

Guinea Fowl

A Guide To Raising Guineas



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*Thanks to Kim Derr, Jennifer Flippen, Katy and Jason Caselli and Margaret Hargrave
for their insights and help.*

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A Guide To Raising Guineas

INTRODUCTION

The guinea fowl, Gallina, or Pintado (*Numida Meleagris*) is bred for a variety of reasons. It is about twenty-two inches long, and from standing high on its legs, and having loose, full plumage can appear larger than it really is. This plump and well-proportioned bird is in the same order as the pheasant and the turkey and in many restaurants is considered to be quite a delicacy. But guinea fowls are more than a meal; they are versatile birds that can bring a lot of excitement and assistance to any farm or garden. As an alarm system they can't be beat, setting up a racket that will scare away intruders or unwelcome in-laws. Gardeners love these birds because they eat a variety of insects, making them worth their weight in expensive insecticide. And then, there are people who have fallen in love with their quirkiness and the easy of care associated with these gray birds with featherless heads.



Keeping Guineas can be a lot of fun. Their characteristics include occasionally aggressive, vain (they will spend a lot of time by a mirror or reflective glass door if you have one!), noisy, funny, sweet, entertaining, shy, wary, alert, excellent at pest control, good ‘watchdogs’, flighty and wild!



“He spends a good part of the day admiring his reflection, I was glad to finally get a photo.”

HISTORY

The Guinea fowl is a native of Africa and derived its name from Guinea, a part of the west coast of that continent. There are several species of guinea fowl including White-breasted, Black, Helmeted, Plumed, Crested, and Vulturine. The common domestic guineas are descended from one of these wild species (*Numida Meleagris*).

In its natural habitat they associate in large flocks and frequent open glades, the borders of forests, and banks of rivers, which offer abundant supplies of grain, berries, and insects, in quest of which they wander during the day, and collect together at evening, and roost in clusters on the branches of trees or shrubs.



Guinea Fowl on the African grass plains

The guinea fowls make very little use of their wings, and if forced to take to flight, will only fly a short distance before touching down again to continue rapidly by foot, threading in and out of the mazes of brushwood and dense herbage, for security.

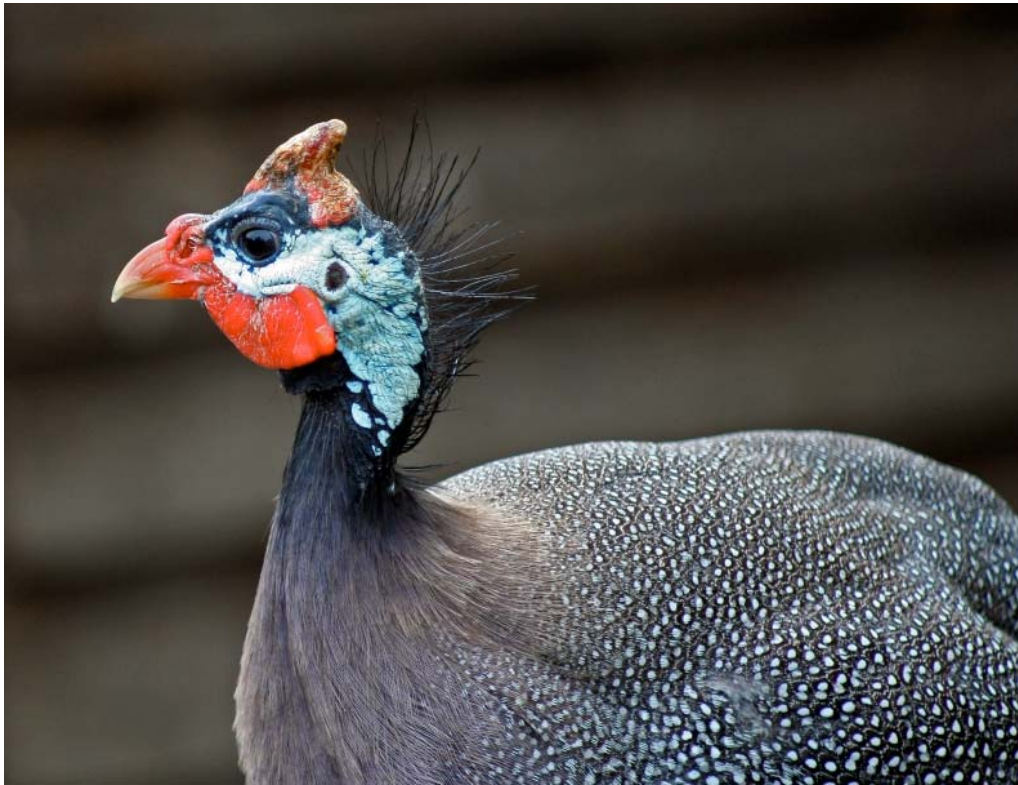


The Vulturine Guinea fowl – not widely domesticated, so most commonly seen outside of their native habitat in Wildlife Parks and Zoos.



