

Given the bacon & seasoning the chicken, no additional salt is needed, but taste to see towards the end

ussy. Instead, I opted for the just as authentic (but simpler) roux method, adding flour with the vegetables while they browned in butter. After reducing the sauce for a few minutes, I finally had the thick, glossy texture I was after.

As a final test, I pitted my streamlined coq au vin—now pared down to a truly manageable 30 minutes—against the 2½-hour project I had started with. Most tasters marveled at how close I'd come to matching the flavor of the original in 40 percent less time, but my pickier colleagues found this quicker version too lean and somewhat lacking in deep wine flavor. The solution was simple enough. I reserved 1 tablespoon of uncooked wine to stir in at the end and finished the sauce with 2 tablespoons of cold butter.

Rich, bacony, and brimming with red wine flavor, this simplified coq au vin had finally escaped its haute-cuisine trappings to move closer—at least in spirit—to its original, humble roots. No past-its-prime rooster required.

**MODERN COQ AU VIN
(CHICKEN IN RED WINE SAUCE)**

SERVES 4 TO 6

A medium-bodied, fruity red wine such as Pinot Noir or Rhône Valley Grenache is best for this recipe. Avoid bold, heavily oaked red wine varieties like Cabernet and light-bodied wines like Beaujolais. To use fresh pearl onions, trim the root and stem end of each onion and discard. Boil for 1 minute, shock in ice water, then peel a thin strip from root to stem. Remove any remaining outer skin (it's like peeling off a jacket). If neither frozen nor fresh pearl onions are available, substitute one large onion cut into ½-inch pieces. (Do not use jarred pearl onions, which will turn mushy and disintegrate into the sauce.) Serve the stew with egg noodles or mashed potatoes.

- 1 bottle medium-bodied red wine (see note above)
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 10 sprigs fresh parsley plus 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 ounces bacon, preferably thick-cut, cut crosswise into ¼-inch pieces *or 1.5 oz bacon bits*
- 2½ pounds boneless skinless chicken thighs, trimmed of excess fat and cut in half crosswise
- Table salt and ground black pepper
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 24 frozen pearl onions, thawed, drained, and patted dry (about 1 cup) (see note above)
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms, wiped clean, stems trimmed, halved if small and quartered if large
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

How We Did It: Coq au Vin in 90 Minutes

Butchering, chopping, browning, straining, simmering, thickening . . . most coq au vin recipes require almost three hours from start to finish. We came up with some shortcuts to keep this simple stew under control.



NO BONES

Opting for boneless thighs rather than bone-in legs shaved more than 30 minutes from the cooking time.



TWO POTS

We reduced the wine, stock, and herbs in a separate saucepan while browning the meat and vegetables.

1. Bring all but 1 tablespoon wine (reserve for later use), broth, parsley sprigs, thyme, and bay to simmer in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook until reduced to 3 cups, about 25 minutes. Discard herbs.

2. Meanwhile, cook bacon in large Dutch oven over medium heat until browned, 7 to 8 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper-towel-lined plate. Reserve 2 tablespoons fat in small bowl; discard remaining fat.

3. Lightly season chicken with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon reserved bacon fat in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of chicken in single layer and cook

until lightly browned, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to plate and repeat with remaining chicken and 1 tablespoon bacon fat.

4. Melt 3 tablespoons butter in now-empty Dutch oven over medium-high heat. When foaming subsides, add pearl onions and mushrooms; cook, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned, 5 to 8 minutes. Reduce heat to medium, add garlic, and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add tomato paste and flour; cook, stirring frequently, until well combined, about 1 minute.

5. Add reduced wine mixture, scraping bottom of pot with wooden spoon to loosen browned

bits; add ¼ teaspoon pepper. Return chicken, any accumulated juices, and reserved bacon to pot; increase heat to high and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover pot, and simmer until chicken is tender, about 25 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking time.

6. Using slotted spoon, transfer chicken to large bowl; tent with foil to keep warm. Increase heat to medium-high and simmer sauce until thick and glossy and measures ¾ cups, about 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in remaining 2 tablespoons butter and reserved 1 tablespoon wine. Season to taste with salt. Return chicken to pot and top with minced parsley. Serve immediately.

EQUIPMENT TESTING: Wine Openers

In our 1997 testing of corkscrews, the test kitchen came down solidly on the lever-style design (eventually popularized by Metrokane's "Rabbit" corkscrew) as the ultimate tool for removing the cork from a wine bottle. At \$150, our winning Le Creuset Screwpull Lever LX was also very expensive. Since that time, other lever-style options have flooded the market—some at much more attractive price points. We gathered 13 contenders (ranging in price from \$12.95 to \$134.95) to see just how low you can go and still get great performance.

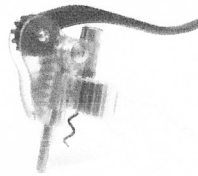
At a glance, 12 of the 13 models were virtually identical and all pulled out corks competently. What separated the good from the great, however, was lever length. The increased leverage (we like 6½ inches or longer) means you need less brute strength to open the bottle; still, even the corkscrew with the shortest lever (the curvy 5½ inches on the Bonjour Chateau Royale, \$69.99) was workable. The longest lever (7¼ inches) was on the cheapest model, the Zoom Corkscrew from the Wine Enthusiast (\$12.95).

The one innovative wine opener, the Screwpull Trigger (\$79.95) has an ingenious slip-over sleeve design, which helps center the screw over the bottle opening—you squeeze the "trigger" to secure the bottle. This new feature streamlines an already speedy process, making this model our new "ultimate" choice. That said, the \$12.95 Zoom Corkscrew will keep the wine flowing. —Garth Clingingsmith



ULTIMATE OPENER

The Screwpull Trigger (\$79.95) has a few innovative touches that justify its price.



BEST BUY

The Wine Enthusiast Zoom Corkscrew (\$12.95) rivals the expensive models—for the frugal gadget hound.



TOO SHORT

The stumpy handle on the Bonjour Chateau Royale (\$69.99) provided less-than-ideal leverage.