

Roasted Cornish game hens stuffed with dukkah and artichokes

Makes 4 servings

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, minced, about 1 cup

1 carrot, coarsely grated, about 1 cup

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon dried oregano

8 frozen artichoke hearts, or 4 cooked fresh artichokes, leaves and choke removed, cut in half

1 lemon, scrubbed and cut into quarters

4 Cornish game hens, rinsed inside and out and patted dry with paper towels

½ cup dukkah

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro or parsley, (optional)

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and carrot, season with salt and pepper and cook until tender, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and oregano and cook until aromatic, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the artichoke hearts and juice of ½ lemon and toss well. Allow to cool.

Preheat the oven to 375° F.

Starting at the point where the wing meets the breast, gently separate the skin from the meat along the top of the breast, creating an opening, 1 inch wide. Press 1 tablespoon dukkah into the opening, and push to spread across the breast meat. Repeat with the remaining 7 breasts. Don't worry if there is a dusting of dukkah on the outside of the birds, it will add texture and flavor.

Season the birds inside and out with salt and pepper. Squeeze the juice of one lemon quarter into the cavity of each bird. Rub the quarter all over the outside of the bird, and then tuck the quarter into the cavity. Push 4 frozen heart halves or 2 fresh artichoke halves into each cavity and then spoon a quarter of the carrot mixture inside. Tie the legs together and secure to the Pope's nose, to keep the filling from falling out. Brush the outside of the birds with the remaining olive oil, and set, breast-side down on a rack in a roasting pan. Roast 20 minutes. Flip the hens, rotate the pan, baste the bird with the fat that has accumulated in the bottom of the pan, and then roast them breast-side up for another 20 minutes or until they are done.

Allow to rest 15 minutes outside the oven and then remove the string, split the birds and serve them with the artichoke stuffing. Garnish with chopped cilantro or parsley.