

Waterfowl Expiration Date

Scott Leysath, The Sporting Chef

Before this year's season gets underway, take a peek into the dark recesses of your freezer. Move some stuff around until you get to those bodies and body parts from duck seasons past. With any luck, the ducks and geese won't be more than one season old. Uh oh, there's a goose from the Reagan years.

If you have game, or any meat, that has been in the freezer for a few years, it's time to take stock of how you control your frozen inventory. The USDA recommends eating frozen game meats within 8 – 12 months of freezing. It's not that you'll get sick and die from eating a three-year old widgeon. Your ducks will be *safe* to eat ten years from now, they just won't taste good. After about a year, the quality of the meat will deteriorate. By the time the next season opens and you start cooking the "new" birds, the old birds are just sitting in the back of the freezer, slowly wasting away.

I know. You've eaten ducks that were three or four years old and they tasted great. Me too, but I've also thawed out old birds that were freezer burned, discolored and had an unpleasant aroma. If you want to extend the life of your frozen fowl, purchase a good quality vacuum packaging unit. The cheap ones will disappoint you if you use it often. I've found that they don't hold up to a successful duck season. You can also freeze your birds in water, zipper-lock bags with water or anything else that prevents exposure of the meat to oxygen. Just make sure to label and date each package so that you can use the oldest birds first. Think of the date on the package as your expiration date. Use within one year of the date.

If you do discover that one of your thawed ducks don't look or smell good, don't soak them in buttermilk or marinade. When in doubt, throw it out and make a promise to yourself to cook future ducks when they're at their best. Fresher is always better. Make the most of your waterfowl and eat them before the next season begins.

This recipe will help you reduce last year's waterfowl inventory. Braising is a cooking method by which meat first browned and then covered and slowly cooked at low temperature until the meat is fall-off-the-bone tender. Braising can be done on the stove top or in the oven. The important part is to make sure that the lid fits tightly so that the liquid doesn't escape.

Duck Braised in Red Wine

Pair this dish with a steamy mound of garlic mashed potatoes.

4 servings

- 4 ducks, skin on or off, quartered
- salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, quartered

- 6 whole garlic cloves
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 3 cups dry red wine
- 1/2 cup beef broth
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and quartered

Season duck pieces liberally with salt and pepper. Dust each piece with flour. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and brown duck pieces evenly. Place browned duck in an oven-proof, well-greased pot or dish with a tight-fitting lid. Place remaining ingredients in pot, cover and place in a preheated 325 degree oven. After 2 hours, add potatoes and cook for another hour or until meat is very tender and pulls away from the bone with minimal effort. Once tender, arrange duck and potatoes on plates and spoon sauce over.

Catch Scott's TV show, HuntFishCook, on Comcast Sports Southeast (CSS), The Sportsman Channel, Dish Network and Direct TV. Check out his website – HuntFishCook.com – for local airtimes.