*A line of crested guinea fowl,
Mkuze game reserve, South
Africa*

The Helmeted Guinea fowl is by far the most common domesticated guinea fowl and can currently be found extensively in Europe and the USA (amongst other places) with over 20 colour variations.



The Helmeted Guinea fowl

There are three principal varieties of domesticated guinea fowl:

- The original colouring is 'Pearl Gray' which consists of a dark-grey background with white pearling (dotting) on the entire body.
- 'White' (solid white all over)
- 'Lavender' (similar to the original 'Pearl Gray' but the base colour is pale gray or lavender).

Other guinea fowl colourings include royal purple, bronze, buff, violet, porcelain and powder blue.



GUINEAS AND CHICKENS

Many who keep guineas, also keep chickens. If you already keep chickens, then the first thing to realise with Guineas is that they are nothing like chickens in their behaviour – they just don't think the same way. They are much more in touch with their wild side, and even as 'chicks' (keets) are not very responsive to being handled and can be quite nervous to even have anyone near them.

They can rid a garden almost completely of insects and do not scratch *as much* as chickens and therefore are less destructive than chickens can be.

They can be kept alongside chickens but this is usually most successful in a free-ranging situation over a large area - you will probably find that the guineas keep themselves completely separate (although the chickens will still benefit from their loud warning calls if a hawk or other predator comes into their radar).

They are game birds and even when raised with chickens as they grow up they will usually "revert" to guinea-like behaviour. The males, although without spurs, can inflict serious injury on other poultry with their short, hard beaks.

Although many do bring up keets quite happily with their chickens, once they get to a few months old and start free ranging the Guineas usually will segregate themselves. They do tend to show more aggression when in smaller groups - it seems that larger groups of guineas (15 plus) are less likely to bother chickens than a smaller group of 6 or less are, but there is no definite solution for co-existence between chickens and guinea fowl.

If sharing a poultry yard you may find that you would like to give the guineas full free-ranging opportunities, whilst still keeping the chickens who are less able to protect / defend themselves, and do not have the same inclination to roam far and wide safely in their pen. One solution for that is to have a fence high enough for the chickens not to fly out, but with a landing board around the top for the guineas to be able to safely fly in and out as they please.

Some people have found that their guineas and chickens will live happily together – even roosting together in the same coop. Others have said it is like a war has broken out. If you do find yourself in the middle of a war, then you may find yourself having to pick sides (or acting as a diplomat!).

If Guineas and Chickens are mixed they can breed together (although the progeny will be sterile) – those babies are not a pretty sight!



“Getting ready to roost for the night - my young hens are the boss when it comes to the pecking order and who gets priority on the prime roosting real estate.”



"We raised 20 african guinea fowl this year because I read in a book that they are great at eating weed seeds, ticks, and assorted other bugs.

Well, yes... but they also scream their heads off at every opportunity, (the neighbors are going cross-eyed from the sheer volume and are having secret meetings to plan a midnight commando - guinea assassination raid on my coop), enjoyed (i.e. destroyed) my tomatoes, beet greens, carrots, swiss chard and lettuce in one afternoon, as well as trampled (i.e. smashed) over the garden en masse everytime they got excited over something...

I discovered too late that the lady who wrote the 'Gardening with Guineas' book raised ROSES... not veggies. And sorry to tell ya', but they DO scratch like chickens - turned my nice veggie garden beds into dust baths.

We may keep 2 or 3 for tick and weed control and general amusement factor (they are hysterical to watch), but the rest are getting roasted for sunday dinner or going in the soup pot. Roast guinea... Mmmmmm, yummy. In 5 star restaurants everywhere."

Jennifer Flippen

FEEDING AND HOUSING

It is believed by many that Guinea fowl do not need any looking after at all, but this is not strictly speaking the case – however, if they have the freedom to roam safely and a protection from the worst of the elements and predators, the care they need is comparatively little.

The Guinea Fowl is a natural wanderer, and will happily roam far and wide. Assuming you are free-ranging them in an area that has a lot of natural food available it will pick up a lot of it's food as it goes.

