

The Cookbook Whisperer: How Maria Guarnaschelli's Powers of Imagination Redefined Recipes

James Oseland

ABSTRACT: Cookbook editing requires many different skills, but there's an important one that often gets overlooked: An editor's ability to summon their powers of imagination when working on an author's manuscript. Few cookbook editors in modern history have been more skilled in this regard than Maria Guarnaschelli, who passed away this year. During her storied career, she edited numerous cookbooks so imaginative that they went on to impact the culture of international home cooking. This paper examines the innerworkings of a handful of Guarnaschelli's books, including *The Zuni Cafe Cookbook*, *All About Braising*, *La Gran Cocina*, and *The Food Lab*, with interviews with their authors.

In the recipe for roast chicken with bread salad that appears in *The Zuni Cafe Cookbook*, the book's author, the San Francisco-based chef Judy Rodgers, translates a signature dish on her restaurant's menu for the home cook. From the first lines, it's clear that it is not an average recipe.

'The Zuni roast chicken depends on three things,' Rodgers explains in the page-long headnote, 'beginning with the small size of the bird. Don't substitute a jumbo roaster – it will be too lean and won't tolerate high heat, which is the second requirement of the method. Small chickens, 2¾ to 3½ pounds, flourish at high heat, roast quickly and evenly, and, with lots of skin per ounce of meat, they are virtually designed to stay succulent. Your store may not promote this size for roasting, but let them know you'd like it.'¹

Rodgers applies the same calm authoritativeness and attention to detail to the prepping of the chicken. It should be patted 'very'² dry, inside and out, and she explains why: 'a wet chicken will spend too much time steaming before it begins to turn golden brown.'³ When it comes to the cooking, Rodgers urges readers not to just put the chicken in the oven and walk away, but rather to stay alert and use their senses to better appreciate what's occurring inside that hot box: 'Place [the chicken] in the center of the oven and listen and watch for it to start sizzling and browning within 20 minutes. If it doesn't, raise the temperature progressively until it does.'⁴

At one point in the recipe, Rodgers refers the reader to a multipage section called 'The Practice of Early Salting'⁵ In it, she tells the story of how, when she was a young cook in a Paris restaurant, she was won over by the technique of salting certain foods well ahead of cooking them. She also describes in technical yet colourful detail the many different varieties of salt chefs use, from *fleur de sel* to kosher salt, and how home cooks can learn to use them too.

In the end, this recipe, which clocks in at nearly five pages, isn't just a guide to making the most delicious, crackly-skinned roast chicken that you've ever eaten. It's a thorough but friendly invitation to become a more knowledgeable cook. No wonder it has become a cult classic.

Published in 2002, Rodgers's cookbook – the only one she'd write – went on to win every major American cookbook award in the categories in which it was nominated. A few years later, after I had become the editor of *Saveur*, I had the good fortune to have a meal with her in San Francisco. We talked about the book's decade-long creation. 'It was a labor of love with Maria,' she told me over appetizers. She was referring to Maria Guarnaschelli, the legendary American cookbook editor who was the book's shepherd. 'She expected a lot, but in the end I had the great advantage to have her.'

In 2001, Guarnaschelli – who had recently joined W.W. Norton, the publisher where she'd spend the last part of her career – bought a proposal I'd submitted for a book called *Cradle of Flavor*. It was to be a comprehensive exploration, through recipes, of the culinary links between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, a part of the world where I had lived off and on for years. It was my first book. Naively, I thought I would finish it within a year or two. Instead, under Maria's demanding tutelage, the process of researching recipes, developing them, and writing three radically different drafts took nearly six years.

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Maria was unlike any other editor I'd worked with. Her physical presence was forceful, but her opinions, delivered by way of a sharp baritone, were even more so. She insisted on a level of discipline and detail in my writing that was a jolt to a first-time book author like myself. She told me again and again to consider my reader. She wanted me to imagine someone who had never been to rural Java but, through the precision of my writing, would be able to master an authentic *opor ayam*, a definitive Indonesian curry. 'How can you translate such mysterious cooking for a person who knows nothing about it?' she once asked me.

Among the award-winning cookbooks that Maria edited in her decades-long career are such diverse titles as *Gran Cocina Latina* by Maricel Presilla, *The Cake Bible* by Rose Levy Berenbaum, *The Splendid Table* by Lynne Rossetto Kasper, and *The Food Lab* by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, along with literally scores of others. Maria's influence on culinary publishing over the last five decades – and on my own work as a writer and editor – is immeasurable. Her death in February of this year inspired me to reconsider what it was that gave the books she edited their magic.

