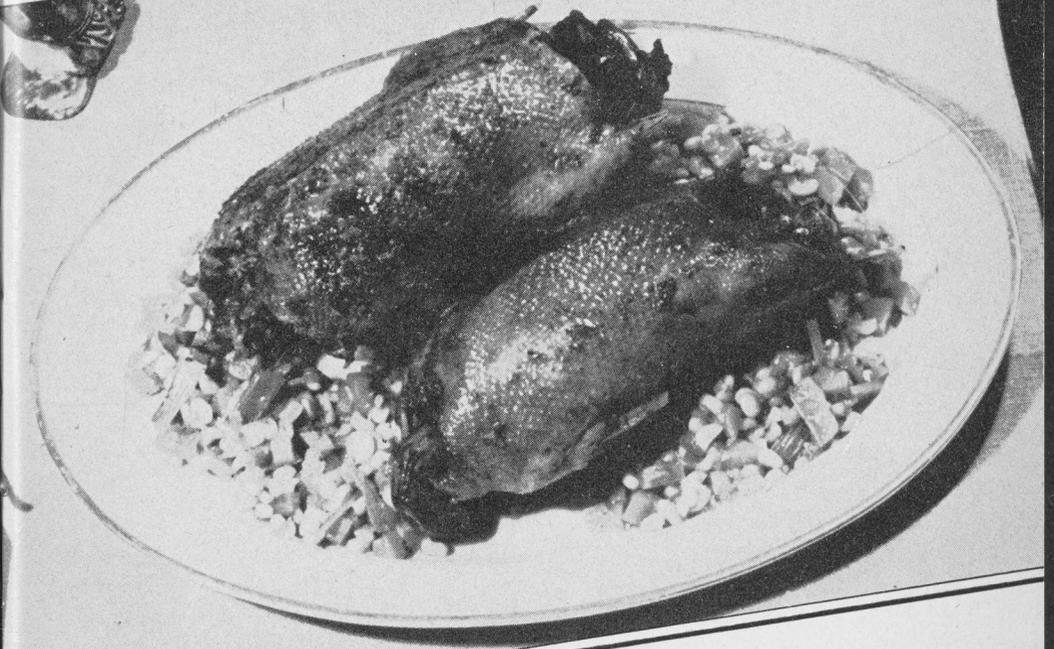


MAR 13 1947

WILD DUCKS and COOTS

Make Good Eating!



AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION—AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
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Wild Ducks and Coots Make Good Eating

BY ANNA MARGRETHE OLSEN¹

Game rates with meats, poultry and fish as an excellent protein food. The use of all surplus edible game should be encouraged at all times. This bulletin has been prepared to promote the use of surplus wild ducks (number above the breeding stock as determined by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and the less-known American coot. The coot, erroneously but more commonly known as the mudhen, is neither duck nor chicken. However, because of its similarity to the wild duck in plumage, habitat, food and migratory habits, the coot is often classed with the ducks.

The material presented in this bulletin is based largely on the experimental work that has been done on game cookery and poultry cookery (Wills, 1946)² in the foods laboratories at Iowa State College. Ducks and coots are used interchangeably in the recipes that follow. Duck and coot flavors are similar and not always easily differentiated.

HANDLING WILD DUCKS AND COOTS IN THE FIELD

The preparation of a wild duck or coot dinner actually begins as soon as the bird is shot and in the hand. The quality and flavor of the game depend largely on the handling it receives in the field. The following rules for bringing home the birds in the best of condition are based on practices observed by many hunters.

1. Bleed each bird by breaking its neck or by cutting its throat as soon as it is picked up.
2. Eviscerate (remove entrails) as quickly as possible. Fryers eviscerated warm (within 1 hour) had a better flavor

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² Wills, Rena F. Organoleptic and histological changes in eviscerated frozen poultry stored under varying conditions of temperature and time. Unpublished thesis. Library, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa. 1946.

than those eviscerated cold (44-48 hours) in Wills' study. To remove the entrails pluck a strip of feathers from the end of the breastbone to the vent, make an incision, and cut around the vent. Remove all the entrails carefully, and clean the giblets. To remove the crop and windpipe make an incision along the back of the neck. Wipe the inside of the bird with a clean cloth or clean paper, and stuff with paper. Wrap the giblets in waxed paper.

