

TEA-SMOKED DUCK BREAST

This recipe is quick and easy but can also be a real crowd pleaser. My wife and I are just as likely to make it for the two of us as we are to make it for a large group as part of a Sichuan feast. While the flavor benefits from the meat having a longer cure time (overnight), we have been known to decide the morning of to defrost some breasts and have tea-smoked duck for dinner the same night. The marinade brightens up the flavor of the duck breast, while the earthy, floral aroma from the tea and rice adds an unexpected complexity to it, without being overpowering. This is perfect for a stove-top smoker, but you can also do it on a kettle grill.

1. Score the skin of the duck breasts, without cutting the flesh, in a crosshatch pattern. Coat the duck breasts in the salt and Sichuan pepper, place in a nonreactive container or plastic bag, and pour in the wine. Let cure a minimum of 2 hours, and ideally overnight.
2. Remove the duck breasts from the cure, rinse under cool water, and pat dry.
3. Mix together the rice, loose tea, brown sugar, star anise, and cinnamon. Line the bottom of your stove-top smoker pan with aluminum foil. Pour in the tea mixture. Level it out into an even layer.

4. Place the duck breasts, skin side up, on a rack over the tea mixture. Place the pan over high heat. Once the mixture starts to smoke, cover the setup and turn the heat down to medium-low. Smoke the duck breasts for 20 minutes.
5. Preheat a cast-iron pan over high heat. Remove the duck breasts from the smoker and place them in the pan, skin side down. Sear the duck breasts until the skin is crispy and golden brown; it should only take a couple of minutes.
6. Let rest for 10 minutes; the duck can be served at room temperature or cold.

Serves 2 to 4 people

- 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ - to 1-pound boneless duck breasts
- 2 tablespoons fine sea salt or kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons ground Sichuan pepper
- 2 tablespoons Shaoxing wine
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup long-grain white rice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup loose black tea, such as Ceylon, Darjeeling, and/or jasmine
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 star anise
- 4 4-inch sticks cinnamon