All About Braising

In 2004, around the time that I was wrapping up the last draft of *Cradle of Flavor*, the writer and cooking teacher Molly Stevens was publishing *All About Braising*, also edited by Maria. Like so many of the volumes that Maria had a hand in, it went on to win every major cookbook award in its category. And as with many of Maria's collaborations, the process to get there was intense. I asked Stevens to tell me about it.

‘I think I realized from the beginning what a master class I was getting,’ she said. ‘Maria would pick a recipe that was particularly troubled, or that was an illustrative example, and then she’d go deep on that one.’

One recipe Stevens proposed was initially called ‘Chicken Legs Braised with Prunes, Green Olives & Lemons.’ Upon my prompting, she searched through her archives and unearthed three separate manuscript drafts of that recipe, each scrawled with Maria’s theatrical yet always clear handwriting. Seeing those pages brought on a rush of memories from the years I worked on *Cradle of Flavor*. I practically broke out in a sweat.

Poring through those manuscript notes, I instantly recognized a fundamental trait of Maria’s editing style: She pushed her writers to make their own improvements, refusing to rewrite the book for them. Consider the fate of this anecdote Stevens included in the first draft about how the lemony chicken recipe had been inspired by one in the *Silver Palate Cookbook*: ‘While I applaud the inclusion of green olives in the Silver Palate original,’ Stevens’s original headnote read, ‘I’ve always wanted something less sugary (it contains 1 cup of brown sugar).’⁶

Maria’s note, written in the manuscript’s left margin, doesn’t mince words: ‘This sentence makes no sense if you don’t know [that] recipe at all. Please fix and briefly get to your point.’⁷ The anecdote is absent in the second draft.

Stevens explained to me what she took away from that edit: ‘Going back and looking at these pages reminded me of something that I still struggle with as a food writer,’ she said. ‘This whole thing about *The Silver Palate Cookbook*, it doesn’t matter to the reader and it doesn’t help them. I had it there because it’s how I got to the recipe. So much of my early process is my internal process: How did I get to this recipe? But as a food writer, your internal process is not necessarily something you need to share with everybody. That might not be what’s helpful to them to bring them into a recipe. Maria said that without really coming out and saying it, which is indicative of how she edited.’

In her second-draft notes, Maria is even more direct. Here’s one of her handwritten edits to the revised headnote: ‘wordy detailing of cheff-y balance/taste/whatever stuff will have your readers turning the page before they discern how quick it is in the end para!’⁸

Maria frequently tells her author she needs to communicate more precisely. In one note, the editor recommends replacing the generic-sounding verb ‘give’ with the subtler ‘lend’, ‘impart’, or ‘contribute.’⁹ She dismisses the phrase ‘seems just right’ as ‘too vague.’¹⁰ Always anticipating the questions a typical home cook might ask, Maria takes aim at Stevens’s suggestion of serving the chicken with buttered egg noodles: ‘Will the noodles soak up the sauce?’¹¹ Another note admonishes Stevens for being less than totally precise about which cut of chicken to use: ‘Wherever you can be concrete it helps! Vague general comments are NOT good.’¹²

Stevens recalled that Maria’s edits pushed the author to focus on her own basic knowledge of the dish. ‘Maria always reminded me that I was writing this book because

I'm an expert,' she said. 'One of the things she said over and over in her notes was 'Get rid of the waffling. We're here because you know and we want to learn from you.' When I was working with her, very rarely would I say 'I don't know' to her because that was not a good answer. Every question had to be answered.'

The pursuit of precision continues in the third draft, where Maria writes in response to the now-twice-rewritten headnote, 'You're being somewhat ponderous, over explaining every element, yet we still don't have a clear picture. Can you get the prunes and olives to one sentence?'¹³ By now, the recipe's name has been changed from the wordy original to 'Quick Lemony Chicken with Prunes and Green Olives.'¹⁴ The title telegraphs two of Maria's prime imperatives: First, emphasize the recipe's ease and deliciousness, then highlight its versatility. Much of the information in the original headnote has been relocated to a Cook's Note at the end of the recipe, a hallmark of Maria's structural style.

'I feel like Maria saw value in annotating text, having sidebars and appendices, information that made it feel like it was very much a resource,' Stevens said. 'I think she was also sensitive to information buried in a headnote that was an actual tip or takeaway. She loved "aha!" moments. If she learned something from your text, she'd be so excited about it, so she was always looking for new bits of information.'