3. Cool as rapidly as possible. Carry the birds on the outside of the bag or spread on the floor of the car until the body heat is dissipated.

4. Keep the birds as cold as possible. If at camp, hang the birds up outside in shade with free circulation of air. The feathers protect against dust, flies and insects and lessen the amount of dehydration.

5. To express the ducks and coots, eviscerate but do not pluck the birds. The feathers protect the birds and make it possible to identify them. Ice thoroughly. Consult the express company for details.

6. To freeze (in zero or sub-zero weather) before sending or taking home, pluck the ducks and skin the coots, remove the entrails and oil sacs, wash thoroughly, dry, wrap in moisture-proof paper and tag. Or take the birds to a locker plant to be "oven-dressed," wrapped, tagged and frozen. Some hunters remove the breast, thigh and leg muscles of the coot and discard all else in the field. Wrap and freeze the giblets separately. They deteriorate rapidly and should be used soon after freezing. Pack the solidly frozen game in dry ice for shipping.

WILD DUCKS AND COOTS IN THE KITCHEN AND AT THE TABLE

The preparations for and the actual cooking and serving of wild ducks and coots are practically the same as for poultry. Here again there is team work between the hunter and the cook, for no experienced duck hunter considers his task completed until he can deliver the birds, plucked, cleaned, aged to his liking and checked for any possible "sour" or tainted spots. The following points indicate the steps usually taken

in preparing, cooking and serving the birds.

1. Since age determines largely the cooking method and time, judge and sort the birds as to age. Young birds (less than 1 year) are tender; older birds (1 year and over) are tougher. Generally young birds are more numerous than old ones. Age is determined by factors such as weight; color of plumage; pointedness or roundness of wing-quill tips; color, smoothness and hardness of shanks; flexibility of bill, breastbone, rib ends and windpipe.

2. Pluck wild ducks dry, not scalded. Follow the method used for plucking a tame duck.

3. Wash under running water, cleaning the cavity thoroughly and removing all loose tissue; drain and dry.

4. Skin the coots, do not pluck them; they are full of troublesome pinfeathers. Some of the fat under the skin is removed with the skin and the flesh is less gamy. Proceed as for ducks.

5. Ripening or aging now is done largely in the refrigerator, infrequently in the field. Dressed birds, wrapped loosely or placed in covered pan, are gamy enough for most people when aged from 18 to 48 hours. For well-ripened or "high" game, age birds from 1 to 2 weeks, or even longer.

6. Check the carcass for any spots that may be sour or stale from contact with entrails, and cut them away. Leg and back muscles develop off odors more quickly than breast muscles.

7. If you like game flavor do not soak birds in a salt or acid solution, and do not parboil them unless they are too gamy or fishy. Ducks and coots that feed on strongly flavored plants and crustacean life are likely to be "strong" and fishy.

8. Judge the quality of a duck or coot by its weight, plumpness, amount of fat, firmness and color of muscle and by its age. Remove the fat in "strong" or fishy birds.

9. During the cooking process add fat generously in the form of butter, bacon or salt pork strips or drippings or a neutral fat. Ducks and coots are less fat and less juicy than domestic fowl.

10. Cook young and tender ducks and coots by dry heat, as by broiling, grilling, frying or roasting, to preserve the

natural and distinctive game flavor. See recipes for each method or follow directions for cooking poultry.

11. Cook older and less tender ducks and coots by moist heat or by a combination of dry and moist heat, as by braising, pot roasting, roasting or baking (covered), or stewing.

12. Cook birds to the desired degree of doneness: Some like their ducks rare; some medium well done; and others very well done. With very few exceptions, all game meat should be medium well done, flavorful and tender, not dry, tasteless and tough. In roasting ducks and coots, cover with a greased cloth and baste frequently to keep the skin or outer surface moist. For a crisp skin, baste frequently with fat and sprinkle with flour after each basting.

