

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT
OF INTERIOR
FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE
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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release

Wild game recipes often begin with the time honored phrase, "First you catch your Whoozit ---." But in cooking coots one need not be too concerned with providing the raw material. Coots are abundant over most of America. Coots furnish shooting when other waterfowl are strangely absent. And coots are good to eat.

The American coot feeds on the better types of duck plants; wild celery, wild rice, sago pondweed and the many other aquatic foods that lend flavor to wild duck flesh. It has long been a favorite in the central and southern States. Tempting recipes have been developed, most of them with local variations. In all these recipes it is assumed that you have first "caught your coot." With the coot safely in hand, follow this bit of advice: "Always skin coots. Save only the breast, legs, liver and gizzard. Remove all fat because of its strong taste."

First, a quick method for those who don't mind a little gamey flavor: Roll the salted and peppered pieces in flour and drop into a skillet of deep hot bacon grease. Cook thoroughly and serve.

Many coot hunters won't be bothered by any other recipe, but if it is desired to subtract some of the wild taste, it may be done by squeezing lime or lemon juice on the pieces and keeping them overnight in a cool place. Another way is to soak the pieces for a few hours in a solution of equal parts of vinegar and water before cooking.

Here's a dutch oven recipe: Roll the pieces of coot in flour mixed with sage, salt and pepper. Brown in a skillet with bacon grease. Place in a dutch oven, or a heavy pot in the oven. Sprinkle well with chopped onion and garlic, add a very small amount of water and simmer for an hour or more. Meanwhile, if you like sauce, brown some flour in the skillet to which a generous amount of butter has been added, add chopped parsley and green pepper, a little Worcestershire, a touch of rosemary, and a very small amount of brown sugar. Pour this over the meat a few minutes before serving.

Another good sauce may be made by mixing thoroughly a half-cup of butter, a tablespoon of dry mustard, a glass of green grape jelly, and a quarter-cup of lime juice. Just before serving mix in a quarter-cup of sherry.

Ever try a coot stew? Here's how it's done: Cut into pieces and place in enough cold water to cover. Add salt, pepper, herbs as desired, a small amount of Worcestershire, and raw potatoes, onion and carrots, chopped into small pieces. Stew slowly until the meat is well done.

Coots served Hassenfeffer style have surprised and delighted many a skeptic. This calls for the breasts and legs of two or three coots, soaked for two days in equal parts of vinegar and water to which is added 1 large sliced onion, cloves, bay leaves, salt and pepper. At the end of two days remove and brown in hot butter, turning often. Add gradually some of the sauce in which the coot was pickled, let simmer until tender (about 30 minutes). Just before serving, stir in a cup of sour cream.

Out of the deep South comes Coot Gumbo: Place the pieces from three coots in a kettle with enough lightly salted water to cover. After simmering for about 2 hours, add 1 quart of either fresh or canned tomatoes, 1 large onion chopped into small pieces, and 1 sprig or two of parsley. Brown 3/4 of a pound of diced cured ham in a skillet and add it to the kettle. Wash, stem and cut into half-inch slices 1 quart of okra. Brown this in the ham fat and add it also to the kettle. Continue to cook slowly for another hour or two until the coot and ham are tender and the sauce has a fairly thick consistency. Add salt to taste and a dash of cayenne. Serve with flaky boiled rice.

Coot hunters have developed many other ways to cook their favorite bird. Individual tastes vary. But on one point they are agreed, "Coots are good shooting; good eating."