

## master cooking **class**

### Duck Rillettes

Once you have a stash of duck confit in the fridge, you can easily make potted duck rillettes. Delicious slathered on French bread, rillettes make an ideal snack for impromptu entertaining.

For the rillettes recipe visit [www.eatmagazine.ca](http://www.eatmagazine.ca)



# DO TRY THIS AT HOME

Text and food styling by DENISE MARCHESSAULT • Photography by CAROLINE WEST

Think artisan-cured meats are just for trendy restaurants? Think again.

You can easily prepare duck confit, duck prosciutto and cured salmon at home. These straightforward recipes are delicious, versatile and keep well in the fridge. That translates into easy entertaining at a moment's notice.

The art of preserving meat is no longer the exclusive domain of professional chefs thanks to the popularity of cookbooks such as *Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking and Curing* by Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn. Curing your own meat, like home canning, is just another way to preserve and maintain the integrity of your food. What's more, curing lends itself to imaginative tinkering; add your favourite herbs and spices and create your very own signature cured meat.

Long before refrigeration, meats were cured out of necessity to prevent spoilage. This usually involved some form of salting, drying, smoking or pickling. Pure fat is another clever way to preserve; when meat is buried under an airtight seal of fat, it is protected from the dangers of imminent spoilage. The use of salt and fat is the magic behind duck confit.

'Curing meat in your own kitchen is a lot easier than you might think.'

**Duck confit** could not be easier to prepare: dust kosher salt and herbs over duck legs and allow their flavours to imbue the meat for a day or two. Rinse and dry the meat and poach it in duck fat for a couple of hours until the meat is fall-off-the-bone tender. (This technique elicits gasps of horror in my cooking classes, but the anxiety subsides after the first succulent bite.)

Rendered duck fat is available at specialty butcher shops. While expensive, around \$20 per litre, it's well worth it. Once you've roasted potatoes in duck fat, there is no going back. You'll be happy to have a pail in the fridge and you'll find dozens of excuses to use it. For the record, duck fat is one of the healthier fats available; it is particularly high in cholesterol-fighting monounsaturated fats.

Duck confit can be kept for at least a month in the refrigerator and reheated when needed. (In France, it's kept in the cold cellar for months on end.) It can be served whole with the skin deliciously crisped or shredded and tucked into an infinite variety of foods including pastas, ragouts, soups, tarts or tortillas. You can serve it in a hearty French cassoulet with beans and sausages or in a light salad paired with fruit. It can also be finely chopped and made into rillettes, a rustic spread delicious slathered on a baguette. The variations are endless.

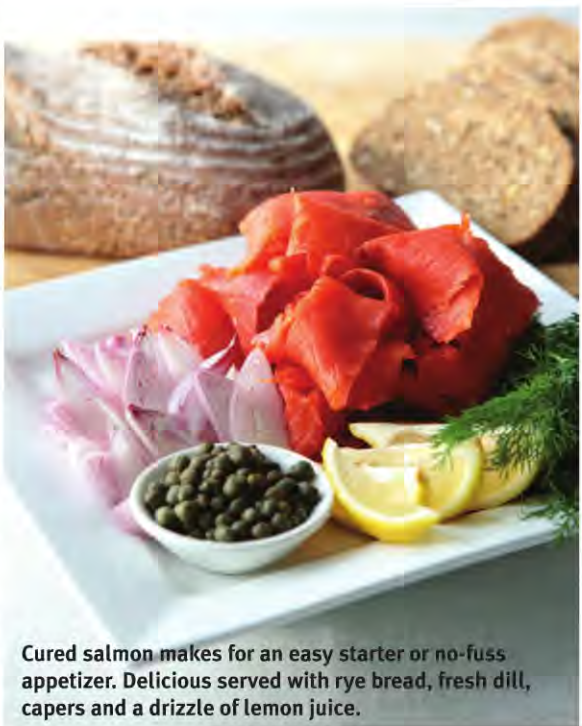
**Duck prosciutto** is salted duck breast, swaddled in cheesecloth and hung to dry. This simple dry-cure recipe, adapted from *Charcuterie*, yields a beautiful piece of meat similar in texture to traditional pork prosciutto. Duck prosciutto is a welcome addition to any salad or antipasto platter and goes well with fresh melon, mango, pear or figs. The duck may be kept refrigerated for several weeks.

**Cured salmon** (gravlax if you're Swedish) is part of my standard entertaining repertoire. It's easy to prepare and guests love it. There are numerous ways to cure salmon, but the principles are similar: bury the fish in seasoned salt and sugar, add a few pounds of weight (cans work well) and allow the salt to work its magic. My quick-cure recipe requires only 24 hours in the refrigerator.

Just before serving, I drizzle my cured salmon with a simple vinaigrette of grapeseed oil and white wine vinegar. I serve it with raw shallots, fresh dill, capers, lemon and freshly ground black pepper. It keeps about a week in the refrigerator, but it never seems to last that long!

RECIPES ON THE NEXT PAGE

Paper-thin slices of duck prosciutto are scrumptious paired with fresh sweet pears, tart apples or ruby pomegranates.