13. Enhance, supplement or modify game flavor by a wise choice of condiments, sauces, spices, herbs and vegetables in barbecued, braised and baked dishes, and in stews.

14. Frozen pan- or oven-dressed ducks or coots need not be thawed before cooking. Simply allow additional time for thawing during the cooking process. The extra time needed will vary with the size and temperature of the bird. Cook thawed game as soon as you can. It deteriorates more quickly than fresh game.

15. Judge the number of servings a large or small bird will make by its weight. The dressed carcass weight of a duck averages from 50 to 60 percent of its original weight; the coot carcass, about 45 percent. For a small serving, allow $\frac{1}{2}$ pound; for a medium serving, $\frac{3}{4}$ pound or more.

16. Make the duck or coot dinner the crowning point of the hunt. Planning the meal with an attractive and suitable centerpiece suggestive of the out-of-doors should be fun for the entire family. Suggestions for a meal have been given with each basic recipe. The following hints are offered as additional meal-planning helps:

- a. Choose accompanying foods to bring out the flavor of the game—not overpower it. Strongly flavored foods should be served with the more gamy birds.
- b. Make the game dish the center of interest. Season carefully and taste it before bringing it to the table. Garnish simply and attractively.



Fig. 1. Note the high breast and chicken-like legs of the coot (upper left). For broiling use only young and tender coots with flexible breastbones and ribs; split each carcass in half by cutting along one side of breast- and backbones, and break the ribs to flatten the halves. For braising and stewing use young or older coots; separate the breast pieces, thighs and legs, and bone if desired (lower left). Add the neck and bony ribs and wings to the giblets for stock (upper right). Fresh giblets make good eating.

- c. Use contrasts in color and texture of foods to add interest. Serve a green or yellow vegetable or both, and crisp relishes or salad greens.
- d. Do not serve the same type of food in different forms in the same meal—for example, corn and cornbread, potatoes and rice or macaroni.
- e. Make the meal simple but zestful. Consider the type of meal in choosing the foods.
- f. Serve hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- g. Duck shears or sturdy kitchen shears simplify the serving of roasted ducks or coots. Split along breast- and backbones if large and serve halves or quarters. Use a small carving knife to slice the breast. Serve small birds whole.

Broiled Wild Ducks or Coots

(2 to 4 servings)

1 large, 2 medium or 4 small ducks or	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ cup fat, equal parts butter and other fat
2 to 4 coots	Salt, pepper, paprika
Garlic or onion, or	Butter
$\frac{1}{2}$ lemon or lime	Chives or parsley, minced

1. Use only young ducks or coots, fresh and in prime condition. Split dressed bird in half and flatten breastbone; leave small ducks whole.

2. Rub pieces with cut surface of garlic or onion, or lemon or lime juice, and brush with melted fat 30 minutes before broiling.

3. Preheat broiler compartment to 350° F. (moderate) with regulator turned to 350° F. To maintain a moderate temperature during broiling, leave the broiler door open or slightly ajar. Lay pieces, skin or skinned side down (whole duck, breast down), on greased rack in broiler pan. Place pan below heating unit so that the top of the meat is from 2 to 3 inches below it. Broil 20 to 35 minutes, basting every 5 minutes with drippings. When browned on surface, pull pan out part way, sprinkle meat with salt, pepper and paprika, and turn to brown other side.

4. Arrange on heated platter, brush with melted butter and sprinkle with minced chives or parsley. Garnish with curly endive or parsley sprigs, or with lemon, lime or tomato wedges.

5. Serve with fluffy rice, buttered peas and carrots, grapefruit salad, corn sticks and wild plum or any tart jelly, or serve with your favorite combinations.

For Large Quantity Broiling use a combination of broiling and roasting. Preheat broiler to 450° F. (hot). Sear meat quickly on both sides, then remove pieces to a rack in shallow pan and place in slow oven (275°-300° F.) to finish cooking, basting frequently with drippings or additional fat. If oven is above the broiler, leave oven door ajar or open to lower the temperature quickly. Allow from 45 to 60 minutes for total cooking.

