

Tea-Smoked Duck Breasts and Guanciale

The Chinese have an affinity for the succulent duck. They crisp it, wok it, glaze it, roast it. They also smoke it. It's surprisingly easy (but it helps to have a range hood in working condition), and the result will surely impress your friends. We've gone one step further and tucked the rosy slices in those addictive steamed buns, accompanied by daikon pickles and a brush of sweet hoisin. Tea-smoked duck breasts and guanciale is pure culinary gold. Sichuan splendor.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns
- 4 8-ounce duck breasts
- ½- to ¾- inch thick slice guanciale (5 to 6 ounces)
- 2 scallions, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 3 slices ginger, smashed
- 2 star anise
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice wine
- ½ cup light brown sugar
- ½ cup uncooked rice
- ½ cup loose black tea leaves (such as Pu Erh or Lapsang Souchong)

Accompaniments

- Steamed Chinese buns
- Hoisin sauce
- Julienned cucumbers
- Julienned scallions
- Pickled daikon

Special Equipment

- mortar and pestle or spice grinder
- resealable plastic bag (or wide flat container with lid)
- wide heavy-duty foil
- wok with lid
- round cake rack
- 12-inch cast iron skillet
- instant read thermometer (optional)

Directions

Toast the Sichuan peppercorns and salt together in a small, dry, heavy skillet over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and the salt begins to color slightly, about 5 minutes. Set aside to cool. Grind to a powder in a mortar and pestle or spice grinder. Set aside. Score

the duck breast skins in a crosshatch pattern, being careful not to cut through the fat to the meat. Rub the duck all over with the pepper-salt mixture. Combine the soy, rice wine, scallions, ginger, star, anise and cinnamon stick in a resealable plastic bag or wide flat container. Add the duck breasts and guanciale, cover and let marinate in the refrigerator for 8 hours or overnight. (If using a flat container, turn the meat over at least once during the marinating period.)

Bring the duck to room temperature (about 30 minutes) prior to smoking. Scrape the aromatics off of the duck and guanciale. Reserve the star anise and cinnamon stick (or use fresh ones). Turn your exhaust fan on high. Line a wok with two long sheets of heavy-duty wide foil (cross them in the center like a “t”) that overlap the edges of the wok by a couple of inches. Combine the sugar, rice, tea leaves and reserved star anise and cinnamon stick on top of the foil in the bottom of the wok and spread into a thick layer. Place a round cake rack about an inch above the smoking mixture — you can use balls of aluminum foil to raise the rack if necessary. Heat the wok, uncovered, over high heat until the smoking ingredients start to let off smoke, 3 to 4 minutes. Place the duck, skin side up, and guanciale in a single layer on the rack, then cover the wok and crimp up the foil around the lid so it’s tightly sealed (some smoke may still escape). Reduce heat to medium and let smoke for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, but leave covered and undisturbed for another 12 minutes.

Carefully uncrimp the foil and uncover the wok — it will be smoky. Transfer cured meat to a cutting board and tent with foil. Place the breasts and guanciale in a large (12-inch) heavy skillet. Sear over medium-high heat until the skin is golden and crisp and some fat has rendered out, 5 to 10 minutes or to desired doneness. Let rest 5 to 10 minutes before slicing on a bias.

Brush the inside of the steamed buns with a little hoisin, then fill with duck, guanciale, cucumber, scallions and pickled daikon while still hot.

total time: 50 minutes + marinating

active prep: 10 minutes

serves: 4

difficulty: *medium*