They will eat insects, snakes and small rodents but do also need green food all year round, so if you live in an area that does not have any natural greenery for them in the winter months, then things like lettuces and spinach etc. should be made available for them to supplement their diet.



Guinea Hens in a garden in London, England

Adult Guineas should be fed a regular meal every day. In the summer when the berries, grass and bugs are in high supply it may seem as though they are hardly touching their supplied food, but they must always have one meal at night, or they will scarcely ever roost at home. A normal chickens layers mash or layers pellets would be fine for their supplied meal, or any game bird feed.



*“For some reason, my Guineas eat like this a lot.
It is quite amusing to watch!”*

They can be quite happy to roost in trees. You may find that even with a coop available some will refuse to use it (especially in the nicest weather), but they are safest if they can be shut in at night. In wet, cold and windy weather most (if not all) will use their shelter (if one is available) - and even seem glad of it.



Young adult Helmeted Guinea fowl on pine tree branch

In common with chickens and other groups of poultry a pecking order must be established within your flock of guinea fowl. Even amongst their own kind the establishment of a pecking order can be a less than peaceful process. Although sometimes stressful for the guinea fowl (and for us!) the establishment of a pecking order is a natural and important part of keeping a flock of guinea fowl. As with chickens, there may be times when you find you have one (most likely a male) which is just too aggressive, and for the safety of the flock must be removed – either temporarily to a separate area or permanently if the situation cannot be resolved.

There may even be one that is shunned by all the others, and the lone guinea will call for his flock but be repeatedly chased away. It can be heartbreaking, but there is really not much you can do other than ensure that the lone guinea is able to eat and drink (perhaps put some food and water in different places) and can get safely into the coop at night (ideally as the first or last one in). If you are able to, provide a few hiding places

in the coop such as a little shelf or a secluded corner, bail of straw away from a wall, or even a plank of wood leaned against a wall – any and all of which should provide a bit of extra security for him. (These kind of hiding places, may also serve to encourage the notoriously shy guinea hens to lay inside the coop instead of miles away aswell!) Often this kind of aggressive / possessive behaviour within a flock is related to the male springtime mating season and is only temporary. Sometimes a lone guinea will find a safe refuge free ranging with another group of livestock (if you have any others) such as chickens, ducks, goats etc.

Guineas need more housing space per bird than a chicken of the same size would - about 3-4 square feet per guinea if they are able to free-range all day (more if they can't). It is not their natural instinct to sleep in a coop, but they can be trained to do so and will be safer from predators if you can encourage them inside. They generally do not like going into a dark building, so a light can help encourage them if they are resistant. If they do roost outside they are likely to be in the lower branches of a tree, or on a thick bush.



If they do roost outside they are likely to be in the lower branches of a tree, or on a thick bush.



"He was the only guinea fowl at the wildlife rescue center that I worked at in Thailand a few years ago and he bonded with me, following me everywhere. He held his own as far as roosters were concerned as there were frequent fights for dominance. As you see from the short video, he was very sociable, enjoyed people and this, I understand, was because there were no other guinea fowl around with which to group."

Regards, Sheryl

A video of "Roger, the guinea fowl" can be seen from the ['Guinea Fowl : A Guide To Raising Guineas'](#) Video page

FREE-RANGING

If you are starting with adult guinea fowl, then keeping them in their coop / pen for a few weeks will help them know where home is. The same is true of keets that have been brooded by you (those attached to an adult should be shown where to go by 'mum', but it can still be helpful to keep mum and the keets in their own little safe area for the first few weeks of their life – Guinea hens are often not the most careful of mothers).

The length of time you keep them in their new home really depends on you and your situation (how close the neighbours are etc.) and if the keets were brooded in their coop or in the house (if they have already moved once they may need a little longer to feel established in their new 'home'). Some have been unlucky enough to lose all their guineas on their first outing – not because they were caught by anything, but because they just wandered off and found somewhere else to roost. There is no set holding time which will definitely make them know where to come back to, but they are better able to feel rooted after at least a few weeks in their new accommodation.

The first few times they are let out could be only a couple of hours before dark – that way they should not go too far before they come back to roost (a light in the coop can help encourage them in).

They get very attached to each other, and another good way of showing them where 'home' is (apart from the regular daily meal) is to just let a handful out for the first few days of their 'release'. They should do a bit of exploring but stay close to the rest of the flock (calling to each other).

Try to get them used to coming in for their ‘home’ meal about an hour before it gets dark. If it starts to get dark before they come home then they will probably roost in a tree or bush somewhere else.