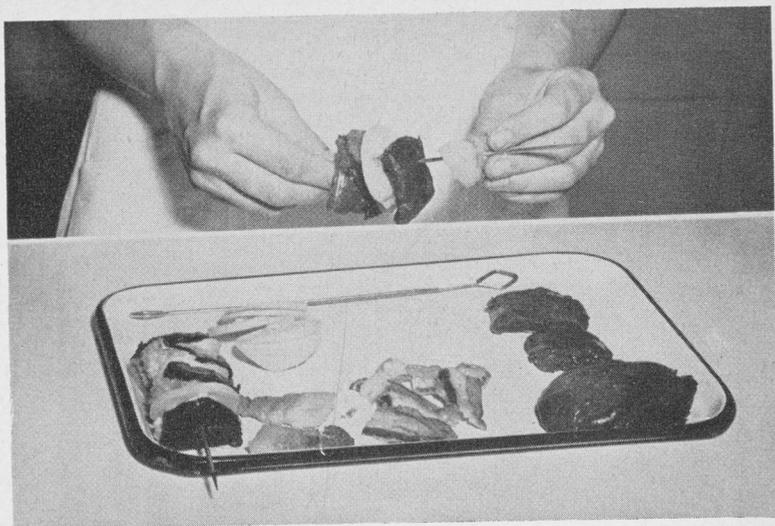


Fig. 2. Kabobs are fun to make and fun to eat, too, whether at the table or over a bonfire. Make them of duck or coot muscle, or even liver or partially cooked gizzard. On long skewers, pointed green sticks or picnic spears, thread (loosely and in succession) buttered and seasoned small pieces of breast, thigh or leg muscle, partially broiled pieces of bacon or salt pork, sliced onion and tomato or small mushroom caps. Continue adding pieces if you want the kabobs larger. Broil over glowing coals or in the broiler oven. Baste frequently with fat and turn to brown evenly.

Oven-Grilled Wild Ducks or Coots

1. Use only spring ducks or coots and prepare as for broiling.

2. Place pieces, skin side down (whole ducks, breast down) in hot fat covering the bottom of a shallow pan with a $\frac{1}{3}$ inch layer. Baste generously and place pan on top shelf of very hot oven (500° F.), and bake 15 to 20 minutes, basting every 5 minutes with fat in pan and turning pieces when half done.

3. Place on heated platter, garnish with mint-flavored glazed apple quarters and parsley or small celery leaves.

4. Serve with mushroom gravy, rice, hominy or potato croquettes, buttered spinach or green beans and turnips, tomato salad and brown bread.

Wild Duck or Coot Kabobs

Ducks	1/4 cup butter and other fat
or	2 tablespoons lemon juice
Coots	1 tablespoon ketchup
Bacon or salt pork	1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
Onion slices	2 drops tabasco
Tomatoes, sliced or	1/2 teaspoon salt
mushroom caps	1/4 teaspoon paprika
	Dash of cayenne

1. Use breasts, thighs and legs of spring ducks and coots; bone and cut in slices 1/4 inch thick.

2. Partially broil or fry slices of bacon or salt pork and cut in squares. Cut onion in thin slices and small tomatoes in 1/4-inch slices.

3. For barbecue sauce, melt the fat and add remaining ingredients.

4. On long skewers, green sticks or picnic spears, thread (loosely and in succession) pieces of duck or coot, bacon, onion and tomato or mushroom cap. Continue adding pieces if you want the kabobs larger. Brush well with barbecue sauce.

5. Broil in broiler or over glowing coals, basting frequently with sauce and turning for uniform broiling. Allow 20 to 30 minutes.

