



Pinot Noir Ranch 5

Cocoa-Chile Duck Breast with a Warm Cherry Salsa

Makes 6 servings

Cocoa Chile Rub

2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably not the milder “dutch” variety.
2 tablespoons ancho chile powder
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 teaspoon ground toasted cumin seed (see sidebar)
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

4 boneless, skin-on Pekin (aka Long Island) duck breasts (about 2 pounds)
4 ounces arugula or watercress (4 big handfuls), rinsed and spun dry
Extra virgin olive oil, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Warm Cherry Salsa

1/4 cup olive oil
2 medium size shallots, minced
1# pitted bing cherries
1/4 cup honey
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
1 jalapeno, halved, seeded and minced
2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
salt and pepper to taste

In a heavy bottomed saucepot on medium heat cook the shallots in 1 tablespoon of the olive oil until lightly browned. Add half the cherries, the honey, vinegars, turn down to a simmer and reduce to 1/3 its original volume. Add the remaining cherries and bring to a boil the reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Turn the heat off and fold in the jalapenos and mint. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

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Preheat oven to 400°.

Make the Cocoa-Chile Rub. In a small bowl, stir together the cocoa, chile powder, cumin, garlic powder, pepper, and cayenne. If the double-breasts are joined, cut them apart into two breasts. Trim excess fat and score the skin, making parallel cuts about one-half inch apart with a sharp knife that go into the skin without cutting into the flesh. Make a second set of parallel cuts across the first to create a cross-hatch pattern. Rub both sides of the duck breasts liberally with the rub and set aside.

Cook the duck. Place a small amount of olive oil into an oven-proof skillet and place it over medium heat. Lay in the breasts, skin-side down, and cook until the skin renders its fat and turns golden brown, about 10 minutes. Leave the duck in one place during this time to allow it to form a crust that stays with the meat rather than sticking to the pan. If much fat has collected in the pan, transfer the duck to a plate and carefully pour off the fat into a heat-proof container. Discard or save for another use. (I love it for sautéing potatoes.) Return the duck breasts to the skillet skin-side down.

Place the skillet in the oven until the meat is medium rare and has an internal temperature of 140°F at the center of the breast, about 4 minutes. (You may prefer to follow the USDA recommendation of cooking the duck breasts to 170°F; however, it will not be medium rare.) Remove from the oven and let rest in the skillet for 5 minutes.

Just before serving, toss the arugula with olive oil, salt, and pepper to lightly coat. Mound the dressed arugula on six plates. Place the duck skin-side down on a cutting board and slice cross-wise into thin strips at a 45-degree angle, parallel to the wing bone. Fan about two-thirds of a duck breast over the arugula on each plate and sprinkle lightly with sea salt. Tuck a large spoonful of the Warm Cherry Salsa next to the duck and serve the rest in a bowl on the side.

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