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TAKE IT SLOW

The secrets to a succulent chicken confit—and why it’s a dish worth waiting for

By *Elisa Bosley*

CHEF JENNIFER JASINSKI started cooking for her family at age 8, while growing up in Santa Barbara—the land of “oranges and avocados,” she says. “I still like the bright freshness of California.” Today, Jasinski—who won a James Beard award this year and is competing on Season 5 of *Top Chef Masters*—juggles three acclaimed Denver restaurants: Rioja, a high-end Mediterranean venue; Bistro Vendôme, a French café; and Euclid Hall, a beer-and-sausage pub.

At each, her clean flavors shine, along with her nimble use of French technique. “Learning the classics up and down helps you be creative,” she says. One of her favorite methods is the ultra-slow transformation of raw meat into rich, crisp-skinned confit. “This is how meat was preserved before refrigeration,” she explains, as she simmers a chicken version at home. “It hasn’t changed for centuries because there’s no need to change perfection.”



Chef Jennifer Jasinski in the edible garden behind her Denver home



Better with confit

“Eat the confit with anything you’d use regular chicken for,” says Jasinski. “It’ll be yummier.” Try it with...



EGGS AND LATKES
Pull the meat off the bone and pile it on crisp potato pancakes.

A BAGUETTE
For a sandwich, tuck big shreds into a baguette with thinly sliced celery and a lemony vinaigrette.

PASTA
Mix with chunkier shapes like penne or gnocchi, or use it to fill ravioli.

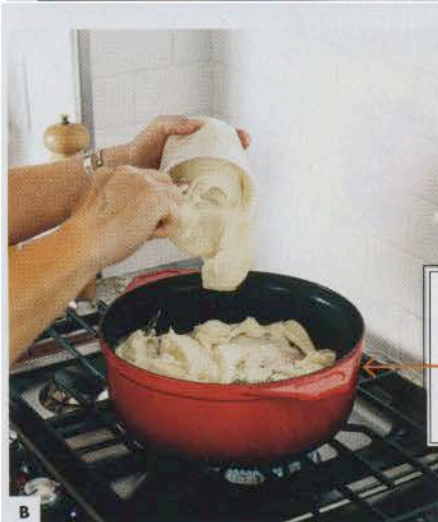
RISOTTO
Serve the whole leg. One great fall combo: Season the meat with Chinese five-spice

powder before cooking, use butternut squash and walnuts in the risotto, and serve with bok choy.

MASHED POTATOES
Nestle the leg next to a rich potato purée and round out the plate with something bracing, like grilled radicchio.

WAFFLES
Shred onto a waffle, then drizzle with black-pepper béchamel and a little maple syrup.

TACOS
Add a crunchy slaw of green cabbage, cilantro, red onion; a squeeze of lime; and sour cream.



TIP
"If the chicken sticks out of the fat, it's not going to cook evenly."

CRISP CHICKEN CONFIT

MAKES 4 WHOLE LEGS / 1 HOUR, PLUS AT LEAST 12 HOURS TO MARINATE AND 8 HOURS TO COOK

Although it takes a while, confit doesn't require much hands-on time. This method works for duck or rabbit too. Jasinski prefers duck or chicken fat for the confit, but easier-to-find lard or a 50-50 blend of olive oil and vegetable oil also work.

- 4 chicken legs with thighs (4½ lbs. total)
- 2½ tbs. kosher salt
- 1½ tsp. pepper
- 8 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 4 large sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 qts. duck or chicken fat, or 4 lbs. lard*