In the end, Maria and Stevens got the headnote down to a concise and friendly 67 words. Here's the published version:

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This easy chicken braise simmers on top of the stove for about 35 minutes, making it ideal for a quick weeknight dinner. But don't let that stop you from making it for company. The winning combination of sweet prunes and green olives in a lemony braising liquid makes it distinctive enough for a fancy dinner party. Serve with mashed potatoes, a potato gratin, or buttered egg noodles.¹⁵

While concision was important to Maria, length in and of itself was not. 'If it was just padding, she'd get rid of it,' Stevens recalled. 'But at the same time, if you needed to write a three-paragraph instruction procedure on how to cut chicken thighs, she was like, "Write as long as you need to there." She always encouraged specificity in the instruction. There's a lot of work that goes into writing a recipe that makes a reader go, "Oh, I really want to make that." Especially when they're just starting out as a cook. It takes a lot of work to get something that feels neat and tidy and effortless.'

Gran Cocina Latina

Another book that Maria edited was the 902-page *Gran Cocina Latina*, an encyclopedic guide to the food of Latin America written by the Cuban-American scholar and chef Maricel Presilla. The book was published in 2013, nearly twenty years after Presilla and Maria had initially discussed it. Presilla and I recently talked about the book's long road to publication.

‘I met Maria in Spain in 1992, after I gave a talk about Latin America at a conference we were both attending,’ she said. ‘In 1993, I went to her office and I brought her the idea I had for a cookbook, starting with where I come from. Immediately, Maria said, “This is too narrow.” She asked to see the material that I had on Latin America, and she loved it and said, “This is the book that we should write.”’

The method by which that book came to exist was unusual, to say the least. ‘We developed this process where I would pick her up from her apartment in Manhattan and then we would drive out to her house in Pennsylvania,’ said Presilla. ‘We would be there for the whole weekend. I would write a chapter and print two copies, and then I would read it to her, and she would say, “Okay, let’s change this, let’s change that.”’

At Maria’s behest, the two agreed early on that the book should not be structured around individual chapters exploring each country in Latin America; organizing the book in that fashion wouldn’t be useful to the average reader looking for a weeknight recipe. Instead, Presilla divided the recipes into chapters with titles such as ‘The Tamal Family’ and ‘Tropical Roots and Starchy Vegetables.’¹⁶ Not bucketing the recipes by country also allowed Presilla to highlight the interconnectedness of the region’s diverse food cultures, showing readers, say, the difference between Guatemalan tamales made from nixtamalized corn and fresh corn tamales from the Mexican state of Michoacán.

‘Maria understood the consumer,’ Presilla told me. ‘She understood that Americans, for whom this book was written, want categories, and that would be the clearest way to present the food. That master plan worked really well. But she understood that I didn’t just want to do a book of recipes. The scope was always going to be larger. She trusted me because I was an academic.’

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Like other authors that Maria worked with – including me – Presilla was surprised by the level of detail her editor demanded. When Presilla began working on the book, she was not a professional recipe writer trained to create super-precise instructions. Maria required that she measure every single item in every single test and, as with Stevens, write each step in a way that would make sense even to relatively inexperienced cooks.

‘She liked my writing, but she thought that I needed to go deeper into each recipe,’ Presilla said. ‘She demanded so much detail from me. What kind of pot? What’s the size? What’s happening inside the pot? Is it bubbling or is it not? I had to measure everything. I would say eight ears of corn and she would say, “What do you mean eight ears of corn? How big are the ears?” She drilled me on that. She made me go deeper.’

Presilla completed the first draft of *Gran Cocina Latina* around a decade after she and Maria had first discussed the book; the manuscript was more than 2,000 pages long and was delivered to Maria’s office in multiple boxes. The next step was to edit it down to a publishable length. ‘We cut three things that I saw as essential: a beautiful chapter with pizzas and pastas, a much bigger chapter on ingredients than what was published, and a 40-page bibliography,’ Presilla said.

Despite sacrificing that material – or perhaps thanks to doing so – Presilla and Maria went on to create one of the best books of their respective careers. Maria’s guidance was essential in helping Presilla interweave personal experiences with recipes, science, geography, history, and rigorously researched culinary information in order to bring all of it together in a vital mosaic of pan–Latin American cooking. At the outset it had seemed an impossible task, but they nailed it.

