

Turducken

Express

How to skip the all-day prepping project and get turducken on the table in under two hours

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The noble turducken plays out like a carnivore's dream—layers of sumptuous turkey, duck and chicken drowned in gravy and packed with at least three different types of stuffing. A turducken normally consists of a 20- to 25-pound turkey, a 4- to 5-pound duck, and a 3-pound chicken, all with a whopping 14 cups of stuffing. Traditionally, this masterpiece is created by carefully deboning and flattening each bird, filling each layer to the brim with savory dressings, wedging one inside the other and finally cooking it for various hours. The cooking time can vary, as can the time it takes for prepping and assembly, but it's a safe bet that the entire process would take around 24 hours.

The origins of turducken are sketchy. Amanda Hesser said it best in a 2002 *New York Times* article on the wonder dish: "Once upon a time, possibly at a lodge in Wyoming, possibly at a butcher shop in Maurice, Louisiana, or maybe even at a plantation in South Carolina, an enterprising cook decided to take a boned chicken, a boned duck and a boned turkey, stuff them one inside the other like Russian dolls, and roast them. He called his masterpiece turducken." The pedigree of this now-famous dish isn't really important. Instead, let's just focus on the fact that wherever it may have started, Louisiana can claim ownership of the mighty turduckens created today.

I was determined to make a turducken of my own creation. The only problem? Deboning. Okay, so deboning not one but three whole birds is a daunting task that even those with butchery training don't find enticing (I asked many butchers if they would do it for me, and was politely told no each time). I needed an easier version. Then it came to me! What about a variation using breasts or flattened cuts of each bird, layered using just one really fantastic stuffing instead of three, then rolling it and tying it like a roast? Behold, the Turducken Express was born—a quicker way of getting the taste of turducken without all the hassle of the original. Bask in the results; I know I sure did.

1. Start with the duck breast, this will be the outside layer of the turducken roll.
2. Place the duck breast skin side down on a cutting board and make one thin cut from left to right almost all the way through the breast. Open the cut to the right and make another thin cut almost all the way through the meat, this time right to left beginning at the crease. Open the second cut to the left. The duck breast should now be three attached panels.
3. Cover the cutting board with a sheet of plastic or waxed paper, and place another sheet on top of the duck breast. Gently pound the meat to an even inch thickness.

Photography by Bill Milne

Cajun Turducken Express

Yield: 4 servings • Zest Factor: Medium

Before you start to make the stuffing, taste the Cajun spice blend you're going to use and if it's very salty, tone down the salt in the rest of the recipe.

For the stuffing:

- 1 teaspoon plus 1 tablespoon canola oil, divided
- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- 2 teaspoons Cajun spice blend, divided
- 2 chorizo sausages, removed from casings
- 2 medium onions, roughly chopped
- 2 medium-sized fennel bulbs, roughly chopped
- 4 celery stalks, roughly chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- 8 cups homemade or store-bought cornbread, crumbled
- chicken broth, as needed

For the turducken:

- 2 teaspoons canola oil
- 1 duck breast
- 2 or 3 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 2 turkey cutlets
- salt and freshly ground pepper

For the gravy:

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon flour
- chicken broth, as needed
- 2 tablespoons whole milk
- Cajun spice blend
- freshly ground pepper

Make the stuffing: In a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat, warm 1

teaspoon canola oil. Add walnuts to the pan, sprinkle them with 1 teaspoon of Cajun spice blend. Stir, and cook just a few minutes, until walnuts are lightly toasted and infused with Cajun spice. Remove the nuts from the pan, and set aside until needed. Lower the heat to medium, add the chorizo to the pan, use a spatula to crumble the meat. Cook until done, about 5 to 7 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove the sausage from the pan, leaving about 1 tablespoon of fat. Lower the heat to medium-low, and add onion, stirring and cooking to soften. After about 5 minutes, add fennel and celery, cooking until all the vegetables are soft and translucent. Add the garlic, and cook 1 additional minute. Remove the vegetables from the pan, and let cool for 5 to 10 minutes.

When vegetables are cool, add them to the workbowl of a food processor with ¼ cup Cajun-spiced walnuts, and dried cranberries. Blend just 30 seconds until mixture is combined. In a large bowl, add vegetable mixture, cornbread, remaining ¼ cup of walnuts, remaining 1 teaspoon of Cajun seasoning and ½ cup chicken stock. Stir, adding more chicken broth as needed to make a cohesive but not soggy texture.

