

Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Fagiano Ripieno

stuffed pheasant

The hardworking and hospitable Friulani, tucked away in the far northeast corner of the country, have experienced a checkered history, enjoying both great glory—for years the town of Aquileia was the second most important city in the Roman Empire—and much hardship—centuries of grinding poverty and countless invaders. La cucina friulana is known for its gnocchi of potato or squash; cialzòn, pasta stuffed with a variety of mixtures, from spinach and citron to ricotta and herbs; and the legendary prosciutto di San Daniele, a prosciutto that connoisseurs declare surpasses that of Parma. Other traditional cured pork products, such as prosciutto affumicato and muset (pork sausage flavored with cinnamon), are appreciated beyond the local table, and game, including venison, trout, and the pheasant dish presented here, are popular in the area's mountainous regions.

Since the lean meat of pheasant can be dry, cooks wrap the birds with pancetta. Frequent basting helps, too, as does a savory meat stuffing. The pancetta gets brown and crisp while the pheasant stays moist and juicy. Chicken or guinea fowl can also be roasted this way.

2 slices white bread, crusts removed

¼ cup (2 fl oz/60 ml) milk

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 small yellow onion, chopped, plus 1 medium onion, thinly sliced

1 bay leaf

¼ lb (125 g) ground (minced) beef

1 Italian pork sausage, about 3 oz (90 g), casing removed and crumbled

1 pheasant liver or chicken liver, chopped
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1 pheasant, about 2½ lb (1.25 kg)

4 slices pancetta

2 fresh rosemary sprigs

½ cup (4 fl oz/125 ml) dry white wine

☞ In a small bowl, soak the bread in the milk until the milk is fully absorbed. Squeeze the bread to remove excess moisture, then chop it.

☞ In a small frying pan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the chopped onion and bay leaf and sauté until the onion is tender, about 5 minutes.

☞ Discard the bay leaf. Transfer the onion to a bowl and add the bread, beef, sausage meat, liver, salt, and pepper. Mix well.

☞ Preheat an oven to 375°F (190°C). Oil a roasting pan just large enough to hold the pheasant.

☞ Rinse the pheasant and pat dry. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Stuff the beef mixture into the cavity, and lay the pancetta slices over the breast and legs. Tuck the wings under the body and pass a 3–4 foot (90–120 cm) piece of kitchen string under the bird at the wing ends. Cross the ends over the breast, securing the pancetta in place, then cross again at the tail end. Finally, tie the drumsticks securely. Place in the prepared pan. Scatter the sliced onion and the rosemary in the pan and pour in the wine.

☞ Roast for 30 minutes, basting occasionally with the pan juices. Raise the heat to 450°F (230°C). Continue to roast until the juices run clear when the flesh is pierced near the joint between the leg and the body, 15–30 minutes. Transfer the pheasant to a warmed platter, cover with aluminum foil, and let rest for 10 minutes.

☞ Strain the pan juices through a fine-mesh sieve into a small saucepan. Skim off the fat from the surface, then reheat the juices.

☞ Carve the pheasant and arrange on the platter. Pass the juices at the table.

serves 4

