

DUCK WITH LIME & HONEY

On assignment in Switzerland, I found myself without a dining partner for a few days and admit I didn't look forward to sitting alone at one of the world's greatest restaurants, Fredy Girardet's in Crissier. But one sip of his house champagne, and my mood changed. Suddenly I felt like a queen with a bevy of footmen. I chatted with the waiters and sommeliers and relished the regal feast. When a whole duck arrived, I almost gasped, realizing this extraordinary chef had cooked a whole duck just for me. I thought about that duck for weeks. Girardet has a great affection for lime and uses it liberally throughout his repertoire. I let the dish dance around in my head for a while, then I came up with a combination of whole lime, lime zest, a touch of honey and vinegar, and a whisper of tarragon. Since poultry meat readily absorbs the flavors placed in the cavity of the bird, the whole pierced limes exude their juices as the duck roasts. When the lime juice, tarragon, and moist duck meat converge, the flavors taste faintly Asian yet distinctly French. Whenever I prepare this dish, people walk into the kitchen and exclaim, "It smells like a Chinese restaurant in here." Serve this with a simple green salad.

- 4 whole limes, preferably organic
- 1 duck (2½ to 4 pounds; 1.25 to 2 kg), liver reserved and trimmings (neck, heart, wing tips) chopped (see Note)
- Sea salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste
- Generous branch of fresh tarragon
- 3 plump, fresh garlic cloves, peeled and halved
- 1 small carrot, cut into thick diagonal slices
- 1 small onion, cut into thick slices
- 1 generous sprig of fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon creamy honey, or to taste
- 4 to 5 tablespoons best-quality sherry or red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons (1½ ounces; 45 g) unsalted butter

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C; gas mark 7/8).
2. Rinse the limes in cold water and dry. Soften 2 of the limes by rolling them back and forth along a flat surface. Using a two-pronged fork, a trussing needle, or a toothpick, pierce the skin of the 2 limes at least 20 times, to help release the juice. Season the duck inside and out with salt and pepper. Place the duck liver, the 2 whole limes, and tarragon, in the cavity. They will serve to enrich the final flavor of the meat. Truss.
3. Zest the remaining 2 limes. In a separate bowl, juice the limes and set aside.
4. Place the duck on its side on a roasting rack in the roasting pan. Place in the oven with the fullest part of the duck—the breast portion—toward the back of the oven. Roast, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Turn the duck on the other side and roast for 10 minutes more.

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(If the duck releases quantities of fat, pour off and discard about $\frac{2}{3}$ of it.) Turn the duck on its back—breast side up—and roast for 10 minutes more. Remove from the oven and surround the duck with chopped trimmings: garlic, carrot, onion, and thyme. Baste with the lime juice and spoon the cooking juices over the duck 3 or 4 times so that it will remain moist as it continues to roast. Remove the trussing string from the bird and season the legs with salt. (At this point, the bird will hold its shape on its own. By removing the string, the legs will cook more evenly.) Return to the oven to roast for a total of 13 to 15 minutes per pound (500 g). (If there is not enough fat to keep the trimmings from browning too much, add a few tablespoons of cold water.) Roasting time will vary according to the size of the duck and your flavor preference. Select the shorter roasting time per pound for a large duck, the longer time for a small duck. Thus, total roasting time for a 2½-pound (1.25-kg) duck would be about 38 minutes; a 5-pound (2.5-kg) duck would be 1 hour and 5 minutes.

5. Meanwhile, prepare the zest: Bring a medium-size saucepan of water to a boil. Place the zest in a fine-mesh sieve and submerge in the boiling water for 2 minutes to blanch. Rinse under cold running water. Drain. Set aside.


6. Remove the duck from the oven and, once again, season generously. Transfer to a platter and place at an angle against the edge of a baking dish, with the neck down and tail in the air. This heightens the flavor by allowing the juices to flow down through to the breast meat. Cover loosely with aluminum foil. Turn off the oven and place the duck in the oven, with the door slightly ajar. Let rest a minimum of 20 minutes and up to 1 hour. The duck will continue to cook during the resting time.

7. To prepare the sauce: Place the roasting pan with the trimmings over high heat. Cook until the trimmings are nicely browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Drain and discard all the liquid in the pan, for it will be mostly fat. (Do not omit this step, or you will have a fat, greasy, inedible sauce.) Add the honey, stir, and cook for 1 to 2 minutes more. Deglaze with several tablespoons of vinegar and cook for 1 minute. Add about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (12.5 cl) of water (or enough to make a rich sauce) and simmer for 5 minutes more.

8. Strain the sauce through a fine-mesh sieve placed over a clean skillet, pressing down on the trimmings to extract as much juice and flavor as possible. Add any cooking juices that have drained from the duck as it rests. Bring the sauce to a boil over high heat. Taste and, if necessary, add 1 to 2 teaspoons of vinegar. Remove the pan from the heat and add the butter, a few pieces at a time, whisking constantly after each addition until thoroughly incorporated. Stir in the reserved zest.

9. To serve: Carve the duck, discarding the whole limes, and arrange in the center of the platter. Spoon about half of the sauce over the duck. Pour the reserved sauce into a warmed sauce boat. Serve immediately.

FOUR SERVINGS

 **WINE SUGGESTIONS:** This duck is ideal with a robust wine of France's southwest. Try to lay your hands on a top-grade Madiran, such as Château Montus, from the duck-raising department of the Gers. It will echo the density and richness of the duck, a wine and food marriage made in heaven. I have also loved this with a lemon-zesty Viognier, a grape that's newly fashionable in Provence and California.

❧ **TECHNIQUE FOR CARVING A DUCK** ❧ When the duck has had ample time "to rest" after cooking and all of the juices have settled into place, it is ready to be carved for the table. Begin with the wing bone: Locate the shoulder joint that holds the wing in place and pierce the skin with a sharp knife at this point. Press heavily on the knife; the pressure will be needed to cut through the joint and free the wing. This will make it easier to carve the leg since there will be more free space for removal. Cut through the skin around the joint between the leg and the thigh in a semicircular shape, beginning the semicircle on the underside of the duck and finishing at the top outside. With a little pressure on the bone and a cut into the joint, the thigh is easily detached. Now the breast is all that remains to be removed: Cut down the middle of the bird, being sure to keep each breast piece intact. Once this initial cut has been made, slice deeply along the breast bone in order to free each side of the breast meat. When both sides of the breast have been removed, place them on the cutting board and cut them at an angle into lengthwise slices.

❧ **A TRUSSING TIP** ❧ A handy tip when trussing a duck or any other bird for roasting: When tying the knots to secure the different parts of the duck, tie a regular knot but loop the string an extra time through the knot before pulling it taut. This extra step will keep the knot tighter and the bird in better shape for even roasting.

NOTE: To extract the maximum flavor from all poultry trimmings—such as the neck, heart, and wing tips—chop them with a cleaver as finely as possible. For a quick and delicious sauce, sauté them quickly in fat, add aromatics such as carrots, onions, garlic, and thyme, and then deglaze with a bit of water or wine. Reduce over low heat for 4 to 5 minutes, then strain.