet. Place serving platter over skillet, carefully invert cake onto platter. Let stand for 1 minute before carefully lifting skillet off. Replace any pineapple stuck to bottom of skillet, scrape any remaining glaze from skillet onto cake. Cool on platter on a rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

About cast iron skillets.



Cast iron skillets, properly maintained, can last for generations. They make an ideal vessel for frying chicken, baking cornbread, and for skillet cakes, such as pineapple upside-down cake.

Maintaining the skillet is simple. Season the skillet by heating it with oil. Let sit; then wipe out excess oil. Wash after each use with hot water and NO SOAP (soap will damage the surface seasoning). Dry thoroughly and wipe with a bit of oil. For stuck-on foods, use steel wool to scour the pan.

Ask the Chef



I love hearing from people who have read the newsletter or taken one of my classes.

I enjoy the opportunity to answer your questions in this general forum, and I hope that my advice is helpful.

Please continue to send me your questions, comments and ideas. They really make my day.

Thank you!

Alyssa

Ask the Chef (Q&A)

Don't Judge a Chicken by its Color

Corey asks, "Why are some chickens yellow and some chickens white? Which is better?"

Reply: The color of a chicken's skin depends on its diet. A diet that is rich in corn produces a yellow skinned chicken. Organic chickens are usually white and pink.

Measuring Cups versus Measuring Pitchers

Cynthia asks, "I've heard that measuring pitchers and measuring cups don't measure the same. Is that true?"

Reply: That is true. Use measuring pitcher to measure liquids and measuring cups to measure dry goods, such as flour and sugar. If you use the liquid measuring cup for flour you may get an extra tablespoon or more per cup. There is an old adage, "A pint is a pound the world around," which is also true.

How to Tell if an Egg is Fresh

Glenn asks, "How can I tell if an egg is still good?"

Reply: Lower uncooked eggs into a bowl of water. If the egg settles horizontally, the egg is fresh enough for human consumption. "If it settles vertically, feed it to the dog. If it rises to the top, feed it to the hydrangeas."

Softening Brown Sugar

Gina asks, "I don't use brown sugar very often, and I usually end up throwing it away because it has hardened. Is there a way to soften the sugar without melting it?"

Reply: Place an open box of hardened brown sugar in the microwave oven with 1 cup hot water. Microwave on high for 1 ½ to 2 minutes for ½ pound of sugar or 2 to 3 minutes for 1 pound of sugar.

Storing Onions

Lynda asks, "What can I do to keep my onions from sprouting?"

Reply: You can store your onions for several months by wrapping them separately in paper towels or foil and storing in your refrigerator. Onions will sprout when subjected to humid conditions or at room temperature. The same is also true for garlic. Ceramic garlic keepers are ventilated and store garlic in the dark at room temperature.