

Pasta With Pheasant Sauce

1 pheasant cut into 6 pieces	2 cloves
1 cup dried porcini mushrooms	3 parsley sprigs, plus some chopped
2 cups water	2 bay leaves
¾ pound sliced fresh mushrooms	2 thyme sprigs
½ cup chopped pancetta or bacon	2 rosemary sprigs
1 cup white wine	1 onion, chopped
¼ cognac or brandy	½ cup Parmigiano, plus more for serving
3 cups chicken stock	¼ cup olive oil
¼ cup flour	Salt and pepper

Soak the dried porcini in the 2 cups of hot water for ½ hour. Drain them, reserving the liquid. Coarsely chop the porcini. Strain the liquid through a coffee filter or a damp paper towel. Set the chopped porcini and the liquid aside.

Dry the pheasant pieces with paper towels. Heat the olive oil in a large enameled casserole or Dutch oven. Brown the pheasant, turning frequently for about 10 minutes until golden. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Remove the pheasant, and set aside.

Lightly brown the pancetta in the same oil and casserole. Remove with a slotted spoon, and set aside.

Cook the fresh mushrooms. Remove and set aside. Then lightly sauté the chopped porcini, and set aside.

Remove all but 2 tablespoons of fat from the casserole. Add the onion to the casserole, sprinkle with salt and pepper and cook until golden. When nearly done, add the carrot, cut into 4 pieces, and brown briefly.

Add the ¼ cup of flour, cooking until thoroughly combined and beginning to brown. Add the cognac and the wine, and cook until nearly evaporated. Add 1 cup of the porcini liquid and 3 cups of chicken stock. Bring to a boil.

Tie 3 parsley sprigs, the bay leaves, thyme, rosemary, and cloves in cheesecloth and add to the boiling liquid. Alternatively, you can tie the herbs with kitchen string and put the cloves directly into the liquid.

Add the porcini, the pancetta, and the 6 pieces of pheasant to the liquid. Partially cover. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for about 1½ to 2 hours or until the pheasant is very tender and nearly falling off the bone.

Remove the pheasant from the casserole, and allow to cool until you can easily handle it.

If you placed the cloves directly in the sauce, remove them, as well as the herb bouquet. Also remove and discard the 4 carrot pieces. The best way to remove the fat from the sauce is to place it in the refrigerator until the fat rises to the top. Skim strips of paper towels across the liquid, removing as much fat as possible.

Remove the pheasant meat from the bones and coarsely shred it. Discard the skin. Be careful to remove all the small bones, especially those in the legs.

Bring the degreased sauce to a simmer and taste for seasoning. Add the shredded pheasant meat and the fresh mushrooms to the sauce, and simmer until all the ingredients until well combined. If the sauce is too thick, thin it out with more of the porcini liquid and/or more chicken stock.

Serve over buckwheat fettuccine, regular egg fettuccine, spaghetti alla chitarra, or any other fresh or dried pasta of your choice.

Save a little of the pasta water in case the dish is too dry. Drain the pasta, return to the pot over low heat, and add half the pheasant and sauce. Remove from the heat and add the ½ cup of Parmigiano. If too dry, add a little of the pasta water. Serve on a large platter or individual serving plates. Spoon the remaining pheasant and sauce over the pasta. Sprinkle with chopped parsley.

Serve with extra Parmigiano.

Any leftover sauce reheats very nicely.