6. Serve on skewers with corn on the cob, crisp vegetables, dills or olives and toasted buns.

Fried Wild Ducks or Coots

(2 to 4 servings)

1 large, 2 medium or	2 tablespoons water, about
4 small ducks	1 tablespoon chopped onion
or	1/2 cup duck or coot stock
2 to 4 coots	1/2 cup rich milk
Salt, pepper, paprika	Salt, pepper
1/3 cup flour	Giblets, cooked
3 tablespoons fat	Sour cream (optional)

1. Quarter or disjoint dressed ducks or coots.

2. Season, dredge with flour and brown in hot fat. Add water, cover tightly and bake in slow oven (300°-325° F.) until tender: For young birds, 35 to 40 minutes; for old birds, 1 to 1 1/4 hours. Turn pieces once and add water if

needed. Remove pieces and keep hot.

3. Prepare gravy by browning the onion and 2 tablespoons flour in drippings in pan. Add stock and milk, stirring until smooth and thickened. Season gravy to taste and add finely chopped giblets if desired. One to two tablespoons sour cream will improve the flavor. Serve in a heated bowl.

4. Arrange pieces on heated platter and garnish with parsley sprigs and fried toast points.

5. Serve with parsleyed potatoes, broccoli, corn fritters, green salad, currant jelly and hot biscuits.

Barbecued Wild Ducks or Coots

Prepare young ducks or coots for broiling and follow directions given in recipe for broiling ducks and coots. Baste frequently with a barbecue sauce instead of with melted fat. Use your own recipe or prepare a sauce by adding the following to $\frac{1}{3}$ cup butter and other fat: 2 tablespoons each lemon juice and tomato or grape ketchup, 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce, and salt, black pepper and paprika to taste.

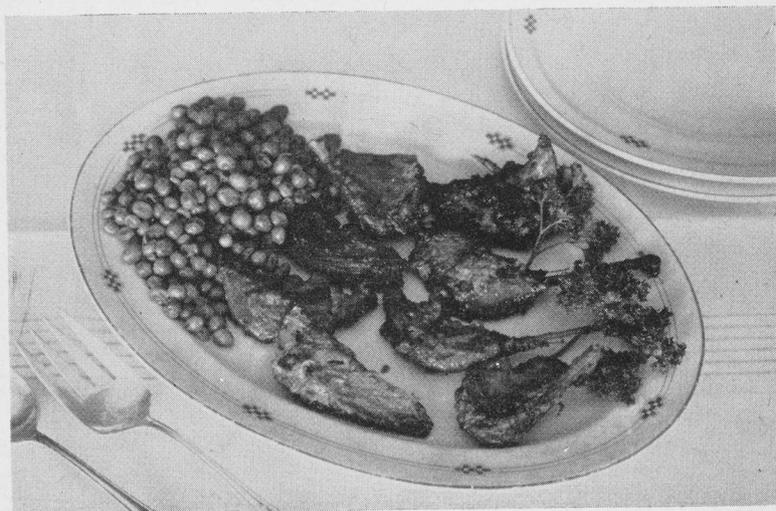


Fig. 3. Fried, braised or smothered coots are both gamy and delicious. If you're of English descent, you'll serve them with peas; if of French extraction, you'll like them with turnips or beans. Wild rice or fried hominy and a tart jelly are usually served with well-planned coot and duck dinners.

Smothered Wild Ducks or Coots

1. Quarter or disjoint cleaned ducks or coots, season and flour as for frying.
2. Sauté 1 medium onion, sliced, in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fat, stirring to brown evenly; remove onions and brown floured pieces in fat. Scatter onions over top, pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup rich milk or light cream (sweet or sour) over all, cover and bake in slow oven (300° - 325° F.) for 40 minutes to $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours. Old birds will take the longer time.
3. Remove pieces to heated platter, thicken cream drippings if necessary, season to taste and pour over meat. Sprinkle chopped parsley, chives or paprika lightly over top. Serve with baked potatoes in the half shell, buttered broccoli, herb bread and a tart jelly.

Breaded Wild Ducks or Coots

1. Quarter or disjoint ducks or coots. Roll in seasoned flour, dip in egg slightly beaten and mixed with 1 tablespoon water, and dredge in sifted fine bread crumbs. For variety add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sage or $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon thyme or marjoram to flour.
2. Brown in fat and bake as for frying. Turn pieces carefully to keep crumb covering intact.
3. Arrange pieces on heated platter and garnish with sprigs of parsley and broiled orange slices topped with a small spoonful of red plum or currant jelly on each.

