



Updated: December 8, 2010, 10:51 AM ET

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Texas pheasant hunting

Braised Pheasant Legs with Cabbage and Grapes

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ESPNOuthdoors.com
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For more food-related blogs from Georgia Pellegrini, check out her website www.GeorgiaPellegrini.com.

I was just hunting in Texas Hill Country at a beautiful place called Joshua Creek Ranch. It is part of the Beretta Trident program, and one of only four ranches in the country to receive a Beretta Trident -- it is like the Michelin Guide to the hunting world.

PHOTO GALLERY



Pheasant

There I hunted chucker, quail and pheasant and even spent some time in a deer stand on a quest for the delicious Axis deer. I was joined by a camera crew, a world class photographer, a journalist from Shotgun Life, a writer from the food and style magazine Taste and of course, the wonderful people that own the place.

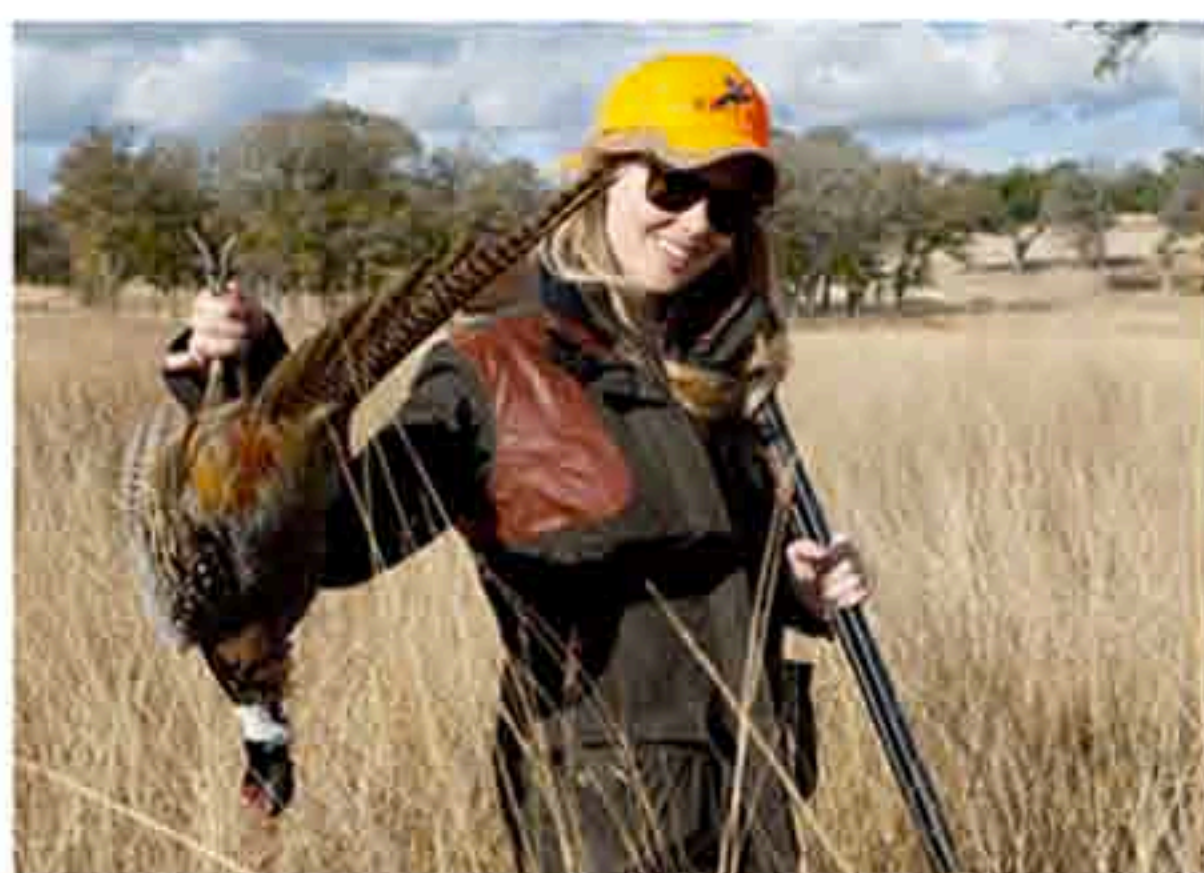
There were many happy hunters, well fed and well taken care of, and I was there to cook and hunt and cook some more. The end result was a beautiful braised pheasant dish that I want to share.

