

balsamic chicken with porcini mushrooms and sun-dried cherries

• Serves: 8 • Preparation: 30 minutes • Cooking: 45 minutes

This elegant braised chicken is the perfect make-ahead meal. Porcini mushrooms, balsamic vinegar, and dried cherries are a divine combination. Serve with any mashed vegetable for a great winter meal.

approx. ½ cup (2 oz) dried porcini mushrooms
8 large boneless, skinless chicken thighs
4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon each of salt and pepper
½ lb (8 oz) pancetta bacon, diced, or smoked bacon, chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 onions, finely chopped
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
20 dried cherries, roughly chopped
½ cup (4 fl oz) balsamic vinegar
2½ cups (18 fl oz) red wine
½ cup (8 fl oz) chicken stock
1 teaspoon arrowroot or cornstarch, dissolved in 2 teaspoons cold water
a handful of flat-leaf (Italian) parsley, chopped

1 Pour 1 cup (8 fl oz) boiling water over the porcini mushrooms. Leave for half an hour, then carefully strain through a fine sieve, reserving the liquid. Roughly chop the porcini.

2 Dredge the chicken in seasoned flour and set aside. Fry the pancetta in a little olive oil until it is very crisp. Remove from the pan and set aside. Brown the chicken pieces on both sides in the bacon fat. Remove from the pan, then sauté the onions and garlic until soft.

3 Stir the porcini mushrooms into the onion along with the cherries, vinegar, red wine, stock, and reserved porcini liquid. Bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes.

4 Add the chicken and pancetta, bring to a simmer, and cook for 30 minutes. Add the arrowroot or cornstarch mixture and simmer for another 5 minutes. Check the seasoning and adjust with additional salt or balsamic vinegar.

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 Make this dish the night before to save time and improve the intensity of flavors.

 Serve with any type of white mashed vegetable or vegetable purée. Celeriac, potatoes, or Jerusalem artichokes are all yummy possibilities. Start with Spiedini of Scallops or Grilled Red Peppers (see pages 87 and 106).

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 Don't use poor-quality balsamic vinegar – splurge on superior brands like Fini, if available.