Southern Fried Wild Ducks or Coots

(Deep- or Shallow-Fat Fried)

Roll pieces of ducks or coots in well-seasoned flour, or bread as for breaded duck. Fry in hot deep fat (365° - 380° F.) about 10 minutes or until browned. Fry a few pieces at a time and remove them to a covered frying pan or Dutch oven. Bake slowly (300° F.) for 25 to 30 minutes. For shallow-fat frying, cover bottom of kettle with 1 to 2 inches of fat and proceed as for deep-fat frying, turning when browned on under side. Serve with a cream gravy, candied sweet potatoes, spinach, crisp relishes, southern spoon bread, cranberry jelly.



Fig. 4. These ducks are stuffed mallards. Two were roasted, uncovered; one was baked, covered, with a jelly glazing spread several times over the surface during the last half hour of baking (uncovered); and one was pot-roasted. The crisp celery curls, radish roses and curly endive serve a dual purpose—for garnish and relish. The colorful vegetable dish of green peas, with turnip strips and golden carrots, and the tart wild plum jelly add zest to the dinner. Duck shears or heavy kitchen shears are a boon to the carver.

Baked Wild Ducks or Coots

1. Use older ducks or coots and prepare as for roasting. Place on trivet in chicken fryer or Dutch oven, and add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hot water.
2. Bake, covered, 2 hours, then remove cover, spread surface with currant or plum jelly beaten until partially broken up, and continue baking (uncovered) $\frac{1}{2}$ hour, basting frequently with jelly and pan drippings.

Potted Wild Ducks or Coots

Stuff and truss older ducks or coots as for roasting, and sprinkle with flour. Brown in $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ cup fat in fryer or Dutch oven, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup hot water, cover tightly and simmer or roast in slow oven (300° to 325° F.) for $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hours, or until tender, turning occasionally and adding small amounts of water as needed. Remove birds and make gravy from drippings in fryer.

Roast Wild Ducks or Coots

(2 to 4 servings)

1 large, 2 medium or 4 small ducks or	3 to 5 cups stuffing or
2 to 4 coots	Oranges and celery or
Onion or garlic	Apples and onion
Salt, pepper, paprika	Butter
Bacon or salt pork	

1. Use young ducks or coots in prime condition, not "strong" or too gamy. Rub cavities of oven-dressed birds with freshly cut onion or garlic and sprinkle with salt, pepper and paprika.

2. Fill cavities with your favorite stuffing or with orange sections and celery, or with apple quarters and onion slices; sew and truss. Rub generously with butter; place, breast down, on greased rack in shallow pan and cover with greased cloth.

3. Roast, uncovered, in slow oven (325° F.) for 1¼ to 2 hours, basting several times with drippings or additional fat. Turn when half done, remove cloth and place strips of bacon or salt pork over breasts. Remove the birds and keep them hot. Make gravy from drippings in pan, stock and milk.

4. Place birds on heated platter, garnish with parsley or curly endive. Serve with broiled mushroom caps and pineapple slices, wild rice or fluffy rice, asparagus tips in fried onion rings, crisp relishes, lingonberry or cranberry jelly and corn sticks.

Wild Duck or Coot Pie

(3 to 6 servings)

1 large, 2 medium or 4 small ducks or	1 cup carrot strips
2 to 4 coots	¼ cup chopped onion
3 tablespoons fat	2 tablespoons minced parsley
Boiling water	2 tablespoons minced celery
½ to 1 teaspoon salt	4 tablespoons fat
1 bay leaf	1 to 2 cups cubed potatoes
1 allspice berry	3 to 4 tablespoons flour
Dash of cayenne	Salt, pepper
	1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
	Pastry

1. Use mature ducks or coots; cut in pieces for serving.

2. Brown pieces in fat (half butter), cover with water and add seasoning; bring to a boil, cover and simmer for 1 hour, or until tender. Remove meat, separate from bones and place in heated casserole.