The Food Lab

Even as culinary publishing entered the social-media era, when so many publishers are seeking to parlay a writer’s Instagram following into a flash-in-the-pan success, Maria knew how to take a creative gamble on first-time authors whom she sensed had something enduring to contribute to the lineage of American cookbooks.

One such author was J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, a columnist for the website *Serious Eats* who in 20TK sold Maria his proposal for a book called *The Food Lab*. ‘Maria was one of the last people to make an offer,’ Lopez-Alt told me. ‘But she was the first person I talked to who seemed interested in the book beyond a business move. A lot of other people I talked to said things like, “Oh, we can package it this way and it’ll look like this.” Maria said, “This is a special book proposal. I want this book, and I’m not going to take no for an answer.”’

As with Rodgers, Stevens, and Presilla, Maria worked intimately with Lopez-Alt to bring his book to life. Over the five-year writing and editing process, *The Food Lab* went from the 350 pages that Lopez-Alt originally envisioned to a nearly 1600-page draft that the two considered publishing in two volumes. That idea was quashed by W.W. Norton and the manuscript was ultimately pared down to comprise a single volume of about a thousand pages. The format worked: The book has sold TK copies to date and is one of the most-admired cookbooks of the last decade.

‘I was always afraid Maria would say no to me,’ Lopez-Alt said. ‘But usually it was the opposite – she would say, “Do more.”’ He recalls that she was always encouraging – and always willing to get on board with new ideas, no matter how unusual they were.

‘Maria was good at identifying people with unique perspectives,’ Lopez-Alt continued. ‘She had a very good sense of what was going to work before the rest of the cookbook world knew that it was going to work. I think she knew what readers wanted before they knew they wanted it.’

That same uncanny foresight almost certainly played a role in Maria’s decision to take a risk on me and *Cradle of Flavor*. After all, what other established cookbook editor would’ve taken on a newbie whose topic was one of the world’s least-understood culinary regions? And yet, I like to think that it was her genuine personal curiosity and imagination, as much as any crystal ball, that ultimately drove her to acquire a book.

Molly Stevens had a similar take. ‘I think Maria *was* the reader,’ she told me.

She learned to cook through the books that she edited. She cooked more of my recipes than anyone I ever worked with. I always knew that when I was turning something in that she might take that recipe home and make it, and

if it didn't work, I was in trouble. She was the ultimate user of the book. And that's why she was so intense about not underestimating the reader, but also not assuming they have your knowledge.

It is marvellous to think that this erudite and well-travelled Manhattanite whose books have won dozens of awards was, in the end, her own 'everyreader'. From the initial proposal to the final galley proof, she was intent on placing herself inside the reader's experience, even if it meant turning on the stove and pulling out the pots and pans.

Back when I was working on the second draft of my book with Maria, she deduced how much I was struggling to explain these foreign cuisines to American readers. Virtually everything I was writing about – from basic cooking techniques to core ingredients such as palm sugar and tempeh – was a potential minefield of unfamiliarity for the typical home cook here. 'You should teach cooking classes,' Maria suggested at one point. 'That way you could better understand how to translate these things.'

Within weeks, I'd acted on her advice, signing on to teach Indonesian-Malaysian-Singaporean cooking classes at New York's Institute for Culinary Education and the New School. Many of the courses took a hybrid format: I would meet students at an Asian market I liked – an opportunity to show them how to identify and choose ingredients that might otherwise be mysterious – and then we would go back into the kitchen classroom and make dishes from those ingredients. I quickly began to see firsthand the sorts of things that were confusing to my students. They would ask simple yet utterly logical questions like, 'Is this paste ground finely enough?' or 'Is this bok choy fresh or not?'

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Maria's advice had been spot-on. In fact, it was one of the best suggestions I've ever been given about anything I've undertaken in my life. All of a sudden, I knew who I was writing my book for.

Notes

1. Zuni
2. zuni
3. Zuni
4. Zuni
5. Zuni
6. Braising draft
7. Braising draft
8. Braising draft
9. Braising draft
10. Braising draft
11. Braising draft
12. Braising draft
13. Braising draft
14. Braising draft
15. All about braising
16. Gran Cocina Latina

Chicken Legs Braised with Prunes, Green Olives & Lemon

The French have long known that chicken and prunes pair magnificently. The prunes, together with a bit of wine, give

the sauce a subtle honeyed note, and their silken texture seems just right alongside tender braised chicken. The

brininess of green olive balances all this good sweetness,

and the lemon zest gives the whole dish a bright citrusy

punch. As good as lemon zest is here, I also like to play

around with other citrus zest. I sometimes use tangerine,

for instance, or a mix of lemon and orange. Or, best of all

thin-skinned Meyer lemon with their delicate, sweet floral

perfume. Meyer lemons are only available for a few months

each winter, but they are not to be missed.

