

by Rachel Owen

A Duck Hunter's Thoughts on Preparing the Bounty



Editor's Note: Wade Truong is a self-taught chef from Virginia, avid fisherman and late onset hunter; his partner Rachel Owen, author of this article, considers herself a Virginia native and says that she didn't grow up outdoors, the outdoors grew on her. Both hunt, fish, and forage together with their black Lab *Tater Tot*. Wade and Rachel love cooking for friends, and exploring new ingredients and flavors. They do it because it gives them a deep sense of pride, rootedness, and nourishment to be connected to their food. They do it because they want to be active participants in the natural world, honor their hard-won experiences in the field and enjoy the abundance of the untamed table.

New York Times correspondent Kim Severson describes the hunting and cooking of the two millennials in *A New Breed of Hunters Focuses on the Cooking* in *The New York Times Cooking Section* on

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February 5 2019. Make sure you read this article. Severson also penned DIY Duck Pastrami in Garden & Gun Magazine and Food-focused millennials are keeping American hunting alive in the Independent (UK).

It's winter, and we're on the tail end of a cold snap that has brought incredible duck hunting but also bone-deep fatigue.

We've spent the past few days walking, crawling, and falling through the frozen marsh, hauling decoys and hunting birds that have arrived in such numbers that the sky at first light looks clouded with wisps of smoke. We broke ice in the creek, off the decoys, from the dog. We shot ducks. A lot of them.



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We set up and watched as the wind whipped the creek, frothing water over the ice until we were almost frozen in, our decoys motionless in the slush, until we packed them all in and moved up creek to another spot. We set up again. We shot mallard and gadwall and black duck and bufflehead and a goose for good measure.

We watched birds hang over the spread, watched as flocks came in like we had them on a string. We

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said how this feels like Arkansas, except in Arkansas you don't worry about the cold as much, probably.

We pushed ourselves for 3 days, amazed & exhausted in equal measure, and when we got home, we made *bulgogi*.

Bulgogi, for the uninitiated, is a Korean dish traditionally made from marinated prime cuts of beef, grilled quickly and often served with rice, all kinds of ferments, pickles, and side dishes (called *banchan*).

This recipe couldn't be faster, easier, or more satisfying. Use a couple shot-up, skinned, or otherwise not-so-pretty duck or goose breasts for this dish- you're not roasting or grilling whole, so aesthetics don't matter so much. It will almost take you longer to make the rice for this meal than to do the rest.

Many recipes will call for an overnight marinade, but we couldn't wait, so instead we sliced our duck breast thin, massaged it with the marinade, and vacuum-sealed it to pull the flavors into the meat.

Gochujang is a Korean fermented chili paste that is delicious in just about everything. If your local grocer doesn't stock it, it's worth seeking out online for its perfect balance of sweet, spicy, and umami depth.

Duck Breast Bulgogi

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Prep time: 15 minutes active, 1-hour total - Serves: 2-4

Ingredients: 2 duck breasts, sliced thin; 4 cloves garlic, minced; 1 thumb-sized piece of ginger, peeled and diced; 2 tbsp sesame oil; 1 tsp hot chili flake; 1/3 cup soy sauce; 1/4 cup neutral oil, such as canola; 1 tsp white sesame seed; 1 tsp black sesame seed; 2 tbsp sugar; 2 tbsp gochujang.

Method: Trim duck breasts if necessary. Slice thin, against the grain, into pieces about 1/8 of an inch thick. In a bowl, mix together all other ingredients. Place sliced duck into marinade and massage it in, then pour everything into a vacuum bag and seal. Allow it to marinate for 30-45 minutes. This is going to pull the marinade into the meat more quickly. If you don't have a vacuum sealer, or have a little more patience, you can let it sit in the fridge for 4-6 hours instead. When you're ready to cook, heat a large pan over medium high heat. Add a few tablespoons of oil and, working in batches, stir fry the duck. Make sure that all the marinade makes it into the pan and cooks down into a sticky glaze. Ideally, you

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want the marinade to reduce and caramelize without totally overcooking the duck. The meat will be medium-well to well done, but the marinade keeps everything tender and flavorful. Serve over rice and garnish with sesame seed and hot peppers.

Editor's Afterthought: True to style, Wade and Rachel don't only prepare the choice parts of their ducks - every morsel is used: check out their recipes for duck gizzards and hearts, and the long, slow and low treatment of duck wings for a confit, plus their method of rendering duck fat.

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