Standing in the fields at Joshua Creek was a special kind of experience. There is a mystical quality in the rooster pheasant as he shoots into the air like a feathered arrow, in all his green and red and purple, and speckled brown-black. The long spike of his tail feathers tapers for aerodynamic flight and he leans to his side and paints the wind. You hesitate when you see the rooster, because you are in awe of his faultless beauty.

Sometimes the rooster doesn't fall. Sometimes he will keep flying because he is a rooster and he is mysterious and will leave only a single feather floating to the ground for you to ponder.

That is why you hunt the rooster. Because you must earn him.

For wild pheasant hunting, you must walk sometimes for eight hours to earn him, and you must hurt a little, and sometimes you must hurt a lot. You must spend time respecting him before he will relent and fall. And even after he falls, lest you become too proud, he will sometimes disappear, where even the dogs must search for hours until they finally find the scent and drop him in your hands, smooth and handsome.



Terry Allen Photography

The meat of the pheasant is just as beautiful tasting. It is slightly sweet and very tender. But it can also taste tough and chewy if it isn't cooked properly. For example, you must always keep the breast meat away from moist heat.

The legs however do well in moisture, so braising is a perfect technique for them. I like to add vegetables that have a little crunch and color, like cabbage, or kale, or even some shaved Brussels sprouts. Color and texture are an important thing to remember along with flavor -- I call it the trifecta to a perfect meal.

Something sweet is also always nice with pheasant, because the meat itself is slightly sweet. Crushed grapes, currants, a dash of brandy or whatever captures your imagination. And in the end, butter will keep things supple and lemon juice will brighten it to keep it fresh.

Give this a try sometime, this dish is magic.

To see a slideshow of the hunting I did on the way to the table, go [here](#).

Braised Pheasant Legs with Cabbage and Grapes

- 8 pheasant legs
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ¼ cup onion diced
- 2 cups cabbage, finely sliced
- 1 cup seedless grapes, crushed
- ¼ cup brandy
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tablespoon parsley, minced
- Salt and pepper

1. Pat the legs dry and season on both sides with salt and pepper. Dust both sides with flour.
2. In a sauté pan, melt the butter until it begins to bubble. Add the legs, skin side down and cook until golden brown, about 4 minutes. Turn over for about 1 minute, then remove the meat to a platter.
3. In the same pan, add the onions and cabbage and sauté until soft and brown, about 5 minutes.
4. Add the grapes and stir. Add the legs, brown side up and nestle them into the cabbage and onions.
5. Add the brandy and light with a match. Let the alcohol burn off and reduce.
6. Add the stock and cover with a lid partially and cook at a low simmer for about 1 hour, until the meat falls off the bone.
7. Finish with lemon juice and parsley and more salt and pepper to taste.

Serves 4

Editor's note: Georgia's passion for good food began at an early age, on a boulder by the side of a creek as she caught her trout for breakfast. After Wellesley and Harvard -- and a brief stint on Wall Street -- she decided to leave the cubicle world behind and enrolled in the French Culinary Institute in New York City.

Upon graduating at the top of her class, she worked in two of America's best restaurants, Gramercy Tavern and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, as well as in one of the premier destination restaurants in Provence, France, La Chassagnette. It was there that she decided it was time to really get at the heart of where our food comes from and head to the source -- Mother Nature. She bought a shotgun and set her sites on the cutting edge of culinary creativity intent on pushing the boundaries of American gastronomy, from field to stream to table.

Her new book, "Food Heroes: 16 Culinary Artisans Preserving Tradition" is available wherever books are sold. She currently roams the world, hunting, tasting good food and meeting the good people who make it. You can read more about her work at www.GeorgiaPellegrini.com.

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