Make the turducken: Preheat oven to 350°. The only tricky part of this whole recipe is the slicing of the duck breast, everything after that is a snap, we promise. For a visual aid, follow the a handy step-by-step photo tutorial pages 58 through 60. The object of step one is to triple the surface area of the duck breast. To do that, rinse and pat dry the duck breast and lay it flat on a cutting board lined with waxed paper, skin side



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9



10



11



down. Make one thin horizontal slit from left to right, about $\frac{7}{8}$ ths of the way through the breast. It is very important to leave the slice attached to the breast. Open this first slit like a book, and starting at the crease between the slice and the breast, make another thin horizontal cut $\frac{7}{8}$ ths of the way through the breast. Open the second slice up like a book. It is fine if some of the fat shows through in the center of the breast. Place another sheet of waxed paper over the breast, and carefully pound it with a meat pounder or rolling pin until an even layer is formed. The duck breast should be about $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch thick at the end of this process. Cover the duck with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until needed. Discard the used waxed paper, and tear off a new sheet, place it on the cutting board, and set one of the chicken thighs on the board, skin side up (We found two worked well but use three if they're small.). Cover the thigh with another sheet of waxed paper and pound it flat with a meat pounder or rolling pin to an even thickness. Repeat with the remaining chicken thigh(s) and refrigerate, wrapped in plastic, until needed. Flatten the turkey cutlets using the same method.

On a cutting board, lay the open, flattened duck breast skin side down, spread a few tablespoons of stuffing onto the duck meat, use a spatula to smooth the stuffing entirely over the top of the breast. Lay the flattened chicken thighs on the duck layer. The chicken layer should be the same size or slightly smaller than the duck layer, so trim the chicken if necessary. Spread a few tablespoons of stuffing over the chicken, smoothing it with

a spatula or the back of a spoon. Lastly, lay the turkey cutlets on the chicken layer, use just enough to cover the stuffing, and trim the cutlets if they are too large. Spread 1 thin tablespoon of stuffing over the turkey. There will be stuffing left over, which can be heated through in the oven, about 25 to 30 minutes, along with the turducken. Using both hands (and maybe a partner), roll the turducken jelly-roll style from left to right. Use butcher twine to tie the turducken like a roast in 1-inch sections, so it will keep its shape. Season the turducken with salt, pepper and Cajun seasoning, if desired. Take a moment to tidy up the roll, brushing off any excess stuffing from the outside, and trimming the ends of the twine.

In a cast-iron pan over medium-high heat, warm oil. Add turducken, duck skin side down, and brown on all sides, approximately 3 to 5 minutes. Place cast-iron pan in the oven until turducken reaches 165°, about 55 to 65 minutes. Remove turducken to a cutting board, tent lightly with aluminum foil and let rest for 10 minutes. Do not discard the pan drippings.

Make the gravy: Place the pan containing the turducken drippings on the stove over medium-high heat, and add the butter to the pan. Melt the butter and stir in flour to form a blond roux. Pour in chicken stock, beginning with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, stirring constantly. Add milk, Cajun spice blend and pepper. Cook for a few minutes until the gravy is smooth and thickened, adding more chicken broth for a thinner gravy.

Slice the turducken, serve hot with gravy.

8. Retrieve the duck breast from the refrigerator and place it, long side toward you, on the board. Dollop some stuffing onto the breast, and smooth it out so it covers the whole breast.

