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Autumn Stroganoff for a Chilly Evening

Duck, chestnuts and crispy curly potato swirls.

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There are two kinds of shoppers: those who arrive at the market with a detailed list and proceed to systematically fill their baskets with everything on that list, blinkered to all other possibilities. Then there are those who arrive with an open mind and an empty cart and simply wing it, often necessitating several return journeys. Hard though I strive to be the former, I invariably morph into the latter. I make a list, but then almost immediately jettison it in favor of some impossible-to-resist seasonal wonder. This throws my entire carefully calibrated meal plan wildly off kilter but does invariably lead to some wonderful inventions. Like this week's recipe, which combines three of autumn's sublime ingredients into a magnificent riff on a Russian classic recipe, Beef Stroganoff.

I can never resist duck, an affliction I blame on a small booth at Leningradsky Market where they sell duck in all its forms: legs, breasts, eggs, whole duck, duck fat, and duck liver. This is

where I first plucked up the courage to try duck recipes, and to which I returned countless times to expand my own repertoire of duck dishes. I love duck's robust meaty flavor, which trumps chicken nine times out of ten. Seared and roasted duck breast is the perfect addition to salads, soups, noodle bowls, or even the beginning of a more complicated main dish.

Synonymous with Russia's expansive, post-Petrine nineteenth-century cuisine, Beef Stroganoff is a classic adaptation of a French dish using Russian ingredients. Here, *fricassée de boeuf* or gently shaved beef is combined not with cream but with local sour cream. Pelagia Alexandrova-Ignatieva in her seminal fin de siècle "Practical Guide of the Basics of Culinary Arts" added mushrooms and onions, and served her Stroganoff with potatoes, which became the norm. In other parts of the world, Stroganoff is combined with rice or egg noodles.

You can "Stroganoff" anything, really, but that doesn't necessarily mean you should. I would, for example, steer you away from Tofu Stroganoff, particularly when made with vegan mayonnaise. With the rise in popularity of multi-cookers like the Instapot, shortcut versions of Stroganoff recipes have flooded the internet, with unfortunate substitutions such as ground beef, processed cream cheese, and tinned soup. Not good. But if you stick to the basic tenets of the recipe, you can achieve interesting versions using chicken, turkey, venison, salmon, and yes, duck. Particularly duck. The gamey flavor of duck arguably provides a more robust contrast to the creamy sauce.

I splurged on several duck breasts; confident I could make a version of Duck Stroganoff work. Swapping out flavor pairings such as anchovies and tomatoes that compliment beef so well proved challenging, until I pivoted to a strange but very successful combination of Asian and Caucasian condiments: Hoisin sauce and pomegranate molasses, which provided the right underpinnings to make this dish really sing. The final tweak was to introduce another of autumn's legendary ingredients: roasted chestnuts, which provided not only a rich sweetness but also a chewier texture that makes this dish more intriguing.

Duck Stroganoff is an ideal autumn dinner, the perfect cozy, creamy antidote to chilly nights. This is not a "dump and go" recipe, but it comes together easily in under 60 minutes and will only improve in flavor when left overnight. Paired here with indulgent crispy string potatoes fried in the residual duck fat, this is an indulgent dish to savor with friends, paired with a strong red wine and a side dish of tangy sour pickles.

Ingredients

- 1 cup (240 ml) chicken stock
- 1 Tbsp of gelatin
- 14 oz (400 grams) fresh mushrooms, cleaned and cut into a ½-inch dice
- 5 oz (100 grams) dried mushrooms
- 1-½ cups (350 ml) Marsala wine, divided into two portions: 250 ml and 100 ml.
- 2 duck breasts
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 tsp of Aleppo pepper
- 1 tsp cinnamon

- 1 tsp Chinese 5 Spice
- ½-tsp allspice
- 1 Tbsp + 1 tsp kosher salt
- 3 Tbsp Hoisin sauce
- 2 Tbsp pomegranate molasses
- 7 oz (200 grams) roasted chestnuts cut into ½-inch dice
- 2 Tbsp fresh thyme
- 1-¼ cups (300 ml) thick sour cream