Cured salmon makes for an easy starter or no-fuss appetizer. Delicious served with rye bread, fresh dill, capers and a drizzle of lemon juice.

## Duck Confit

1/4 cup kosher salt  
1 1/2 tsp freshly ground pepper  
4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced  
2 large shallots, thinly sliced  
1 Tbsp fennel seeds, lightly crushed

1 Tbsp freshly chopped parsley  
4 sprigs fresh thyme  
6 duck legs  
Approx. 5 cups duck fat

Combine the salt with the pepper, garlic, shallots, fennel, parsley and thyme. Sprinkle half the mixture on the bottom of a dish large enough to hold the duck legs in a single layer. Place the duck on top of the salt mixture and then sprinkle with the remaining salt. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 24 to 48 hours.

Heat the oven to 240°F. Melt the duck fat in a saucepan over medium low heat.

Remove the duck from the salt, rinse thoroughly and pat completely dry with paper

towels. Arrange the duck legs in a single snug layer in a wide, shallow, oven-safe saucepan, casserole or baking dish. Pour the melted fat over the duck. (The duck pieces must be completely covered by fat.)

Transfer the duck to the oven and gently simmer, uncovered, until the duck is tender and can be easily pulled from the bone, approximately 2 to 3 hours. Check the oven occasionally to make sure the fat is gently simmering; confit can become tough if the oven is too hot. Adjust the heat as required to achieve a very gentle simmer.

Store the duck in the fat in the refrigerator for up to one month. Excess duck fat can be strained and stored in the refrigerator for later use.

When ready to use, brown the duck pieces, skin side down, in a frying pan to crisp the skin. Then transfer to an oven until heated through, approximately 15 minutes at 325°F.

Frozen duck legs and duck fat (sold in two-litre pails) are available at Slaters Meats in Victoria. Oyama Sausage Company on Granville Island, in Vancouver, sells duck fat.

### TREVE'S WINE SUGGESTIONS

The very first wine that comes to mind for this is **SHERRY**. These Spanish fortified wines are so versatile, complex and delicious – and make a perfect complement to many charcuterie plates. A dryer style like fino or, slightly darker, amontillado would suit the salty richness of the meats.

Another way to go would be an older vine, low yielding, cool climate **RIESLING** – they have the laser focus acidity to stand up to the intense cured meats, along with a fruit sweetness to complement their salty and savoury character.



**Duck Confit with Lentils**  
Enjoy comforting French bistro fare at home with succulent duck confit with spicy lentils and carrots. For the spicy lentil recipe visit [www.eatmagazine.ca](http://www.eatmagazine.ca)

## Duck Prosciutto

Recipe adapted from *Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking and Curing*, by Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn.

2 boneless duck breasts, approximately 1 pound  
2 cups kosher salt, plus more if needed  
1/2 tsp freshly ground white pepper  
Cheesecloth and kitchen string

Place half the salt in a baking dish. The size of the dish should hold the duck breasts snugly without touching each other.

Nestle the duck in the salt, skin side up, and cover with the balance of the salt. The duck must be completely covered with salt. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 24 hours.

Remove the duck from the salt, rinse thoroughly and pat completely dry with paper towels. The flesh should feel dense, and its colour will have deepened. Dust the breasts on both sides with the white pepper.

Wrap each breast in a layer of cheesecloth and tie with string. Hang the breasts for about 7 days in the refrigerator or in a cool, humid place (the optimum temperature is 8 to 15°C or 50 to 60°F). If your refrigerator does not have shelf-racks to hang the duck, you can place a cooling rack (or any such rack) on top of two Mason jars, slightly ajar. The duck can hang from the rack by kitchen string, between the jars.

After a week, or two, the flesh should be firm but not hard throughout. If the meat still feels soft, or raw, in the centre, continue to hang it in the refrigerator until it feels firm and the duck has lost about 30% of its original weight. This could take anywhere from one to four weeks.

Remove the cheesecloth, wrap the duck in plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use. The duck will keep for several weeks or longer if refrigerated.

## Cured Salmon

1 1/2 lb salmon fillet, skin on  
2 bunches fennel fronds, dill or parsley, roughly chopped  
1 Tbsp lightly crushed fennel seeds  
2 1/2 cups kosher salt  
2 1/2 cups sugar

Run your fingers over the salmon flesh to ensure there are no pin bones. If bones are present, remove with tweezers. In a medium-sized bowl add the salt, sugar, fennel fronds and seeds and mix until well combined.

Place half the sugar/salt mixture in the bottom of a wide, shallow container. (The salmon will release plenty of liquid, so make sure your container will accommodate the extra fluid.) Nestle the salmon in the mixture and completely cover it with the balance of the mixture.

Cover the top of the mixture with plastic wrap then place a small cutting board or plate on top of the plastic wrap. Weight it down with 2-3 cans or other suitable objects weighing approximately 2-3 pounds. Refrigerate for 24 hours. Remove the salmon from the salt/sugar mixture, rinse thoroughly and pat completely dry with paper towels.

Slice as thinly as possible and serve with fresh lemon, capers, thinly sliced shallots, fresh dill and freshly ground pepper.

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