

Duck confit recipe

A traditional French method for preserving duck by cooking and sealing it in fat, then reheating to serve.



Duck confit Photo: LAURA EDWARDS

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7:00AM BST 27 Aug 2012

Serves four

Making confit is an ancient practice developed in France as a way of preserving fatty meats such as duck, goose and pork. And the process doesn't just preserve; it intensifies the flavour. Home-made stuff is a special treat and it's very easy to serve, as all you have to do at the last minute is fry the legs. I use lard to seal the confit, as it is denser than duck or goose fat.

50g (1¾oz) coarse salt

8 peppercorns, crushed

8 juniper berries, crushed

leaves from 4 sprigs of thyme, chopped

3 bay leaves, broken up

4 large duck legs, 200g (7oz) each

2kg (4lb 8oz) duck or goose fat (you can buy this in cans or jars)

lard, to seal

Mix together the salt, pepper, juniper, thyme and bay. Sprinkle half of this into a non-reactive broad, shallow dish and set the duck legs, skin-side down, into this. Sprinkle the rest of the mixture over the top. Put in the refrigerator (I cover it loosely with clingfilm) and leave for 24 hours. Brush the salt mixture off with a pastry brush and preheat the oven to 110°C/225°F/gas mark ¼.

Heat the duck or goose fat in a heavy-bottomed pan in which the legs will fit snugly. Bring the fat to a gentle simmer – it should just be shivering – and add the legs. There should be enough fat to completely cover the duck. Cook in the oven for two and a half to three hours. The duck should be completely soft and tender and the juices that run out when pierced with a skewer should be clear.

Remove from the oven and lift the legs on to a wire rack (put something underneath for the dripping fat). Put a sieve over a bowl and ladle the fat through it, being careful to leave behind the cooking juices. Put about 2cm (¾in) of this fat into the sterilised jar or earthenware pot in which you are going to keep the confit. Leave to cool and set. Lift the legs with tongs and put them into the jar (they shouldn't touch the edges). Ladle on the rest of the fat to cover completely. Tap firmly on your worktop to remove air bubbles. Refrigerate for an hour to firm up, then melt enough lard to provide a 1-2cm (½-¾in) seal, pour it on top and return to the refrigerator. When the lard has hardened, put a piece of baking parchment over the top. Cover, if using an earthenware pot, or seal, if using a preserving jar. Left like this, the duck should keep for two months in the refrigerator.

To serve, remove the duck and scrape off most of the fat. Take 2 tbsp of the duck fat and add to a frying-pan. Over a medium heat, let the fat get hot, then add the legs, skin-side down. Cook for four to five minutes, browning the skin well. Turn to sauté the other side briefly, a further three to four minutes. The duck should be hot and the skin crisp. Serve with sautéed potatoes (with garlic and parsley) and a watercress salad. In spring it's lovely with stewed peas and spring onion.

The fat from the confit can be reheated and strained through a sieve and then re-used three times for making more confit.

This is an extract from Diana Henry's book on preserving, 'Salt Sugar Smoke' (Mitchell Beazley, £20), available from Telegraph Books (0844 871 1514) at £18 plus £1.35 p&p