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Sage and orange-scented chicken with black olives

Excerpted from Italy by Ingredient, Artisanal Foods, Modern Recipes by Viola Buitoni (Rizzoli). Copyright © 2023

Back in the 1980s, rabbit was not a selection obvious to the butcher in the Upper East Side neighborhood to which I had moved straight from the Umbrian countryside, so I used chicken instead. The day the local Lebanese fruiterer was out of green olives, I bought some sun-dried black ones in their place. I added orange zest later, as my hand in the kitchen became surer of itself. And that is how the rabbit with green olives of my youth was reincarnated into the family favorite chicken. Instead of buying a whole chicken, you can use parts. Dark meat is always juicier, but if you prefer breast, braise it 6 to 8 minutes less or it will be dry. Rosemary, savory, or thyme is a good stand-in for sage, and any type of black olive will do. And it goes without saying that you can and should use rabbit if you like it and can source it.

FOR 6 TO 8 PEOPLE

- 1 chicken, 4 to 5 pounds / 1.8 to 2.2 kg
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup / 170 g black olives
- 1 orange
- 4 sage sprigs
- 3 garlic cloves
- Extra-virgin olive oil as needed
- 1 cup / 240 ml white wine
- 1 cup / 240 ml chicken stock, heated

1. The day before making the dish, ask your butcher to cut the chicken into 10 pieces (2 cosce, 2 thighs, 2 wings, and 2 bone-in breast halves, each split in half). Make sure the back ends up in the package, too, as it will impart great flavor to the final dish. When you get home, sprinkle the chicken pieces on all sides with salt, cover, and refrigerate.
2. About an hour before you start cooking, take the seasoned chicken pieces out of the refrigerator, pat them dry, and leave them on the counter to come to room temperature.
3. Wash the brine off the olives well and place them in a small bowl. Squeeze each one lightly with your fingers to loosen the flesh from the pit and discard the pits. Cut 2 wide strips of peel from the orange. Rub 2 of the sage sprigs and the orange peel strips between your palms to release their essence and add them to the bowl.
4. Slant the blade of your knife until it is almost parallel to the cutting board and use the heel of your hand to gently press the blade down on 2 of the garlic cloves until you've cracked the skin. Peel the cloves and leave them whole. Keep one aside and add the other one to the olives. Pour enough oil into the bowl to barely cover the olives and toss well.
5. Grate 1 1/2 teaspoons zest from the orange. Peel the remaining garlic clove, then mince it into a paste with a generous pinch of salt. Mix the garlic and grated zest together. Rub the remaining 2 sage sprigs between your palms to release their essence.
6. Select a sauté pan wide enough to accommodate the chicken pieces in one cozy, but comfortable, layer. Pour 2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil into the pan, add the whole peeled garlic clove, and over low heat slowly coax out the garlic's fragrance.
7. Remove and discard the garlic, raise the heat to medium, and add the chicken pieces. Brown them for 5 to 7 minutes, until the chicken will lift off the pan without being forced or pulled. It should be golden. Turn the chicken pieces over and repeat the step on the other side, then move them to a plate.
8. Turn the heat back down to low, toss in the garlic-zest mixture and sage sprigs, and stir to coat them in chicken deliciousness until the garlic has softened. It will take a couple of minutes, and be careful not to burn the garlic. Return the chicken to the

pan, raise the heat to high, and douse with the wine. When the acid of the alcohol no longer pinches your throat and punches your nose and its sugar sweetly caresses your eyes and cheeks instead, pour the hot stock over the chicken. The liquid should lap just the bottom one-quarter of the chicken.

9. Lower the heat until the stock is simmering with a low, gentle mutter. Cover partially and cook for 30 to 35 minutes. During cooking, you will visit with your chicken every 7 minutes or so to stir it and ensure it has between one half- and 1-inch liquid and isn't sticking to the bottom of the pan. If necessary, add a little hot water. It is important that there be enough liquid to have a good amount of sauce, but not so much that the chicken is boiling instead of braising.
10. When the chicken is about 10 minutes from ready, fish the garlic clove, orange peel strips, and sage out of the olives and drain off most of the marinating oil. Stir the olives into the pan and finish cooking the chicken.
11. The chicken is ready when it starts to barely retract from the joints and bones without falling away and is quite tender. It should look lustrous, luscious, and moist and smell like this is the last dish you'll want to eat before dying.
12. Sample the sauce and adjust salt and pepper to your taste. Use tongs to attractively arrange the chicken pieces on a warm serving platter, douse with the sauce and olives, and serve.