This tasty braise simmers on top of the stove for about

35 minutes, making it a quick weeknight dish - although it's

certainly elegant enough for company. For a darker, more

robust, rustic-looking dish, use red wine in place of white,

and switch to red wine vinegar as well.

Serve with mashed potatoes, a potato gratin, or

buttered egg noodles to soak up the tasty sauce.

Serves 4

Braising time: 35 to 45 minutes

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Somewhere in this sentence you need to tell us you have shifted from a generality to a comment relating to this specific recipe.

transfer 2nd para. to beginning.

lead impart contribute

Can we delete this stuff?

Whenever you can be concrete, it helps! vague general comments are NOT good.

too vague

too much already!

Conflate this sentence into the previous one + make shorter.

because of their

put this in a cook's note at the end

begin headline HERE

early put together?

distinctive a dinner party

with a darker substitute add for the

for the white wine vinegar as well.

will the noodles soak up the sauce?

also

wordy detail line of chef-y balance taste balance stuff that made you bleed turning the page before they all come how quick it is in the 2nd para! Deal with the sauce stuff briefly.

and tell us when (months) they are available.

FIGURE 1-1. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

4 whole chicken legs, or a combination of thighs and drumsticks (about 3 1/2 pounds total), rinsed and patted dry
 Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
 All-purpose flour for dredging, about 1/2 cup
 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
 1 cup dry white wine
 1 garlic clove, smashed
 4 strips lemon zest, removed with a vegetable peeler (each about 2 1/2- x 3/4-inch), or substitute orange, tangerine, or Meyer lemon (see ~~headnote~~)

cook's note ?

2 whole cloves
 3/4 cup ~~moist~~, plump, pitted dried prunes
 1/3 cup brined green olives, such as Picholine or Lucques, pitted

if they're plump, won't they be moist? also, ~~add~~ add a soaking-to-plump procedure?

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1. If using whole legs, ~~cut each apart into a thigh and a~~ ^{separate the} drumstick. To do so, turn the leg skin-side down and, with a sharp chef's or boning knife, cut along the line of yellow fat that ~~separates~~ ^{connects} the thigh ~~and~~ ^{from the to the} drumstick. This line will direct you to the exact spot where the 2 parts ~~connect~~ ^{are joined}.
2. *Dredging the chicken:* Generously season the chicken pieces all over with salt and pepper. Spread the flour in a

Need to pat pieces dry first ?

FIGURE 1-2. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

wide shallow dish (a pie plate works well), and dredge half
 the chicken piece ^{1/3} one at a time by placing one in the flour,
 turning to coat both sides, lifting and patting lightly to
 shake off any excess.

3. *Browning the chicken:* Add 2 tablespoons of oil to a
 large, deep skillet or saute pan (12- to 14-inch works well)
 over medium-high heat. Heat until the oil shimmers. Place
 the dredged chicken pieces in the pan, skin side down, and
 cook, without disturbing, until one side forms a nutbrown *good!*
 crust, about 3 to 4 minutes. Turn the chicken with tongs,
 and brown on the other side, another 3 to 4 minutes. While
 the chicken is browning, dredge the remaining pieces. Remove
 the seared chicken to a large plate, and brown with *?*
The remaining pieces. Set these aside with the others, and
 discard the flour.

4. *The aromatics and braising liquid:* Pour off the fat from
 the pan and quickly wipe out any black specks with a damp
 paper towel, being careful to leave behind the *valuable/essential* good!
 bits. Add the vinegar, wine, garlic, zest, and cloves to the
 pan, and stir with a wooden spoon to scrape up the ^{*rose*} prized
 browned bits stuck to the bottom of the pan.

5. *The braise:* Return the chicken to the ^{*skillet*} ~~pan~~ *and be sure to*
 along with any *add*
 juices that have accumulated on the plate, arranging the
 pieces so they fit in a snug single layer. Scatter over the

FIGURE 1-3. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

prunes and olives. Cover tightly, and reduce the heat to low. Braise at a gentle simmer, basting occasionally and turning the pieces with tongs halfway through, until the chicken meat is tender and pulls easily away from the bone, 30 to 40 minutes. When you baste, check to see that the liquid is simmering quietly; if it appears to be simmering too vigorously, reduce the heat or shift the pan onto a flame tamer.