3. Sauté carrots, onion, parsley and celery in fat (half butter) until delicately browned; add vegetables to stock. Add potatoes and cook, covered, 20 minutes. Place vegetables over meat in casserole.

4. Brown flour in drippings, add about 3 cups of stock and cook until thickened. Season to taste, and pour over meat and vegetables. Cover with pastry rolled $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick; cut gashes in crust for escape of steam.

5. Bake in hot oven (450° F.) for 15 minutes, then reduce heat to moderate (350° F.), bake $\frac{1}{2}$ hour until browned.

6. Serve from casserole with fried or popped wild rice³, crisp vegetables or a molded fruit salad, pickles and hot rolls.

Duck or Coot and Bean Casserole

(2 to 4 servings)

1 to 1½ cups dried beans (kidney, lima, pinto, soy, pea or navy)	⅓ cup flour 4 tablespoons fat 1 medium onion, chopped
1 large, 2 medium or 4 small ducks or	1 clove garlic, crushed Dash of cloves ½ teaspoon mustard
2 to 4 coots Salt, pepper, paprika	2 peppercorns 4 tablespoons ketchup

Hot water

1. Soak beans overnight; drain. Cook in salted water for about 1½ hours; drain and place in casserole or bean pot.

2. Disjoint dressed ducks or coots. Season, dredge with flour and brown; remove pieces to casserole or bean pot.

3. Cook onions and garlic in drippings about 10 minutes. Add 1 teaspoon salt, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper, remaining seasonings and 1½ cups water; bring to a boil and pour over beans and meat, adding hot water as needed to cover well.

4. Bake, covered, in moderate oven (325°-350° F.) for 1½ to 2 hours, or until meat is tender and beans cooked.

5. Serve from casserole with coleslaw or a tomato salad, corn muffins and green gage plum butter.

³ Place about 2 tablespoons unwashed wild rice in small frying basket and fry in hot deep fat (380° F.) about 3 minutes or until grains pop open.

Duck or Coot and Vegetable Casserole

(2 to 4 servings)

1 large, 2 medium or 4 small ducks or 2 to 4 coots	1 teaspoon salt $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon paprika $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sage
4 tablespoons fat	Dash of thyme
1 medium onion, chopped	Dash of cloves
3 cups sliced turnips	$\frac{1}{2}$ bayleaf, crushed
3 cups cubed potatoes	2 cups water, about

1. Cut dressed ducks or coots in pieces for serving. Brown in fat; remove meat and cook onions in drippings.
2. Place $\frac{1}{2}$ of turnips and potatoes in casserole; put browned meat on top, sprinkle with onions and seasonings, and cover with remaining vegetables. Add water to drippings in frying pan, bring to a boil and pour over all, adding more hot water if needed to cover well.
3. Bake, covered, in moderate oven (325° - 350° F.) about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, or until well done, removing cover the last 15 minutes to brown vegetables and thicken the mixture.
4. Serve from casserole with crisp celery and radishes, glazed apple rings and corn muffins.

Baked Duck or Coot and Rice

(2 to 4 servings)

1 large, 2 medium or 4 small ducks or 2 to 4 coots	1 tablespoon chopped green pepper $\frac{3}{4}$ cup rice $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups water or tomato juice
Salt, pepper, paprika	2 tablespoons ketchup
4 tablespoons flour	1 teaspoon sage
$\frac{1}{3}$ cup fat	Dash of cayenne
1 small onion, chopped	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon bayleaf

1. Disjoint dressed ducks or coots for serving. Season, dredge with flour and brown in hot fat; remove pieces to heated casserole.
2. Fry onion, green pepper and rice in drippings in frying pan about 20 minutes, stirring to brown lightly and evenly. Add water or tomato juice and seasonings, bring to a boil and cook 10 minutes; pour over meat in casserole.
3. Bake, covered, in moderate oven (325° - 350° F.) about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, stirring twice and adding liquid as needed.
4. Serve from casserole with buttered snap beans, tossed salad, brown bread and chokecherry preserves.