Guinea fowl will free range at quite a distance, and can potentially be a pest to neighbours – they are also inexplicably drawn to roads.



If they can get onto a road they will!

Do not let their natural preference for running over flying fool you into thinking a fence will keep a domesticated guinea in – they roost in the branches of trees (sometimes flying straight to the top!) and so hopping over a 6 or 12 or 20 foot fence would not pose much of a problem for them.

If you want, or need, to stop them roaming so far then clipping the flight feathers of one of their wings may help with this (as it puts them off balance), another way would be to order chicks (Keets) and have one wing pinioned (where the last joint of wing is removed). Guinea keets

may be pinioned after they are about 1 or 2 weeks old. It is more difficult to pinion a full-grown bird, and not advisable unless you really know what you are doing - there is a good chance of excessive bleeding.

Measures like these will help reduce their ability to fly over a fence, but equally it will be increasing the danger from predators as they will be less able to get away from them.



PREDATORS

Although guinea fowl and their eggs are susceptible to the usual predators that plague poultry keepers lives (such as fox, possum, coyote, mink etc.) they are at their most vulnerable when first free-ranged as keets as they are very easily picked off by a hawk.



The Hawk – not such a danger for the full-grown guinea fowl, but potentially these are the biggest killers of a not yet yard-smart Keet

As adults they can be a formidable opponent - a group of charging adult Guineas can see off many predators. There is no absolute guarantee of safety for them whilst free-ranging, but they are naturally quite well equipped to protect themselves (or run for cover).

Other, sometimes forgotten, but potentially no less dangerous predators are your own or a neighbours pet dog(s).



"One afternoon my husband Jason let our Boston Terrier outside to go potty but then was distracted away by our daughter who had a homework question at the computer. As he was helping her, he heard an odd noise and looked up from the computer at the window right above it. One of our nine guinea fowl that roam our property daily had flown against the window just in front of him, filling the entire frame up with an explosion of feathers. The guinea then tried the window right next to the other with the same calamitous results, and my husband jumped up and raced out of the house, just in time to see the dog with a mouthful of feathers. The bird flapped away as Jason chased the dog into the house and into his crate. Then he went outside and looked for the bird. I came home from work at this point and we searched the woods around the house and in the neighbors' yards. Our other eight lavender guineas went to their shed peaceably and we looked for an additional 2 hours to no avail.

When we gave the bird up for lost at nightfall, we came into the house and cooked dinner, cleaned up and went to sleep as usual. I thought I heard a few chirps and went out with a flashlight in case he had come back. In the morning I heard a few more chirps and went out a back door to look and listen. I stared out into the morning, thinking it had to be close -- very close -- but why couldn't I see it? I turned to go back in, and there I finally saw the bird, looking at me over the ottoman. He had been camped out behind the wood burning stove all night. The bird

stretched its neck to look at me, and chirped questioningly. Our large cat was on his belly, watching him. I gave the bird some millet and while it was busy eating I grabbed him and placed him in the shed. Though he was missing feathers, he was able to fly out with the rest the next day, and we soon could not tell which one it was who had spent the night making a mess behind the stove. When he entered the house, probably because Jason had left the front door open while retrieving the dog, the bird had raced in, gone down a flight of stairs and through three rooms, to settle behind the stove.

Then there was the day Jason noticed the Guineas during a rainstorm, all lined-up at the window looking in, sopping wet, looking forlorn and needy. Such amusing creatures. Always a source of entertainment, rain or shine!"

