

Duck Breast with Port Sauce

Serves 4

After moving to Brittany from England, Ruth Bown stepped back from fast-paced living and changed gears to an enormously satisfying slow tempo. Bown explains that market gardening has been a way of life for many in this province for over 200 years. In fact, she boasts, this area accounts for half of the artichokes in France. As an ex-pat, she worried that she wouldn't be accepted by the locals, but nothing could be further from the truth. "Not only," she writes, "are we accepted in the community, but also into their homes to share family meals. Many of my neighbors have been terribly generous in giving me their family recipes, many of which are now part of my family's repertoire of meals. This particular recipe was given to me a number of years ago by Madame Anne Duval from Bergerac." Bown describes her neighbors as warm and friendly, wedded to the land, and utterly modest.

2 duck breast filets
2 teaspoons sea salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 shallots, finely chopped
1 cup onion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon white sugar
1 tablespoon wine vinegar
½ cup ruby Port, or Madeira
1 ½ ounces butter

Wipe the duck breasts and score skin side with a small sharp knife in a lattice pattern. Sprinkle with the salt and season generously with pepper.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium heat and put the duck, skin-side down in it. Cook for 10 minutes, or until crisp and golden, then turn and cook for another 10 minutes. Remove the duck from the skillet, leaving about 1 tablespoon of fat in the pan. Keep the duck warm.

Add the shallots and sugar to the pan, and cook over a medium heat until softened and lightly caramelized. Add the vinegar and boil until evaporated. Stir in the port and any juices that have come from the duck breasts, and boil for 2 to 3 minutes, until slightly reduced. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter.

Cut the duck lengthwise into thin slices, and fan out on dinner plates. Spoon some sauce over each and serve at once with a selection of vegetables.