To garnish

- Sumac
- Fresh tarragon
- Pickled cucumbers or cornichons

Crispy Curly Fried Potatoes

- 4 large russet potatoes
- 1 Tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 Tbsp onion powder
- 1 cup (240 ml) flour
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Salt for flavoring

Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 300°F (150°C). Score the fat side of the duck breasts in a crosshatch pattern. Place the breasts fat side down in a skillet and cook over medium heat for 20 minutes until the fat renders. Carefully decant the rendered fat into a non-reactive, heatproof container and set aside. Flip the duck breasts over and put them in the preheated oven for 25 minutes. Cool to room temperature.
- Sprinkle the gelatin over the stock and set aside.
- Pour hot water and ½ cup (100 ml) of Marsala over the dried mushrooms, pushing the mushrooms down to submerge them in the liquid. Cover with a clean cloth and leave for 40 minutes.
- Heat the butter in a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Sauté the fresh mushrooms until they leach their liquid. Sprinkle 1 tsp of salt over the mushrooms, cover, and lower the heat. Cook for about 15 minutes, checking once or twice that the mushrooms are reabsorbing their liquid. When most of the liquid is gone, remove the cover and continue to cook until the mushrooms are fully browned.
- Decant the dried mushrooms from their soaking liquid by straining them through a fine-mesh sieve set over a clean bowl. Add 1 cup (240 ml) of the mushroom liquid to the stock and gelatin mixture. Trim the mushrooms of any woody stalks, then slice them into a ½-inch dice. Add the rehydrated mushrooms to the pot and toss to combine, cooking an additional 2 minutes. Spoon the mushroom mixture into a bowl and set aside.
- Wipe out the pot and return to medium heat. Add the olive oil; when it is shimmering, add the chopped onions. Sauté the onions until translucent, then add the remaining salt,

Aleppo pepper, cinnamon, Chinese 5 spice powder, and allspice and toss to combine. Add the chestnuts, Hoisin sauce and pomegranate molasses and toss to coat the onions in the condiments.

- Return the mushrooms to the pot, then add the remaining Marsala and the fresh thyme. Raise the heat to medium and let the mixture simmer until the liquid is evaporated. Use the back of a wooden spoon to scrape up anything sticking to the bottom of the pot. Slice off any remaining fat from the duck breasts, then slice the breasts into ½-inch cubes and add them, together with any liquid that may have accumulated as the duck breasts cooled to the pot.
- When the Marsala is completely absorbed, add the stock and gelatin mixture to the pot and stir to combine for 1 minute. Then set a colander over a large bowl and strain the solids from the liquids. Return the solids to the pot and set aside.
- Place the sour cream into a large, heatproof mixing bowl. Add ½-cup (100 ml) of the strained liquid to the sour cream in a slow steam, whisking vigorously as you do. When the mixture is totally combined, add the remaining liquid in a similarly slow, steady stream, continuing to whisk until fully combined.
- Return the pot with the solids to low heat and add the sour cream and stock mixture to the pot, stirring gently to combine and heat through. Add the chopped tarragon, and sprinkle with sumac just before serving.

Duck Stroganoff can be made a day in advance. Heat through gently before serving.

Curly Potatoes

- Preheat the oven to 200°F (93°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Use a spiralizer or mandoline to cut the potatoes into matchsticks or curly "noodles." Soak the cut potatoes in cool water for 45 minutes.
- Pat the potatoes dry. In your largest skillet or Dutch Oven, pour the duck fat and enough additional vegetable oil to a depth of 1 ½ inches. Heat the oil to 350°F (180°C).
- Fill a sturdy plastic bag with the flour, onion powder, and paprika. Working in batches so as not to crowd the skillet, coat the potatoes with the flour mixture, shaking off any excess, then fry in the hot oil for 3 minutes. Sprinkle with salt while still hot. Drain on a baking sheet lined with paper towel, then transfer to the prepared baking sheet with parchment paper and keep warm. Keep warm in the preheated oven until you are ready to serve.

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