

POULET DEMI-DEUIL (Truffle Braised Chicken)

(adapted from Fine Cooking magazine)

1 oz. fresh black truffle
2 Tbs. Madeira wine; more as needed
One 2-1/2-lb. chicken
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
4 cups chicken stock (homemade is best)
2 medium carrots, peeled
2 large leeks (white parts only)
2 medium zucchini
1/4 cup cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/2 tsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice

Slice the truffle very thinly using a mandoline or a very sharp, thin-bladed knife and a steady hand. Put the slices in a small bowl, add the Madeira, and let soak briefly to moisten the truffles (making it easier to slide them under the chicken skin and giving them some Madeira flavor). Strain the truffle in a fine-mesh strainer set over a small bowl. Reserve the liquid.

Moisten your hands under cold running water and loosen the skin on the chickens' breasts and thighs, carefully sliding your hands between the skin and meat. Slide the truffle slices under the skin of the chicken breasts to cover them, then slide a slice or two under the skin of each thigh. Finely chop the remaining truffle slices and set aside for use in the sauce. Truss the chickens, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight to allow the truffles to flavor and perfume the chickens.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Season the chicken generously with salt and pepper, then rub with the softened butter. Set on a rack in a roasting pan and roast for 40 minutes. (The chicken will be underdone.)

Pour the stock, reserved chopped truffle, and reserved Madeira into an ovenproof, flameproof casserole large enough to hold the chicken with some room to spare. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat so the liquid is simmering and cook until reduced to about 2 cups; about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, cut the carrots and leeks into square segments, keeping them separate. Wash the leeks well. Cut off the ends of the zucchini and cut out the center portion by slicing down its length to remove 4 rounded sides. Discard the rectangular center portion and cut the outer portions into uniformly sized pieces. about 1/4 inch thick.

Remove the strings from the chicken and set it in the casserole, breast side up. Add the vegetables, cover and braise at a simmer until fully cooked, about 20 to 30 minutes.

Transfer the chicken to a large serving platter and cover with aluminum foil to keep warm. Raise the heat in the pan with the stock and veggies to high, and cook until the broth has reduced a bit, about 5 minutes. Swirl in the cold butter, one cube at a time, to thicken and enrich it. Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt, pepper, Madeira, and/or lemon juice.

Spoon some sauce and vegetables over the chicken on the serving platter and serve.