

Glazed Cornish Game Hens

These roasted and glossy glazed game hens will become a staple in your poultry repertoire. Cornish game hens, once a specialty item, are easily available in the freezer section of a supermarket or in a butcher shop. They are a small plump chicken, a cross between the Cornish and Rock chicken, and are quite meaty for their size. They average anywhere from 1 1/2- to 2 1/2-pounds per bird. While usually I portion one bird per person, as part of a buffet, one-half hen is plenty. They are fantastic and I have made them many times for large parties where the guests can sit down, use a knife and fork, and gnaw on the leg if they are so inclined. Don't worry about the boozy glaze; the alcohol evaporates as it roasts and you are left with a sweet, glossy-crisp skin. They are a nice menu choice for a Thanksgiving buffet in lieu of turkey, or for a late summer outdoor picnic. I like to garnish with large purple grapes; they taste good with the meat.

Serves 12

Preparation Timeline: Roast the day it is being served

Serving Equipment: Large platter with serving fork

Onsite/Reheat: Optional

Onsite/Refrigeration: Yes

Serving Temperature: Warm or cool room temperature

6 Cornish game hens (1 1/2- to 1 3/4-pounds each)

3 cups orange marmalade, quince jelly, or apricot preserves

1/3 cup orange liqueur, like Grand Marnier, or Scotch whiskey

1 pound Ribier grapes, for garnish

Preheat the oven to 400°. Rinse game hens inside and out with cold water and pat dry. To split each game hen, place the bird, breast side up, on a cutting surface. Holding the bird with one hand and using kitchen shears with the other, cut the breast in half, starting from the neck end. Turn the bird over and cut down both sides of the back bone, as close as possible, leaving two halves; discard the backbone, or freeze and use for soup stock. Season the hen halves inside and out with the salt and pepper. Place side-by-side in a roasting pan.

Combine the preserves and liqueur in a small saucepan or microwave proof bowl and mix with a fork. Heat gently just to melt. Pour half the glaze over the hens using a large spoon or brush to coat the entire skin surface.

Reduce the oven temperature to 350° and roast for 30 minutes. Pour the remaining half the glaze over the hens and return to the oven and roast for 1 more hour (1 1/2 hours total). Let cool 30 minutes and then place on a nice platter and cover tightly. Carry to the party warm or else refrigerate until transporting.

Transportation Notes: No special precautions as long as tightly covered. If transporting raw, be sure to place in a cooler and refrigerate or bake immediately upon arriving. Carry glaze in a small covered container.

Onsite/Preparation: To fully cook onsite, preheat the oven to 400°. Reduce the oven temperature to 350° and roast for 30 minutes. Pour the remaining half the glaze over the hens and return to the oven and roast for 1 more hour (1 1/2 hours total). Serve immediately while warm. Garnish with some nice whole grape clusters.