

For those who enjoy it: rabbit pie

Some of you may recoil in horror: those big ears, the quivering nose, the soft, cuddly fur sported by rabbits. How can a person eat a bunny? If you can bear the



SANDY OLIVER
TASTE BUDS

thought, read on. Rabbit meat is mostly lean, dark meat and is susceptible to a good many preparations — especially to braising — and, dare I

say, is similar to chicken. Dressed rabbits are funny shaped creatures. The fore-quarters are meaty, then there are long flanks with barely any meat, ending in meaty hindquarters. Led by my old “Silver Palate” cookbook, rabbit fricassee with mushrooms and tomatoes served over polenta was my go-to recipe first couple of times I cooked it. Ultimately, I found the bones I left in it were annoying, so before serving it I took to removing them.

The last time I cooked rabbit, I decided on making indi-

vidual pies for company supper — a slightly fussy approach, but it looked a little bit more elegant. For a plain family supper, I’d make a one dish pot pie. No matter what the finished product looks like, shiitake mushrooms and a general plug of Madeira make all the flavor difference. No Madeira? Apparently you can use almost any wine — white or red. And I prefer a sauce made with broth instead of a cream sauce, which comes in handy in case you have a lactose intolerant eater. Also, because I had gluten avoiders in my company, I used cornstarch to thicken the gravy. Do what you need to, but the recipe below calls for flour.

Send queries or answers to Sandy Oliver, 1061 Main Road, Islesboro 04848. Email sandyoliver47@gmail.com. For recipes, tell us where they came from, list ingredients, specify number of servings and do not abbreviate measurements. Include name, address and daytime phone number. And make sure to check out Sandy’s blog at tastebuds.bangordailynews.com.



Chef Cara Stadler (left) meets with farmers at Bumbleroot Organic Farm this week in preparation for her farm dinners at Tao Yuan in Brunswick.

KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

Dinner

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KATE HOLCOMB, TAO YUAN FARM-TO-TABLE DIRECTOR

boots seated next to them. On this culinary trip, the farmer who grew it comes with you.

Now in its second year, these farmers appreciation nights will pair produce from Bumbleroot Organic Farm in Buxton with venison from Applegate Deer Farm in West Newfield. On another night, dairy and lamb from Kennebec Cheesery of Sidney will be served with produce and fermented goods from Thirty Acre Farm in Whitefield.

“Everyone who came last year enjoyed getting to see local farms featured,” said Kate Holcomb, the restaurant’s farm-to-table program director. “Some came to all three.”

This year the series expands to showcase twice as many farms and an extra night is added. On Oct. 15, the chefs tackle an all-vegetarian meal from Six River Farm of Bowdoinham.

“It will be fun to see them craft an entire meal from vegetables,” said Holcomb. “They have the experience and knowledge it takes to highlight produce. Part of the fun of it is you sit down and don’t have to make any decisions. They take you on a trip.”

You can’t get closer to eating local than breaking bread with the man or

woman who grew that heirloom tomato, harvested that sweet carrot and nurtured that succulent venison. Seeing how a superstar chef like Stadler, who studied at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, combines shishito peppers, fresh on the vine that morning, with just harvested meat, for example, is a rush for a farmer who has been digging in the dirt all summer.

“We wouldn’t miss it,” said Fisher after giving Stadler and Poulos a tour of his two-acre spread Monday morning.

“We love eating as much as we enjoy farming. It’s great to see someone take something we’ve worked

so hard on and represent it really well,” said Fisher.

To Poulos, a farm dinner “really completes the circle.” Like wine dinners where the vintner is present, “customers like to say hi to farmers,” she’s noticed.

Tao Yuan’s harvest dinners are exciting for customers and farmers, but for no one more than Stadler, who deepens what she already knows with new possibilities.

“It’s a big challenge. These are things we don’t normally have on the menu. It’s completely different,” she said. And stimulating, too. “We just wanted to appreciate our

farmers. Starting with a beautiful product is so central to what we do.”

To keep food fresh, beautiful and prevalent in Maine, Stadler is working on an aquaponics enterprise — a way to grow fish and plants in a greenhouse all year. Though in its planning stages, she has tapped Holcomb to find an educational partner. They hope to have a solar-powered system up and running this winter. The first step is research.

“The idea is to foster a network of anyone who would like to participate in an aquaponics farm-to-table operation in Maine,” said Holcomb. Ideally it would be located on a college campus at first. They hope to make an announcement in November.

To make a reservation for harvest dinners at Tao Yuan, call 207-725-9002 or book online at <http://taoyuan.me/reserve.html>.

Rabbit and Shiitake Pie

Serves 3 to 4

To braise the rabbit:

- 1 rabbit
- 1 rib of celery, chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper
- Water

To make the pie:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 2 tablespoons of flour
- 1½ cups stock from braising and/or chicken broth
- Rabbit meat removed from the bone
- 3 to 4 dried shiitake mushrooms, broken and soaked in hot water
- ¼ cup of Madeira or more to taste
- Dried thyme to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Pastry sufficient to cover a 9-inch pie

Put the rabbit into a heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid. Add the celery, carrot, onion and bay leaf, plus enough water to cover the bottom of the pot. Set over a medium heat and cook covered at a simmer until the meat falls from the bones.

Remove the rabbit from the pot, and drain the liquid and vegetables in a colander, reserving the liquid. Pick the meat from the bones and cut into bite-size pieces.

Heat the butter and olive oil together and add the chopped onion and cook until onions are softened. Stir in the flour and cook briefly with the onions.

Add the stock and/or broth stirring constantly to avoid lumps, and cook until slightly thickened. Drain and add the mushrooms and cook for about five minutes.

Add the rabbit meat, thyme, salt and pepper and Madeira, and mix together. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Spoon the mixture into a pie plate and top with the pastry, pinching to close the edges and cut a vent hole in the top. Bake at 375 degrees until the crust is golden.

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