



### Poussins en demi-deuil (Hens in Mourning)

*This classic French dish from Lyon, the culinary capital of France, means “in half-mourning,” and refers to the effect of thinly sliced truffles in a black lace veil covering the bird. The traditional recipe uses a whole chicken, but using poussins (baby chickens) or Cornish hens allows you to offer individual whole birds to each diner, without destroying the lovely lace pattern for presentation. The dish is wonderful on its own, as the birds will be juicy and the truffles imparting intense flavor. But if you wish, you can serve it with the included pan sauce.*

*2 servings*

### Ingredients

2 poussins (baby chickens) or Cornish hens, about 1 ½ pounds each  
1 fresh black truffle, about 1 ounce, or 1 ounce grated truffle in olive oil [see Chef's Note]  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted  
Gray salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

#### *For the pan sauce:*

½ cup dry white wine  
½ cup chicken stock  
1 teaspoon chervil leaves, minced  
½ cup heavy cream (optional)  
1 tablespoon brandy (optional)  
Unsalted cold butter, for mounting

*[Chef's Note: Poussins would be the best choice for this recipe, as they are very small, delicate and flavorful. However, you may use Cornish hens or squab for this dish. Each bird has a slightly different flavor profile and size.]*

*There is nothing so earthy and evocative as a fresh truffle in season. However, these capricious temptresses of the earth only show themselves at certain times of the year, and aren't as widely available in the US as they are in Europe. We enjoy truffles year-round, using flash-frozen grated truffles preserved in olive oil. To substitute, carefully spread the grated truffles under the skin as you would sliced truffles. You won't get the same veil effect, but the speckling will be intriguing, and the unique taste will be imparted to the breast meat. ]*

### Preparation

Slice the truffle as thinly as possible using a truffle shaver. Set aside.

Wash and dry the birds. Carefully loosen the skin from the breast of each bird without tearing. You can gently run your fingers under the skin and spread them slowly to loosen the skin, working first from the tail, then the neck. Use ½ of the truffle for each bird, and gently lift the skin, laying the truffle slices in a lace pattern over the breast meat. It helps to keep the skin from touching the truffles until you are finished, as it's very difficult to shift the truffles once they are placed. When finished, slide one tablespoon of butter per bird under the skin and over the truffles, and press the skin down onto the meat. If you have any remaining truffle bits, mix them with the remaining butter and refrigerate until ready to roast. Tie the legs together with kitchen string, if desired. Refrigerate the birds for a few hours or overnight, as this will give time for the truffle to flavor the meat. If pressed for time, you can omit this step and roast them immediately.

*February 2006*

Remove the birds from the refrigerator at least 20 minutes before roasting, preheat the oven to 400°F and lightly butter a roasting pan large enough to fit both of the birds without crowding. Melt the remaining tablespoon of butter and brush over the birds. Season with gray salt and freshly ground pepper inside and out, and roast in the center of the oven for 20 minutes, uncovered. Baste with the pan juices, and continue to baste every five minutes until the internal temperature of the thigh comes to 165-170° F. Remove the birds to a platter, cover with foil and allow to rest while you prepare the pan sauce.

*For the pan sauce:*

Skim the fat from the pan drippings using a spoon or a degreasing cup. Add the white wine to the pan juices and bring to a boil, being sure to deglaze the *fond* (brown bits) from the roasting pan. Reduce by one half, then add the chicken stock, reducing again by one half. Add the chervil and brandy (optional). If using heavy cream, stir it in now. If not, stir the sauce, and mount with butter. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

*[Chef's Note: Mounting with butter, or "monter au beurre" in French, simply means to finish a sauce with butter. After a sauce is cooked and seasoned, adding a knob or two of cold butter helps to bring the sauce together, adding creaminess and thickness. It is essential that you use cold butter, and only add it after removing the sauce from the heat. This technique produces a lightly thickened sauce without having to resort to using a roux or other starch-based thickener.]*

**Service**

Place each finished bird on a serving plate. Just before service, lightly drizzle sauce around the bird. This dish can be served with a side of simply roasted potatoes or with our [Balsamic Roasted Root Vegetables](#).

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February 2006