

ITALY BY INGREDIENT

ARTISANAL FOODS / MODERN RECIPES



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Mushrooms appear again in this recipe, paired with another ingredient we all need to embrace out of the Valhalla of rarefied, challenging ingredients to which it's been unjustly relegated: quail. The flavor of quail is distinct but not gamy, and the meat is dense but not stringy. Quail cook quickly, and it takes more skill to mess them up than it does to nail them. And if the price was ever a factor, look again: quail can be sourced for as little as \$2.50 a bird, less than the average for one pound (450 grams) of organic chicken breast. If you can plan ahead, brining will give the quail a velvetier mouthfeel and reduce the already short cooking time, but you can skip the step and still have on-point results. One more tip: if you are looking to impress, shave some black truffle over the quail right before bringing them to the table.

Quaglie ripiene di farro e porcini con sugo di finferli e castagne

Farro and porcini-filled quail with chanterelles and chestnut sauce

To brine the quail, dissolve the kosher salt in 1 cup / 240 ml hot water and then mix it with 1 quart / 1 L cold water. Place the quail in a 2-quart / 2-l container and pour the salted water over them. Cover the container and leave the quail to brine in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 hours. Drain the tiny birds and dry them well inside and out. Lay them on a sheet pan and refrigerate uncovered for 1 hour.

While the quail are brining, make the filling. Fill a 2-cup / 475-ml measuring pitcher with hot water and drown the porcini in it. Leave them soaking so that they plump and soften.

Fill a saucepan with 1 quart / 1 L water and set it over heat to come to a boil. Drop the farro into a colander, pick it over, and rinse it. When the water is boiling, season it with 1 teaspoon salt and stir in the farro. Lower the heat until the water is at a gentle boil and cook the farro for about 20 minutes, until quite tender but with structure. Drain it as soon as it is ready so it doesn't overcook.

FOR 4 PEOPLE

To brine the quail

¼ cup / 35 g kosher salt

4 quail

For the filling

1 ounce / 30 g dried porcini

Salt and pepper

½ cup / 85 g semi-pearled farro

1 shallot

1 lemon

¼ cup / 5 g loosely packed parsley leaves

continued

Quaglie ripiene di farro e porcini con sugo di finferli e castagne, continued

2 tablespoons
extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup / 120 ml
dry white wine

Nutmeg, for grating

For the sauce and quail

1 shallot

6 thyme sprigs

1 pound / 450 g
chanterelle mushrooms

1 cup / 115 g cooked and
peeled chestnuts

Salt and pepper

3 tablespoons
extra-virgin olive oil

1 cup / 240 ml
brandy or Cognac

1 cup / 240 ml
chicken stock

Meanwhile, grate the shallot on the second smallest holes of a box grater. Grate 2 teaspoons zest from the lemon. Finely chop the parsley.

Drain the porcini, collecting their soaking liquid in a bowl. Rinse and chop the mushrooms. Filter the soaking liquid through a tight-mesh strainer to remove any grit. Reserve.

Pour the olive oil into a frying pan and set it over low heat. When you can detect its fragrance without bending over the stove, add the shallot and 1 teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 to 4 minutes, until the shallot is quite fragrant and hazy and beginning to turn a little golden. Add the porcini, parsley, and lemon zest, raise the heat to medium, and stir for 2 minutes.

Douse the mushrooms with the wine, and when the acidic fumes of the wine's alcohol have been replaced by the sweet caress of its sugar, add 1 cup / 240 ml of the porcini soaking liquid. Turn the heat down to medium-low and cook the porcini, stirring occasionally, for another 8 to 10 minutes, until the liquid has evaporated. Transfer them to a bowl.

Combine the porcini and farro in a bowl and grate nutmeg over them just until you catch a whiff of it without bending over the bowl. Stir the filling well and taste it, then adjust salt and pepper to suit your palate. Spoon the filling into each quail.

Cut a 2-foot / 60-cm length of butcher's twine. Cross the quail's feet and secure them with a knot, leaving all but 2 inches / 5 cm of the twine on one end of the knot. Run the long end of the twine up the quail's tummy to its chest. Pin the string with a finger to the quail's chest and make a 90-degree bend. Run the twine all around the chest, tightening the wings to the body, then loop it under the 90-degree bend. Pull the twine up toward the quail's neck, then down all around the back and the bum to rejoin the short end hanging from the feet. Tie the two ends together and snip off excess twine. Repeat until all 4 quail are trussed into neat packages.

Leave the quail on the counter to come to room temperature while you prepare the ingredients for the sauce.

Slice the shallot paper-thin. Rub the thyme sprigs between your palms to release their fragrance. Free the chanterelles of dirt and other debris with a brush, trim the very bottom of the stems, and then slice them. Roughly chop the chestnuts.

Dry any condensation off the quail if necessary and season them lightly with salt and pepper.

Place a frying pan—preferably a well-seasoned cast-iron one—on medium heat and hover your hand over it until it becomes uncomfortable. Add 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and swirl the pan to distribute it uniformly. Add the quail breast side down and listen for the sizzle that preludes good caramelization. It will take 3 to 4 minutes until the birds' bosoms are browned enough that you can lift them off the pan without having to pull. Turn the quail over and brown their backs and lastly their sides. Transfer them to a plate.

Add the remaining olive oil, the sliced shallot, and the thyme sprigs to the pan and swirl quickly over medium-low heat for 3 to 4 minutes to soften the shallot. Toss in the chanterelles and add 1 teaspoon salt. When the mushrooms start to wilt, add the chestnuts and stir to coat everything in the deliciousness. Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring often. The mushrooms will wilt completely and release some moisture.

Return the quail to the pan and turn the heat to its highest setting. Douse the birds with the brandy. The pan will likely catch fire. Don't fret; just step back and wait for the fire to die down as the alcohol burns off.

Step back up to the stove to pour ½ cup / 120 ml each of the porcini soaking liquid and the stock into the pan. Lower the heat to medium and continue cooking for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. The quail will be done by now. Move them to a warm serving platter and cover them with aluminum foil to trap the heat.

Tighten the sauce for another 5 to 8 minutes, until the liquid is slightly viscous and a deep, glossy tobacco brown. Add more stock if you would like a runnier sauce. Sample a spoonful and adjust salt and pepper to suit your palate.

Snip and remove the twine from each bird, then spoon the sauce over the quail. Serve right away.



