

Traditional coq au vin

Coq au vin is traditionally made with a one-year-old cockerel – full flavoured and perfect for the stew pot. If you can get a real coq (a few good butchers supply them), brilliant, otherwise use the legs of regular chickens - one per person. Legs have more flavour than breasts, and are more suited to slow cooking.

To get 10 pieces from the bird: Cut out the spine and save for stock. Take the legs off and divide into thighs and drumsticks. Take the wings off, remove the wingtips and save them for stock. Remove the breast plate and cut the breast in half, then divide each breast piece into two. You should have 10 pieces. Or ask your butcher to do it.



Serves: 5-6

1 large cockerel, weighing 2.5-3kg, cut into 10 pieces on the bone
salt and pepper

200g lardons, or thick-cut streaky bacon cut into 1cm pieces

olive oil

knob of butter

2 large onions, peeled and roughly chopped

2 carrots, peeled and roughly chopped

2 sticks of celery, roughly chopped

4 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped

2 tbsps plain flour

100ml brandy

1 bottle decent red wine

bouquet garni of parsley, thyme and bay

1 tbsp tomato paste

2 pared strips of orange zest (optional)

approx 500ml chicken stock

Garnishes:

18 baby onions, peeled and left whole

300g button mushrooms, wiped clean and left whole

butter

1. Season the chicken pieces all over with salt and pepper. Do this the day before you want to cook them, if you can. If not, season them at least an hour before cooking.
2. Fry the lardons in a heavy-based casserole until the fat has rendered and they are turning brown and crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside.
3. Add a dash of oil to the pot and brown the chicken pieces all over, in batches. Remove from the pot.
4. Check that there is no burnt residue in the pan. Brown is good, but black bits smelling of char can ruin the finished dish, so better to be safe and wipe them out with kitchen paper. Add a lump of butter and the vegetables and fry over moderate heat until mostly soft and starting to caramelize.
5. Add the flour and cook for a few minutes to make a roux. Add the brandy and cook until it has almost gone. Add the wine, bouquet garni, tomato paste and zest if using and bring to a boil while stirring.
6. Now add the chicken back in and enough stock to just cover. Partially cover with a lid and simmer gently for about two hours or until the meat is very tender. Stir occasionally to ensure even cooking.

7. Meanwhile make the garnishes. Fry the onions in a non-stick frying pan with a knob of butter, salt and pepper until tender and nicely caramelised. Tip them out and do the same with the mushrooms.
8. Remove the meat to a roasting tin, carefully brushing off any clinging vegetables or herbs. Strain the sauce through a sieve into a saucepan, pressing down on the solids to extract as much sauce as possible. Boil the sauce to reduce until thick, dark and rich. Taste and season if needed.
9. Pour sauce over the chicken pieces and either serve immediately, or (much better) chill and reheat the next day in a 160C oven for about 45 minutes until gently bubbling. Serve garnished with the lardons, onions and mushrooms and together with something to soak up the delicious sauce, such as crusty country bread or mashed potatoes.