

Counterfeit Duck Confit: All of the Flavor, Without the Labor

Traditional recipes for duck confit, or *confit de canard*, can require dozens of steps to prepare. David Lebovitz's fake take cuts the steps down to five. **Ed Anderson/Courtesy of Ten Speed**
David Lebovitz and his counterfeit duck confit. **Eleanor Beardsley/NPR**
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The California-trained chef loves fresh food and cooking, and he doesn't eat anything that comes out of a box. Lebovitz moved to Paris 11 years ago to write books and what has become a hugely successful blog on both sides of the Atlantic.

Lebovitz's latest cookbook-storybook, *My Paris Kitchen*, has a fantastic recipe for avoiding the time, heartache and cleanup of a traditional *confit de canard*, or duck confit.

"Most recipes that you see for confit usually begin with, 'Melt 10 liters of duck fat, then slip in four duck legs.' If you live in the south of France [where confit is from], you can find duck fat easily," says Lebovitz. "If you live in France, you can buy it in the supermarket in little jars the same size as peanut butter."

The Hard Way

Confit de canard dates back to antiquity. It was used as a way to preserve meat in an airtight grease pack. Henry the VIII was a huge fan of confit duck legs. But he didn't care how long it took or how the grease could smell up the kitchen.

If you Google "confit de canard," you can find recipes listing as many as 24 steps, with phrasing such as "do this the next day." The hard way of making this dish involves grinding up duck fat, melting it, cooking the duck legs in the melted duck fat and then re-cooking them several times in a pan on the stove.

The Hack

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One of most important elements of this method of faking duck confit, says Lebovitz, is the baking dish. It's got to be small, so that the duck legs are pressed snugly together. **Eleanor Beardsley/NPR**
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Lebovitz says his recipe for "counterfeit duck confit" avoids all that. "This technique is great, because it takes zero effort. All you do is season the duck legs — about 2 minutes of active work — let them sit for a few hours or overnight, and bake them for 3 hours."

One of most important elements, he says, is the baking dish. It's got to be small, so the legs are pressed snugly together, which keeps them surrounded by duck fat as they bake.

"Since it's not preserved in the grease for a long time, it's not a [true confit](#)," says Lebovitz.

But he believes his technique produces a dish that is every bit as tasty. On the day I visited, he cooked up duck legs with beautifully bronzed, crunchy skin and tender meat underneath.

Lebovitz says the nutmeg and allspice he prescribes in his recipe add a barely perceptible, balmy after note. And that, he says, is the essence of French cooking.

"Seasoning should accent the food, not be the food," says Lebovitz. "Because [the French] like to let the ingredients speak for themselves. They want duck confit to taste like duck. They don't want it to taste like two tablespoons of allspice."

Lebovitz adds in a tiny bit of gin, because the ingredient that makes gin gin is juniper, and juniper goes very well with duck. It's sort of like cooking with a little wine.

Ingredients:

- 4 duck thighs (thigh and leg attached)
- 1 tablespoon of sea salt
- 1 tablespoon gin
- 1/4 tablespoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 tablespoon allspice
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and halved lengthwise
- 2 bay leaves

Instructions:

1. Prick the duck all over with a needle, piercing the skin.
2. Mix the salt, gin, nutmeg and allspice in a baking dish that will fit the duck legs snugly, with no room around them. Rub the spice mixture all over the meat.
3. Put the garlic (cut lengthwise) and bay leaves on the bottom of the baking dish and lay the duck legs, flesh-side down, on top. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight.
4. Put the duck in a cold oven. Turn the oven on to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Bake the duck thighs for 2.5 hours, taking them out during baking once or twice and basting them with any duck fat pooling around.
5. To finish the duck, increase the oven temperature to 375 degrees and bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the skin is deeply browned and very crispy.

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Once your duck is cooked, keep that fat pooling in your baking dish — it's great for frying up potatoes, or even chicken. **Eleanor Beardsley/NPR**

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The Plate

Don't toss that duck fat pooling around the finished dish — Lebovitz says it's great for frying