Main dishes / France

Slow-Rendered Crispy Duck Legs

Duck legs cured overnight with thyme and salt, then rendered low and slow until the fat is completely liquid beneath a skin that shatters on first bite — the Gascon tradition of patience turning one of the richest cuts in the kitchen into something impossibly light and crisp.

Time 600 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 1200 g Duck legs, whole (leg and thigh)
- ☐ 15 g Fresh thyme sprigs
- ☐ 4 g Black pepper, coarsely cracked
- ☐ 5 g Fleur de sel
- ☐ 20 g Flaky sea salt
- ☐ 20 g Garlic cloves, halved
- ☐ 3 whole Bay leaves
- ☐ 5 g Fresh thyme leaves, stripped

Let's make it.

01 Score the duck skin in a diagonal crosshatch with a sharp knife, cutting through the skin and fat but not the meat beneath. Rub the legs all over with flaky salt, cracked pepper, and thyme, pressing the herbs into the score marks. Tuck garlic halves and bay leaves under and around the legs in a dish. Refrigerate uncovered overnight (8–12 hours). The salt draws moisture from the skin and seasons the meat throughout.

02 Place duck legs skin-side down in a cold, dry, oven-proof skillet or roasting pan. Do not preheat — starting cold prevents the skin from buckling. Place in a cold oven and turn to 130 C (260 F). Cook for 3–4 hours, skin-side down the entire time. The duck fat will render out gradually; the legs will sit in an increasing pool of their own golden fat. Occasionally tilt the pan and spoon off excess fat.

03 Pour off most of the rendered fat into a jar to save. Increase oven to 220 C (425 F) or, for maximum control, transfer legs to a fresh skillet and crisp skin-side down on the stovetop over medium-high heat for 5–8 minutes. Watch attentively — the goal is a shattering, golden-mahogany skin, not burnt. Flip for a final 2 minutes on the meat side.

04 Rest the duck legs for 3 minutes — just enough for carryover cooking to complete, not long enough for the skin to steam and soften. Sprinkle with fleur de sel and fresh thyme leaves. Serve skin-side up, immediately, with lentils du Puy, sautéed wild mushrooms, or a bitter green salad dressed with the rendered duck fat.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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