


# Fricasseed Chicken with Dried Porcini Mushrooms and Marsala Wine

POLLO IN PADELLA CON FUNGHI SECCHI E MARSALA

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1 ounce imported dried porcini (*Boletus edulis*) mushrooms OR if in packets, a ¾-ounce packet

A 3½-pound chicken, cut into 8 pieces

Flour for coating the chicken, about ½ cup

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 tablespoon butter

Salt

Black pepper ground fresh

3 tablespoons chopped onion

⅓ cup dry Marsala wine; see headnote

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For 4 persons

There are two ingredients at work in this dish, the dried porcini mushrooms and the Marsala wine, that invest the chicken with complex flavors and aromas of exceptional depth and earthiness.

In dried porcini we have not just a conveniently packaged alternative to the fresh mushroom, but an inimitable ingredient with its own separate repertory of applications. You are no longer using it as a mushroom, but as the aromatic forest essence of that mushroom. The difference between fresh and dried porcini may be compared to the difference between a bouquet of fresh flowers and the potent concentrate of their fragrance in a vial of perfume.

Marsala too is a product of a special process through which certain properties of the wine are concentrated and altered by aging and blending. Vanilla, spice, smoke, and caramel are some of the scents it can manifest. There are many classifications for Marsala, depending on the specific production method that was used. For all cooking purposes, look for the word *secco*, which means dry, although it is still slightly sweet. It will be even better if you find the additional qualifying words *superiore* and *ambra*.

1. Soak the mushrooms in 2 cups barely warm water for at least 30 minutes. Lift out the mushrooms by hand, squeezing as much water as possible from them, letting it flow back into the container where they soaked. Rinse the reconstituted mushrooms in several changes of fresh water. With the tip of a small paring knife scrape clean any place where soil appears to be still embedded. Pat dry with paper towels and chop them very fine. The water in which the mushrooms soaked is richly infused with porcini flavor. To clear it of the soil that has become deposited in it, filter it through a strainer lined with single-ply paper toweling, collecting it in a bowl or a pouring cup. Set aside.

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2. Wash the chicken pieces thoroughly, and pat them as dry as you can with paper or cloth towels. Spread the flour on a plate and turn the chicken in it.

3. Choose a skillet or sauté pan that can accommodate all the chicken pieces in a single layer without overlapping, put in the oil and butter, and turn on the heat to medium high. When the butter foam begins to subside, slip in the chicken. When all the pieces have become well browned on one side, add salt, black pepper, and the chopped onion, and turn the pieces over.

4. When the chicken has become browned all over and the onion has become colored a rich gold, add the Marsala wine. Let it bubble briskly for just a few seconds, add the chopped *porcini* mushrooms, turn the ingredients over with a wooden spoon, then cover the pan and turn the heat down to medium low.

5. Cook the chicken at a slow but regular simmer, replenishing the cooking juices when they begin to dry out with 2 or 3 tablespoons of the filtered water from the mushroom soak. Turn the chicken pieces over every once in a while and continue cooking until they feel very tender when prodded with a fork and the meat looks as though it would easily fall off the bone, about 50 minutes to 1 hour. The cooking juices should have condensed into a small amount of creamy sauce. If there is too much fat floating free, tip the pan and spoon it off. Transfer the entire contents of the pan to a warm platter and serve at once.

**AHEAD-OF-TIME NOTE:** This is a dish you can cook all the way through, but without spooning off any fat, several hours or even a day in advance. When making it ready to serve, warm the chicken in a covered skillet over slow heat, adding a little water if it seems necessary. Spoon off any free excess fat from the pan when the chicken is hot, just before serving.