6. *The finish:* Using a slotted spoon or tongs, transfer the chicken to a large platter with out stacking, and cover loosely with foil to keep warm. Skim any surface fat from the sauce with a wide spoon. Raise the heat under the pan to high, and reduce the pan juices for a 2 to 3 minutes to concentrate the flavor. The sauce should be the consistency of a thin vinaigrette. Taste for salt and pepper. ~~Finish~~ out the whole cloves and zest, if you like. Pour the juices over the chicken, and serve.

ok?
 lift the lid to
 first for vivid specificity

piece under
 "shift"
 suggests another burner

them visible?

flame tamer.

sift

Finish, out is

not so graceful a word.
 I'd use sparingly

FIGURE 1-4. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

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Chicken Legs Braised with Prunes, Green Olives & Lemon

The French have long known that chicken and prunes ^{pair} make a magnificent ^{by J} union, but it was the broad reach of the Silver Palate Cookbook in 1980's that ^{compelled} influenced discriminating American ^{cooks} ~~hosts and hostesses~~ to add ^J this combination to their repertoire. Chicken Marbella became, and remains, one of those enduring sure-to-please party ^{dishes} recipes that turn up everywhere. [While I applaud the inclusion of green olives in the Silver Palate original, I've always wanted something less sugary (it contains 1 cup brown sugar).] So I eliminated the sugar and rely on the prunes for sweetness along with the floral perfume of lemon zest - use Meyer lemons if they're in season. The fruit and the wine work together to give the sauce a subtle honeyed note, and the olives and vinegar harmonize the whole with their brininess and acidity.

This tasty braise simmers on top of the stove for about 35 minutes, making it a quick weeknight dish - although it's certainly elegant enough to serve to company. For a darker, more robust, rustic-looking dish, use red wine in place of white, and switch to red wine vinegar, too.

Serve with Parsley-Flecked Mashed Potatoes (page 00) or Buttered Egg Noodles (page 00).

This sentence makes no sense if you don't know the recipe at all. Please fix and deeply get to your point.

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FIGURE 2-1. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

Serves 4

Braising time: 35 to 45 minutes

4 whole chicken legs, or a combination of thighs and drumsticks (about 3 1/2 pounds total), rinsed and patted dry

Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

All-purpose flour for dredging, about 1/2 cup

2 tablespoons olive oil

1/4 cup white wine vinegar

1 cup dry white wine

1 garlic clove, smashed

4 strips lemon zest (preferably Meyer lemon), removed with a vegetable peeler (each about 2 1/2- x 3/4-inch)

2 whole cloves

3/4 cup moist, plump, pitted dried prunes

7 1/3 cup ^{drained} ~~pitted~~ green olives, such as Picholine or Lucques, ^{pitted}

1. If using whole legs, cut each apart into a thigh and a drumstick. To do so, turn the leg skin-side down and, with a chef's or boning knife, cut along the line of yellow fat that separates the thigh and drumstick. This line will direct you to the exact spot where the 2 parts connect.

Need to tell us when you redo the headnote why a Meyer lemon is something we should try to do of the ~~the~~ would a mix of lemon + orange do the job

FIGURE 2-2. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

2. Generously season the chicken pieces all over with salt and pepper. Spread the flour in a wide shallow dish (a pie plate works well), and dredge half the chicken piece one at a time by placing one in the flour, turning to coat both sides, lifting and patting lightly to shake off any excess.

3. Add 2 tablespoons of oil to a large, deep skillet over medium-high heat. The pan should be just large enough to hold the chicken pieces in a single layer (12- to 14-inch pan works well). Heat until the oil shimmers. Place the dredged chicken pieces in the pan, skin side down, and cook, without disturbing, until one side forms a nutbrown crust, about 3 to 4 minutes. Turn the chicken with tongs, and brown on the other side, another 3 to 4 minutes. While the chicken is browning, dredge the remaining pieces. Remove the seared chicken to a plate, and sear with remaining pieces. Set these aside with the others, and discard the flour.

4. Pour off the fat from the pan and wipe it quickly with a paper towel. Add the vinegar, wine, garlic, zest, and cloves to the pan, and stir with a wooden spoon to scrape up the prized browned bits stuck to the bottom of the pan. Return the chicken to the pan along with any juices that have accumulated on the plate, arranging it so it fits in a snug single layer. Scatter over the prunes and olives. Cover tightly, and reduce heat to low. Braise, basting

a saute pan

size please

?

clean

it

at a gentle easy simmer

The

What about the wiping thing up above?

