Main dishes / China

Peking Duck

The pinnacle of Chinese roast cookery — a whole duck air-dried over 24 hours, lacquered with maltose and soy until the skin shatters at a touch, the fat rendered completely away beneath a burnished mahogany shell.

Time 1800 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- [ ] 2300 g Whole Pekin duck (2.2–2.5 kg), cleaned
- [ ] 60 g Maltose syrup
- [ ] 30 ml Shaoxing rice wine
- [ ] 30 ml Light soy sauce
- [ ] 2000 ml Boiling water (for blanching)
- [ ] 5 g Five-spice powder
- [ ] 10 g Fine salt
- [ ] 20 g Fresh ginger, sliced
- [ ] 30 g Spring onion, cut into lengths

Let's make it.

01 Mix five-spice and salt. Remove the neck and giblets. Dry the duck cavity thoroughly with paper towels. Rub the five-spice-salt mixture inside the cavity. Stuff the cavity with ginger and spring onion. Truss the opening with a skewer. Using a bicycle pump or air compressor nozzle inserted under the skin at the neck opening, inflate the skin away from the breast — this separates subcutaneous fat from flesh, the key to shatteringly crisp skin.

02 Hold the duck over a large pot or wok by its trussed neck. Ladle boiling water slowly and evenly over the entire skin surface for 2–3 minutes — the skin will tighten and turn opaque white. This opens the pores and tightens the protein matrix, allowing better lacquer adhesion and a crisper final skin.

03 Warm the maltose in a small pan over very low heat until it just flows. Stir in the Shaoxing wine and soy sauce to make a lacquer. Brush a thin, even coat over the entire duck skin. Hang the duck in a cool, airy spot (or in front of a fan) and repeat the lacquering every 4 hours for a total of 3–4 coats over 24 hours. The skin must be fully dry between coats. This is non-negotiable — moisture trapped under the lacquer steams the skin during roasting instead of crisping it.

04 Preheat oven to 220 C (430 F). Place the duck breast-side down on a wire rack set over a deep tray with 2 cm of water beneath (to catch dripping fat and prevent smoking). Roast 25 minutes. Flip to breast-side up, increase to 240 C (465 F), and roast a further 20–25 minutes until the skin is shatteringly crisp and deeply lacquered.

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