9. Lay the chicken thighs on top of the duck and stuffing, and put a smaller spoonful of stuffing on top of them.

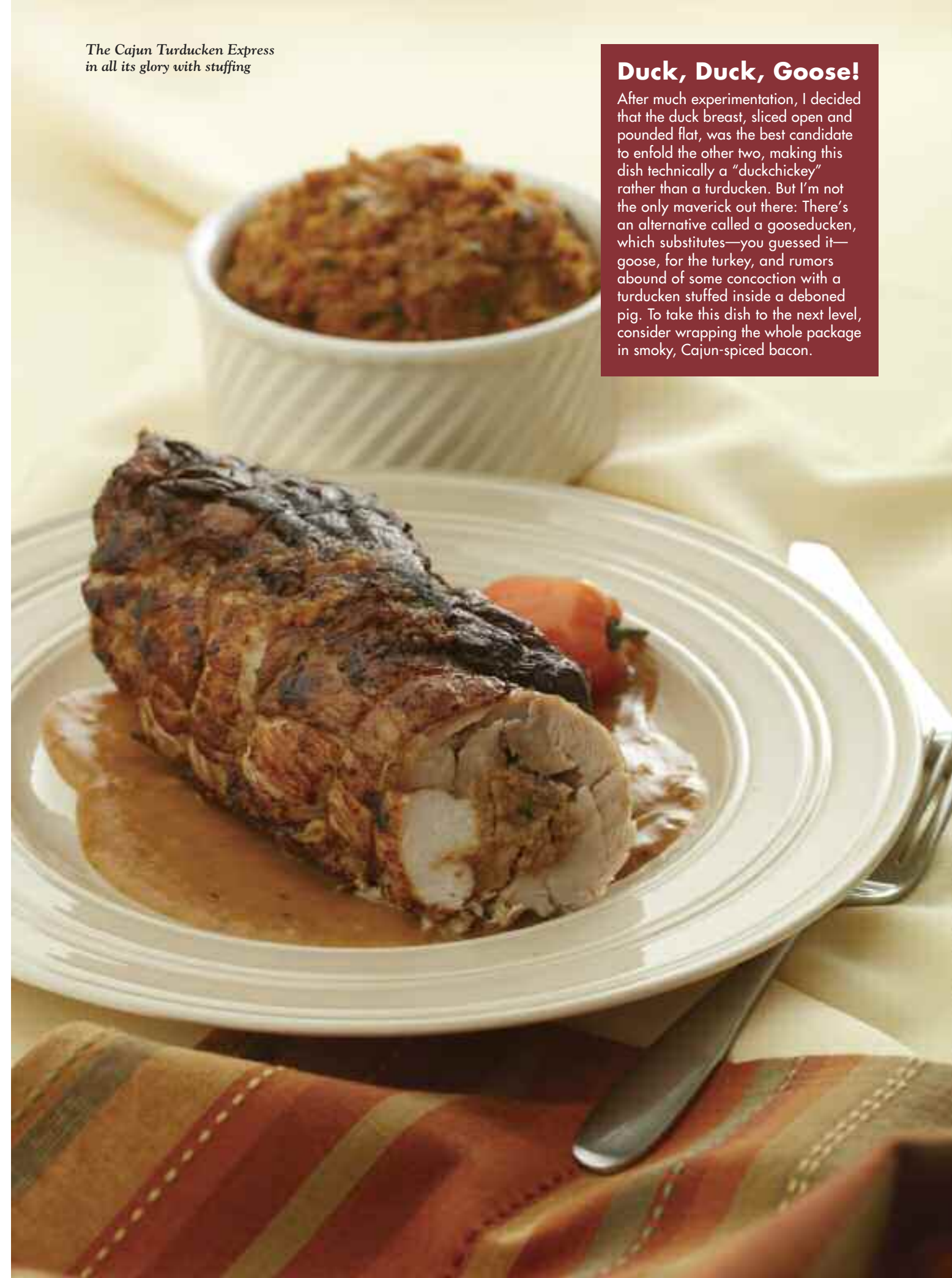
10. Lay the turkey cutlets on top of the chicken and stuffing layer and put a very small amount of stuffing just down the center of the cutlets.

11. Roll the whole thing up firmly but not too tightly, securing the roll with twine at every inch. Clean up any stuffing on the outside of the roll and the turducken is ready for cooking.

*The Cajun Turducken Express
in all its glory with stuffing*

Duck, Duck, Goose!

After much experimentation, I decided that the duck breast, sliced open and pounded flat, was the best candidate to enfold the other two, making this dish technically a “duckchickey” rather than a turducken. But I’m not the only maverick out there: There’s an alternative called a gooseduck, which substitutes—you guessed it—goose, for the turkey, and rumors abound of some concoction with a turducken stuffed inside a deboned pig. To take this dish to the next level, consider wrapping the whole package in smoky, Cajun-spiced bacon.



