

Good Coq au Vin

Ingredients:

½ c Lardons (or very thickly sliced bacon), cut into ¼ - by 1½-inch strips (optional)
2 or more T Olive Oil
3½ to 4½ lbs Chicken, cut into parts (or all one kind of part), thoroughly dried
¼ c Cognac or Armagnac
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 Bay Leaf
¼ t dried Thyme
20 Pearl Onions, peeled
3 T All-Purpose Flour
2 c Red Wine, preferably Burgundy, Côtes du Rhône, or Pinot Noir
2 c homemade Chicken Stock
2 Garlic cloves, mashed or minced
1 T Tomato Paste
¾ lbs fresh Mushrooms, trimmed, rinsed, and quartered

Directions:

1. Pour enough oil in a large pot to reach a depth of ⅛ inch if you're not using lardons or bacon. If you are using lardons or bacon, toss them in a heavy-bottomed casserole or pot along with 2 tablespoons oil over medium or medium-high until lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Transfer the lardons or bacon to a plate, leaving the drippings in the pot.
2. Heat the drippings or oil remaining in the pot over medium-high heat. Add the chicken, being careful not to crowd the pieces. (You may need to work in batches). Cook the chicken, turning frequently, until nicely browned on all sides. (If working in batches, return all the chicken to the pot.) Carefully pour the Cognac or Armagnac into the pot and wait until it becomes bubbling hot. If desired—and if you're brave—ignite the sauce with a match. Let it flame for a minute, gently tilting the pot by its handle and swirling the sauce to burn off the alcohol. To extinguish the flames, simply cover the pan with its lid.
3. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add the bay leaf and thyme to the pan and then nestle the onions around the chicken. Cover the pot and let the chicken simmer gently, turning the pieces once, for about 10 minutes.
4. Uncover the pot, sprinkle the flour over everything, and turn the chicken and onions so the flour is absorbed by the sauce. Cover and cook, turning once or twice, for 3 to 4 minutes more.
5. Remove the pot from the heat and gradually stir and swirl in the wine and enough stock to almost cover the chicken. Add the lardons or bacon, garlic, and tomato paste to the pot, cover, and gently simmer for 25 to 30 minutes. Test the chicken for doneness (there should be no trace of pink and the juices should run clear when the meat is pierced with a knife). Grab some tongs and transfer the chicken pieces to the plate when they're done. Continue to cook the rest of the chicken a few minutes longer. If the onions are not quite tender, continue cooking them in the sauce, then return the chicken to the pot, add the mushrooms, and simmer 4 to 5 minutes. The sauce should be just thick enough to lightly coat the chicken and vegetables. (If the sauce seems too thin, bring it to a boil and cook until the sauce is reduced to the desired consistency. If the sauce is too thick, thin it with spoonfuls of stock.) Taste the sauce and correct the seasoning accordingly. Serve the coq au vin immediately or let it cool, cover, and refrigerate overnight. To reheat, skim any fat that has congealed on the surface of the stew and place the pot of coq au vin over medium-low heat.