1. Pat chicken dry. **"That helps the salt and pepper go on evenly."** Mix salt and pepper and sprinkle over chicken. Put in a 4- or 5-qt. dutch oven and arrange garlic and thyme sprigs on top (A). Cover and chill at least 12 hours and up to 18.
2. Preheat oven to 200°. Add duck fat to chicken; warm on stovetop over lowest heat, covered, until fat is melted, about 20 minutes (B). It should completely cover chicken; if it doesn't, add more. Bake until meat is very tender when pierced, at least 8 hours and up to 12.
3. Using tongs, carefully transfer chicken to a 9- by 13-in. baking dish (C) and chill. Wait for melted fat to cool, then ladle into containers and chill for future use. Leave behind the garlic and herbs at the bottom

of the pot and any gelatinized meat juices too. If you don't plan to use all the chicken right away, cover it with still-liquid fat; it will keep, covered in the refrigerator, for a few months. (In fact, in the old days, cooks kept it at cool room temperature for weeks.) **"You can use the fat to**

cook. The next time you make a roast chicken, instead of olive oil, put this fat on it. Or brush it on grilled bread."

4. To use confit, crisp it up: Spoon cooking fat into a deep, wide pan. If chicken has been chilled in fat, transfer to a baking sheet and scrape off fat.
5. Heat fat over medium heat until it reaches between 275° and 300° on a deep-fry thermometer. Add chicken legs, skin side down (D). **"If they don't really sizzle, the fat isn't hot enough. Also, cold**

TIP

“Be very gentle when you crisp the confit, because the skin tears easily.”



chicken legs are going to drop the temperature of your fat, so crank up the heat to around 350°.

6. Cook, adjusting heat to keep temperature between 275° and 300°, until chicken is lightly browned and crisp, 10 to 12 minutes, turning once. “Focus on getting a nice crisp skin on the chicken, not just on the time it takes.” Using tongs (and a slotted spoon if you need it, to help hold the very tender, delicate chicken together), transfer chicken to a rack set over a rimmed baking sheet to drain. It’s now ready to eat.

**Find these fats at some butcher shops and at well-stocked grocery stores.*

PER WHOLE LEG 855 Cal., 63% (541 Cal.) from fat; 66 g protein; 61 g fat (18 g sat.); 9.1 g carbo (0.6 g fiber); 975 mg sodium; 254 mg chol. GF

ORANGE ENDIVE SALAD with CHICKEN CONFIT

SERVES 4 / 20 MINUTES

Rich, salty chicken confit, served with these ingredients, becomes a complete—and perfect—meal. “The watercress is spicy, endive is more bitter, oranges are sweet, avocado is creamy. There’s a reason why everything is in here,” says Jasinski.

VINAIGRETTE

- 1/3 cup orange marmalade
- 1/4 cup verjus* or fruity white wine, such as Riesling
- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/8 tsp. pepper

SALAD

- 2 oranges or blood oranges
- 1 firm-ripe avocado
- 1 head red or yellow Belgian endive, or 1/2 small head radicchio, leaves separated
- 1 bunch watercress, large stems removed. “I use watercress grown hydroponically; I like the mildly spicy flavor and that the stems are more delicate.”
- 4 crisp chicken confit legs (whole legs; see recipe, opposite)
- 4 oz. fresh goat cheese

1. Make vinaigrette: In a blender, whirl marmalade and verjus together. With blender running, drizzle in oil; add salt and pepper. Chill until ready to use. “This dressing keeps for 3 weeks at least, because there’s nothing in it that will change flavor, like garlic or fresh herbs or shallots.”
2. Make salad: With a sharp knife, slice peel and pith from oranges, cut them crosswise into wheels, and remove seeds. Slice avocado and season with salt and pepper. “People don’t season their salads enough. The ingredients need salt too, especially the watery ones.” Toss endive and watercress with about 1/4 cup dressing.
3. Arrange oranges, avocados, and salad to one side of 4 rectangular plates. Set a chicken leg on each plate, next to salad.

Crumble about 1 oz. of cheese onto each salad, and drizzle with about 1 tbsp. more dressing.

**Find verjus (unfermented grape juice) at well-stocked grocery stores or online. ▲*

PER SERVING 1,215 Cal., 64% (772 Cal.) from fat; 74 g protein; 86 g fat (26 g sat.); 35 g carbo (5.7 g fiber); 1,286 mg sodium; 276 mg chol. GF



“You want enough elements on the plate to make every bite a happy bite.”

TIP