Sliced Cajun Turkucken Express with Spicy Bourbon-Glazed Sweet Potatoes, plus Dirty Wild Rice and stuffing



Spicy Bourbon-Glazed Sweet Potatoes

Yield: 6 servings • Zest Factor: Medium

- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar
- ⅓ cup dark maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons bourbon or whiskey
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 6 tablespoons butter, melted
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper, or to taste
- pinch salt
- 3 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced into 1-inch-thick slices

Preheat oven to 375°. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together all ingredients except for potatoes until evenly combined. Add sliced potatoes, and mix until well coated with mixture. Pour onto baking pan with raised edges. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, stirring occasionally until potatoes are tender and caramelized.

Dirty Wild Rice

Yield: 6 servings • Zest Factor: Medium

- ¼ cup bacon, finely diced
- ½ cup celery, thinly sliced
- ½ cup onion, small diced
- ½ cup green bell pepper, chopped
- ½ clove garlic, minced
- 1 pickled Tabasco pepper, minced
- ½ cup corn, frozen, thawed
- ½ teaspoon tomato paste
- 1 cup wild rice
- 1¾ cup chicken broth or water
- salt and freshly ground pepper

Heat a heavy, medium sauté pan over medium heat. When hot, add bacon, brown and render fat until crispy. Strain, and remove bacon. Reserve bacon for later use, leaving remainder of fat in pan.

In sauté pan with bacon fat, add celery, onion, bell pepper, garlic, Tabasco pepper and corn. Season with salt and freshly ground pepper. Sauté over medium heat, until soft and tender,

about 5 to 7 minutes.

Mix in rice until coated evenly with vegetable mixture, add water or chicken broth and stir. Raise heat to medium-high until reaching a full boil. Reduce heat to low, cover with lid, and simmer for 25 to 30 minutes until all liquid is absorbed, checking occasionally. Serve topped with reserved bacon.

Creole Ratatouille

Yield: 6 servings • Zest Factor: Medium

- ½ cup olive oil, divided
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 large green bell peppers cut into ¼-inch slices
- 1 pound zucchini, diced into ¼-inch rounds
- 1 cup celery, thinly sliced
- 2 to 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 1 pound eggplant, diced into 1-inch cubes with skin on
- 1 (28-ounce) can whole, peeled plum-shaped tomatoes
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons fresh thyme, minced
- 2 tablespoon flat-leaf parsley, minced, and divided
- 2 tablespoons capers, rinsed
- 1 to 1½ tablespoons hot red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- ½ teaspoon sugar

In a large heavy pot, heat ¼ cup of olive oil with butter over medium heat until hot. Add peppers, zucchini and celery, and sauté until tender, about 4 to 5 minutes. Remove, and reserve in small bowl.

Add remaining olive oil to pot. Add garlic, onion and eggplant, and sauté for about 5 to 7 minutes until soft and tender. Add canned tomatoes, season with salt and freshly ground pepper. Bring to a simmer, and gently break up tomatoes while stirring. Stir in carrots, tomato paste, thyme, 1 tablespoon parsley, capers, hot red pepper

flakes, paprika and sugar. Season liberally with salt and pepper. Simmer on medium heat for 5 minutes. Add the reserved zucchini, celery and peppers. Reduce heat to a low simmer, and cook for 15 minutes until slightly thickened. Check seasoning, adding more salt and pepper if necessary. Serve garnished with remainder of parsley.

Creole Fried Green Beans with Thyme-Chipotle Dip

Yield: 6 to 8 servings • Zest Factor: Mild

For the dip:

- 1 chipotle chile in adobo, minced
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon minced garlic
- salt and freshly ground pepper

For the green beans:

- canola oil for frying, as needed
- 1 pound green beans, washed, stems removed
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons cornmeal
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 cup buttermilk
- ¼ teaspoon paprika

Make the dip: In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together all ingredients thoroughly until well combined. Cover, and refrigerate 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the green beans. In a Dutch oven, heat canola oil over medium-high heat. In a medium bowl, combine flour, garlic powder, cayenne, cornmeal, salt and pepper. Pour buttermilk into a large bowl. Dip green beans into buttermilk, and dredge in flour mixture. Fry immediately in oil, working in small batches. Remove from oil, drain, and reserve on paper-towel-lined dish. When finished frying green beans, dust with paprika, season with salt and pepper. Serve with Thyme-Chipotle dip. **CP**