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FIGURE 2-3. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

occasionally and turning the pieces with tongs halfway through, until the chicken meat is tender and pulls easily away from the bone, 30 to 40 minutes. When you baste, check to see that the liquid is simmering gently; if it appears to be boiling too vigorously, reduce the heat or shift the pan onto a flame tamer.

5. Using a slotted spoon or tongs, transfer the chicken to a platter and cover loosely with foil to keep warm. Skim any obvious surface fat from the sauce. Raise the heat under the pan to high, and reduce the pan juices for a 2 to 3 minutes to concentrate the flavor. Taste for salt and pepper. Fish out the whole cloves and zest, if you like. Pour the juices over the chicken, and serve.

would it
be
very saucy?

FIGURE 2-4. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

BRAISING/Poultry & Game pg. 2

Quick Lemon Chicken Braise
with Prunes + Green Olives

Chicken Legs Braised with Prunes, Green Olives & Lemon

1st sentence was dizzying and had me stopped. Avoid too many ideas jammed into a sentence. That makes it

This easy braise simmers on top of the stove for about 35 minutes, making it ideal for a quick weeknight dinner — although it's distinctive enough for a dinner party. The prunes contribute a subtle honeyed note to the sauce, and their silken texture is luxurious alongside the tender braised chicken legs. The briny green olives and sharp citrus balance all this good sweetness.

I make this chicken braise often, and I've discovered that the recipe is open to variation as long as you respect the general proportions. For example, you can substitute white wine for red wine in place of white, and switch to red wine vinegar as well. I also like to play around with the citrus flavor, by substituting tangerine zest for the lemon zest, for instance, or a mix of lemon and orange. Or, best of all, try it with thin-skinned Meyer lemon because of their sweet floral perfume.

Serve with mashed potatoes, a potato gratin, or buttered egg noodles.

Serves 4
Braising Time: 35 to 45 minutes

GLOBAL: (including thighs)

4 whole chicken legs, or a combination of thighs and drumsticks (about 3 1/2 pounds total)
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
All-purpose flour for dredging, about 1/2 cup
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Sauce needs an adj. ? lemony ? also to play against honeyed ?

Such an improvement now

Too adjectival please reword

What's the good sweetness? The prunes? you're being somewhat ponderous overexplaining every element yet we still don't have a clear picture. Can you get the prunes + olives in one sentence?

lemony!

not needed

For

you can substitute white wine for red

I combine zest with zest

if you can find them

398

Make into 1 or 2 variations, see attachment

Hope you like the edits. This was a tough one for me. In this case less is a lot more

I think when you say whole chicken legs you need to set in the fact that "thighs" are part of what you mean

FIGURE 3-1. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

1/4 cup white wine vinegar

1 cup dry white wine or dry white vermouth

1 garlic clove, smashed

4 strips lemon zest, removed with a vegetable peeler (each about 2 1/2- x 3/4-inch), or substitute orange, tangerine, or Meyer lemon (see Cook's Note, page 00)

2 whole cloves

3/4 cup plump, pitted dried prunes (If you can't find plump prunes, see Cook's note, page 00)

00)

1/3 cup brined green olives, such as Picholine or Lucques, pitted

1. *Separating chicken legs into thighs and drumsticks:* If using whole legs, separate the thigh from the drumstick. ~~To do so,~~ turn the leg skin-side down and, with a sharp chef's or boning knife, cut along the line of yellow fat that runs between the thigh and drumstick. This line will direct you to the exact spot where the 2 parts are joined.

2. *Dredging the chicken:* Rinse the chicken legs in cool water, and dry thoroughly with paper towels. Generously season all over with salt and pepper. Spread the flour in a wide shallow dish (a pie plate works well), and dredge half the chicken pieces one at a time by placing in the flour, turning to coat both sides, lifting and patting lightly to shake off any excess.

3. *Browning the chicken:* Add 2 tablespoons of oil to a large, deep skillet or saute pan (12- to 14-inch works well) over medium-high heat. Heat until the oil shimmers. Place the dredged chicken pieces in the pan, skin side down, and ~~cook~~ without disturbing, until one side forms a nutbrown crust, about 3 to 4 minutes. Turn the chicken with tongs, and

I put in variations
let this braise be
a crowd pleaser:

Semour

399

Good!

