

Holiday Cooking

New Holiday Classics From California Wine Country

(NAPSA)—The holidays create the expectation of traditional dishes, and the cook may feel challenged to find new ways to present old favorites. Even slight variations can start new traditions and one of California's most fabulous fruits—the fig—easily brings European flair to American family classics.

Pairing the right wines with the meal is easier when old maxims are applied, such as white wines with poultry. Figs with certain white wines are an historic pairing used in entertaining throughout the world, and with these dishes, it's an easy choice to make—Ferrari-Carano's Alexander Valley Chardonnay provides a continuity of flavors that make it a logical wine to drink throughout the meal.

More American cooks are discovering the elegance figs contribute to a presentation, and with the availability of California figs that have been dried, they are simple to include in a broad array of dishes.

This holiday feast, created by Executive Chef Jeffrey Madura of John Ash & Co. Restaurant in Sonoma County, stars Cornish game hens "pickled" in red wine and "wrapped" in prosciutto. Succulent figs macerated in wine vinegar and earthy spices provide a honey-like sweetness that's balanced with the fresh lemon piquancy. Drizzling the hens with the reduction provides a heavenly sweet and sour contrast.

Figs are a perfect counterpart to the strong, rich blue cheese in these savory popovers. And the combination of figs and sweet potatoes in the pudding is so inviting and smooth that it's practically a dessert.

Cornish hens with "pickled" figs and prosciutto, blue cheese



Figs from California wine country bring European flair to American family classics.

and fig popovers, and sweet potato and fig pudding—all stunning, yet deceptively simple. Visit www.californiafigs.com for all of these recipes and more.

Cornish Game Hens with "Pickled" California Figs and Prosciutto

1 recipe "Pickled Figs" and the reserved liquid

8 (1¼ to 1½ pounds each)

Cornish game hens

¼ cup vegetable oil

2 tsp. kosher salt

1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

8 thin slices prosciutto

Place strained, reserved fig liquid in a medium saucepan over medium heat and reduce by half.

Preheat broiler. Depending on oven size, hens can be browned in batches. Arrange Cornish game hens in large roasting pan (or pans), skin side up, brush on all sides with oil, and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place under

broiler until crisp, 3 to 5 minutes. Decrease the heat to 375°F, and continue to cook for 30 minutes. Remove from oven, and carefully, since hens and pan will be hot, place slices of fig along the breast and wrap prosciutto across, tucking under the wings. Continue to bake for an additional 20 to 30 minutes, or until internal temperature reaches 170°F in the breast and 180°F in the thigh. Let rest, loosely covered, for 5 to 10 minutes.

Warm sauce and drizzle over each hen and serve with remaining whole figs on the side.

"Pickled" Figs

2 cups granulated sugar

2½ cups red wine vinegar

2½ cups balsamic vinegar

2 cinnamon sticks (3" each), broken into 3 pieces

12 cardamom pods, crushed

1 whole star anise or 6 pods

12 round, thin slices, peeled, fresh ginger

8 thin slices lemon

12 whole black peppercorns

24 dried figs

In medium, non-reactive pot, combine sugar, vinegars, cinnamon, cardamom, star anise, ginger, lemon and peppercorns. Place over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Add figs, cover, decrease heat to low, and simmer for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and let figs cool in the syrup.

Strain liquid and place in a medium saucepan over medium heat and reduce by half.

Serves 8