

**PEKING DUCK**  
**Region: Peking**  
**Method: blanching and roasting**

The Chinese have a special reverence for duck, regarding it as a symbol of wholesomeness and fidelity. Of course its 'delectability' is its chief virtue. With Peking Duck Chinese cooks mastered the art of making the most of the duck's rich, succulent flesh while minimising its major flaw -- its relatively large proportion of bone and fat. There is little doubt that this spectacular dish was first concocted in the Imperial kitchens. Its popularity spread as restaurants, staffed by former Imperial chefs, made it a speciality to be served at banquets. The dish can now be found in all parts of China.

The preparation and cooking of Peking Duck in China is an art form. Specially raised ducklings are fed a rich diet of maize, sorghum, barley and soyabean for 1½ months before they are ready for the kitchen. After being killed and cleaned, air is pumped through the windpipe to separate the skin from the meat. (This allows the skin to roast separately and remain crisp while the fat melts, keeping the meat moist.) Hot water is then poured over the duck to close the skin pores and it is hung up to dry. During the drying process a solution of malt sugar is liberally brushed over the duck, which is then roasted in wood-burning ovens. The result is a shiny, crisp and aromatic duck with beautiful brown skin, moist flesh and no fat.

Preparing Peking Duck is a time-consuming task, but I have devised a simpler method which closely approximates the real thing. Just give yourself plenty of time and the results will be good enough for an emperor. Traditionally Peking Duck is served with Chinese Pancakes, spring onions cut into brush shapes and sweet bean sauce. In Hong Kong and in the West hoisin sauce is used instead. It is very similar to sweet bean sauce but contains vinegar. Each guest spoons some sauce onto a pancake. Then a helping of crisp skin and meat is placed on top with a spring onion brush and the entire mixture is rolled up like a stuffed pancake. It can be eaten using chopsticks or one's fingers. This makes an unforgettable dish for a very special dinner party.

**Serves 4-6**

1 x 1.6-1.8 kg duck, fresh or frozen, preferably Cherry Valley  
(3½ - 4 lb)

**Honey Syrup Mixture**

|                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1                    | lemon                            |
| 1.2 litres (2 pints) | water                            |
| 3 tablespoons        | honey                            |
| 3 tablespoons        | dark soy sauce                   |
| 150 ml (5 fl oz)     | Shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry |

**To Serve**

Chinese Pancakes  
6 tablespoons hoisin sauce or sweet bean sauce

If the duck is frozen, thaw it thoroughly. Rinse the duck well and blot it completely dry with kitchen paper. Insert a meat hook near the neck.

Using a sharp knife, cut the lemon into 0.5 cm (¼ inch) slices, leaving the rind on. Combine the lemon slices with the rest of the honey syrup ingredients in a large pot and bring the mixture to the boil. Turn the heat to low and simmer for about 20 minutes. Using a large ladle or spoon pour this mixture over the duck several times, as if to bathe it, until all the skin of the duck is completely coated with the mixture. Hang the duck in a cool, well ventilated place to dry, or alternatively hang it in front of a cold fan for about 4-5 hours, longer if possible. (Be sure to put a tray or roasting pan underneath to catch any drips.) Once the duck has dried, the surface of the skin will feel like parchment.

Pre-heat the oven to gas mark 9, 240°C (475°F). Meanwhile, place the duck on a roasting rack in a roasting pan, breast side up. Put 150 ml (5 fl oz) of water into the roasting pan. (This will prevent the fat from splattering.) Now put the duck into the oven and roast it for 15 minutes. Then turn the heat down to gas mark 4, 350°F (180°C) and continue to roast for 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Remove the duck from the oven and let it sit for at least 10 minutes before you carve it. Using a cleaver or a sharp knife, cut the skin and meat into pieces and arrange them on a warm platter. Serve at once with Chinese Pancakes, spring onion brushes and a bowl of hoisin sauce or sweet bean sauce.