Thanks so much for all your FABulous details

FIGURE 3-2. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

brown on the other side, another 3 to 4 minutes. While the chicken is browning, pat dry the remaining pieces again and dredge them in the flour. Remove the seared chicken to a large plate without stacking, and brown the remaining pieces. Set these aside with the others, and discard the flour.

hard to not stack with

4. *The aromatics and braising liquid:* Pour off the fat from the pan and quickly wipe out any black specks with a damp paper towel, being careful to leave behind the valuable browned bits. Add the vinegar, wine, garlic, zest, and cloves to the skillet, and stir with a wooden spoon to scrape up those prized browned bits stuck to the bottom of the skillet.

Rep. by sample of food will be in one sentence.

5. *The braise:* Return the chicken to the skillet, and be sure to add any juices that have accumulated on the plate, arranging the pieces so they fit in a snug single layer. Scatter over the prunes and olives. Cover tightly, and reduce the heat to low. Braise at a gentle simmer, basting occasionally and turning the pieces with tongs halfway through, until the chicken meat is tender and pulls easily away from the bone, 30 to 40 minutes. When you lift the lid to baste, check to see that the liquid is simmering quietly; if it appears to be

simmering too vigorously, reduce the heat or place a flame tamer under the skillet.

6. *The finish:* Using a slotted spoon or tongs, transfer the chicken to a large platter to catch the juices, and cover loosely with foil to keep warm. Skim any visible surface fat from the sauce with a wide spoon. Raise the heat under the skillet to high, and reduce the pan juices for a 2 to 3 minutes to concentrate their flavor. The sauce should be the consistency of a thin vinaigrette. Taste for salt and pepper. Retrieve the whole cloves and zest, if you like; they can be an unpleasant surprise to bite down on. Pour the juices over the chicken, and serve.

400

striped

I think new it is terrific with the suggested changes

I frankly like them. It's somewhat contradictory to say "if you like" in the previous paragraph and then call them unpleasant. Just delete.

FIGURE 3-3. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

Cook's Notes

Meyer lemons

I adore the ~~fragrance and~~ ^{floral} flavor of Meyer lemons and eagerly anticipate their season each winter. A relatively new arrival on the produce scene, the Meyer lemon is a cross between a lemon and a mandarin orange that was developed over 100 years ago as an ornamental tree in China and then grown in California. But it wasn't until the 1980's that California chefs ~~tasted Meyer lemons and discovered the goodness of these pretty fruits.~~ ^{as a professional cook}

~~At first glance, Meyer lemons resemble ordinary lemons (like the Eureka and Lisbon varieties), but on closer inspection, you'll see that Meyer lemons have thin, smooth yellow skins and are a bit larger, rounder and less oblong. If you're at all unsure, scratch the skin, if it emits a sweet fragrance of citrus blossoms, it's a Meyer lemon. In addition to this lovely fragrance, what's really remarkable about Meyer lemons is the taste of the fruit, juice and even the skin. Although not quite sweet enough to eat out of hand like an orange, chopped up Meyer lemon can be added, peel and all, to salads, braises, stews, and other dishes. Since much of the floral character resides in the peel and it's thin, don't be shy about including it.~~

Like most citrus, Meyer lemons ~~are~~ a winter fruit. Look for them from November to March. Select ones that feel plump and heavy for their size with smooth skin. Because of their thin skins, Meyer lemons are more delicate than standard varieties. Store them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator and use them within a few days. Meyer lemons are grown on small farms and not usually sprayed or dyed, but it's always a good idea to wash the outside of fruit before using. Rolling the lemon back and forth on a countertop before juicing will yield more juice.

*IMHO
Meyer lemons are bigger than Eureka + Lisbon + they are + thin skinned, to me they look like small grapefruits.*

floral

as a professional cook

?

I

it

?

what a great choice

varieties in the Supermarket.

? come to us in bloom in the

FIGURE 3-4. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.

Molly

be playing around
with the citrus.

~~#~~ Use the wine + vinegar
(red or white) be affected
by the change of citrus? if so,
I'd put this para. at the end
of the recipe and elevate it to
full variation status. I have always
found this para. too loaded with
switches anyway. It's never a good idea
to give people too much freedom. Choose
1 or 2 variations. That's really best I think.
Make 10 of them Meyer Lemon Chicken since you've
got the note.

402

FIGURE 3-5. Sample edit page from *All About Braising* by Molly Stevens.