

Grilled Chukar

I just made this one up tonight after a day of training. It was excellent - my new favorite way to cook these tasty devils. The rub adds a bit of heat, which is counterbalanced nicely with the honey-almond glaze.

2 whole chukar, or 4 quail, plucked and cleaned. Believe me; it's worth the effort for this recipe. Chukar, in particular, are easy to pluck. It should only take you 15 minutes.

Pluck and gut the chukar. If desired, kiss the chukar with a blowtorch to singe off any small feathers you miss. Using kitchen shears, stout scissors, a cleaver or a good chef's knife, split the chukar in half lengthwise, cutting through the middle of the breast and spine to give you 2 halves, each with a leg and a breast. Wash and dry thoroughly. Using a kitchen mallet or a rolling pin, flatten each half a little bit so that it will sit flat on the grill.

Combine the following in a small bowl to make the rub:

1/4 cup olive oil
1 TBS crushed garlic
1/4 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp sea salt
1 tsp Pimenton Picante (Hot, smoked paprika from Spain)
- OR - 1 tsp regular paprika and 1/4 tsp ground red pepper

A quick word about Spanish Smoked Paprika - nothing else in the world tastes quite like this, which is arguably Spain's greatest contribution to mankind's storehouse of seasonings. It is unlike anything else, but not in a weird, alien way. It tastes both familiar and exotic at the same time, and it will become your new "secret ingredient" - trust me on this. It comes hot (picante), sweet (dulce) and bittersweet (agridulce) – all have the unique smokiness that defines the taste. It's made by smoking peppers over a wood fire until they are dried, then grinding them into a powder. It's hard to find, so buy it on the web at http://tienda.com/food/smoked_paprika.html - it's worth the effort. If you only buy one, buy the Picante – it's not overly hot, and it has the most intense flavor.

OK - Back to the recipe:

Blend the ingredients together, and then rub the chukar liberally with the mixture. Grease 'em up, then set them aside to marinate for 30 - 60 minutes.

Preheat grill on high. A wood fire is the best, but any grill will do. I use a gas grill. Just before adding the meat, I sprinkle a handful of fine wood chips - hickory or oak - onto the burners.

While grill is warming up, grind 3 TBS smoked almonds with a mortar and pestle, or with the flat of a broad knife on a cutting board, to make fine crumbs. Combine in a small bowl with 1/2 cup honey.

When grill is very hot, toss on your wood chips then wipe the grill with a little olive oil. Place the chukar on the grill skin side down and cook for 2 minutes. Turn and grill for 2 more minutes.

Brush or spoon the honey mixture on the skin side, then turn over and cook 30-60 seconds. Brush honey on the bone side then turn and cook 30-60 seconds, brushing the last of your honey onto the skin side while the other side cooks. Remove from grill, cover with foil and let stand 5 minutes.

Total cooking time should not exceed 6 minutes, even less for quail. Game birds should be served just a tad Medium/Medium rare. Letting them stand 5 minutes will ensure they are cooked

through. DON'T OVERCOOK, OR YOU WILL HAVE TO GO OUT FOR A PIZZA! The difference between perfect, moist, delicious chukar and a recoil pad is about 1 minute on the grill.

Serves 4

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