



FENNEL

Roasted Duck with Prosciutto-Wrapped Fennel Bulb and Balsamic-Cherry Sauce

Serves 4

Although this roasted duck, encrusted with fennel and coriander seeds, sings with flavor, it isn't the center of attention on the plate. That honor goes to the whole roasted fennel bulb, which has been wrapped in prosciutto and caul fat.

It cuts like a pat of soft butter, and the combination of lightly salty ham with the anise-flavored fennel simply monopolizes your attention. The caul fat keeps everything succulent, moist, and rich. A playful balsamic-cherry sauce fuses the flavors of the fennel and duck together. Almost any roasted meat would stand in nicely for the duck. Or you could serve the fennel by itself—your guests will be stunned.

FENNEL BULBS

2 large fennel bulbs, tops trimmed
Freshly ground black pepper
1 pound prosciutto, thinly sliced
¼ pound caul fat
1 tablespoon grapeseed oil
8 sprigs thyme
4 bay leaves

DUCK

1 fresh duck
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 sprigs sage
1 sprig rosemary
3 tablespoons fennel seeds,
toasted and crushed
1 tablespoon coriander seeds,
toasted and crushed

BALSAMIC-CHERRY SAUCE

½ cup chopped dried sweet cherries
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
½ cup pan juices from fennel (above)
Freshly ground black pepper

GARNISH

2 tablespoons coarsely chopped
fennel fronds
1 teaspoon crushed coriander seeds
Freshly ground black pepper
8 teaspoons Fennel Oil (*see Appendices*)

METHOD

To prepare the fennel bulbs: Season the fennel bulbs with pepper. Wrap each bulb in ½ pound of prosciutto, then wrap tightly with the caul fat. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Place the grapeseed oil in an ovenproof sauté pan and heat to medium-high heat. Remove the plastic wrap and sear the fennel bulbs in the oil on all sides until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Add the thyme and bay leaves; roast in the oven for 2 hours, or until the fennel bulbs are tender, turning them periodically while cooking. Reserve ½ cup of the pan juices for making the reduction. Allow the fennel bulbs to rest for 5 minutes before slicing in half and then into wedges.

To prepare the duck: Preheat the oven to 425°F. Season the cavity of the duck and the skin with salt and pepper. Stuff the sage and rosemary inside the cavity of the duck. Rub the outside of the duck with the fennel and coriander seeds. Place the duck on a rack set in a roasting pan and bake for 7 minutes. Reduce the heat to 375°F and roast for 1 hour, or until the duck is cooked to medium. Allow the duck to rest for 15 minutes before carving. Cut the duck breasts off the bone and slice the breasts into ½-inch-thick pieces. If you like, you can serve the duck legs; alternately, reserve them for another use.

To prepare the sauce: Place the cherries, vinegar, and reserved pan juices in a small saucepan; whisk to combine. Warm over medium heat until hot and season to taste with pepper.

ASSEMBLY

Place a few slices of the roasted fennel bulb on each plate and arrange the duck meat in front. Spoon the sauce over the duck and around the plate. Sprinkle the fennel fronds and coriander around the plate and top with pepper. Drizzle the Fennel Oil around the duck and fennel bulb.

WINE NOTES

The Douro Valley of Portugal is generally known for its fortified wines, or Ports. Quinta das Tecedeiras "Reserva" utilizes the same grapes as Port but is made into a dry, unfortified red wine. The brown, caramelized flavors of the prosciutto and the essence of the cherries are echoed in the black cherry and spice notes of the Tecedeiras. The bright acidity of the Port also makes an ideal contrast to the richness of the roasted duck.