

CHICKEN FRICASSEE

Serves 8

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from several recipes.

Chicken Fricassee has a long history, first appearing in books in 15th century Europe. I think of this comfort food as country cooking, the cuisine of working-class folks who lived on economy. Originally made with the simplest of ingredients, the dish has enjoyed some enhancements over time to make it appropriate for a Sunday family dinner.



Ingredients:

2 tablespoons pure (cooking) olive oil for frying
2 tablespoons butter
3 ounces (85g) pancetta, divided
1 chicken, at least 3 pounds (1.4kg), cut into 8 pieces
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 large onion, coarsely chopped
2 to 4 shallots, sliced
2 to 4 cloves garlic, minced or crushed with a garlic press
3 sprigs fresh thyme
4 small Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (2cm) pieces (or 1 lb. (454g) small potatoes)
2 stalks celery, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (2cm) pieces
2 large carrots, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (2cm) pieces
12 small mushrooms, cleaned and trimmed
2 cups (475ml) low-sodium chicken broth, preferably homemade chicken stock
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60ml) vermouth or dry white wine (dry red wine is okay in this dish)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Herbes de Provence

Optional:

1 to 2 ounces prosciutto; diced
1 tablespoon lightly browned flour (see Note below)

Directions:

Heat the oil and butter over a medium-high flame in a large skillet. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Brown the pieces and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the pancetta until well browned, about 10 to 15 minutes. The pancetta might need to be removed early to prevent burning. Transfer the chicken to a platter and wrap with foil. The pancetta can be set aside in a small bowl.

Chop the vegetables. Remove most of the oil from the pan and discard. Sauté the chopped onion, shallots, garlic, and thyme sprigs about 3 minutes, stirring often. Add the potatoes, celery, carrots, and browned pancetta. Cover the pan and cook over medium-low heat 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the mushrooms to the pan, season with salt and pepper, and return the browned chicken to the pan. Cover and cook until the largest chicken pieces, typically the breast meat, reaches an internal temperature of 165°F to 170°F (74°C to 77°C).

Transfer all the cooked ingredients to a larger casserole dish, arranging for presentation, and cover with foil. Keep warm, such as in a low (200°F/93°C) oven.

Pour the chicken stock into the skillet, keeping any brown bits (the fond) that are in the pan, and add the vermouth, remaining pancetta, Herbes de Provence, and optional prosciutto. Bring to a boil and reduce by about half. Then strain and discard the solids.

The reduced stock can be thickened with cooked flour mixed into about half a cup of cooled stock and then stirring the mixture into the pan of concentrated stock. Bring to a boil to thicken. Pour the finished stock over the chicken and vegetables in the casserole. Serve immediately.

The step-by-step photos were removed. See the video for the preparation.

Note

I keep cooked flour in my cupboard. It is useful for a quick roux or to thicken liquid without adding a raw flour flavor. Put some flour in a skillet (I use stainless steel so that I won't need to worry about a nonstick coating) and whisk the flour over high heat until it starts to change color. Remove from the heat and keep whisking (the pan is still very hot and can scorch the flour) until the pan has cooled enough to avoid scorching. Store in a jar in the cupboard. For a darker flour (good for beef gravy, etc.), cook the flour a little longer.