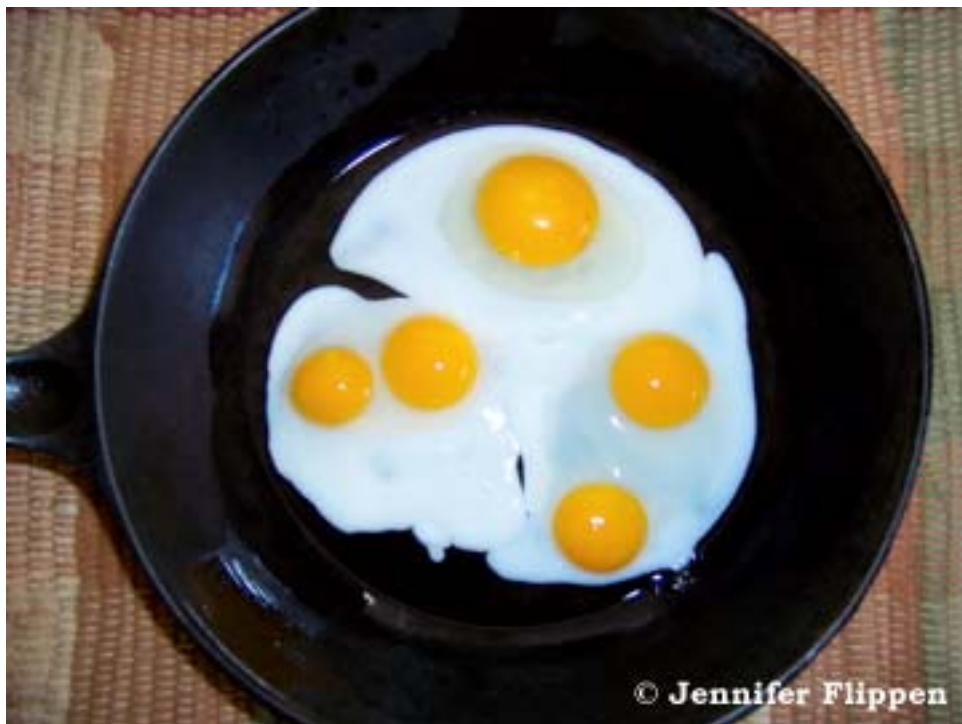
Katy Caselli
Durham, NC

A video of Katy and Jason Caselli's Lavender Guinea fowl in "ambush" mode can be seen on the ['Guinea Fowl : A Guide To Raising Guineas'](#) Video page

EGGS

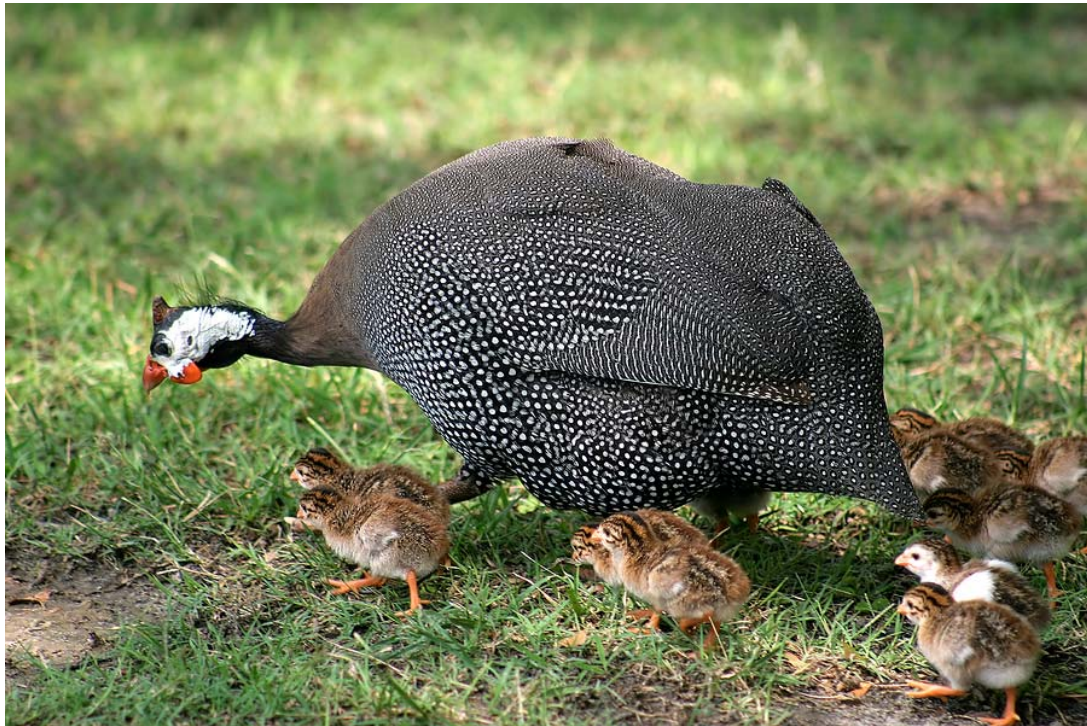
Young guinea hens will start laying from about 6 months old and tend to lay around 60-100 eggs a year (primarily in the spring and summer – March or April to around October). Due to their natural free ranging instincts you will be lucky if you can find even half of the eggs – they are very good at hiding their nests!

Guinea eggs are slightly smaller than a ‘normal’ chicken egg and have a rounder shape. They are edible and have a very rich taste. The shells can be very hard to crack – but it’s worth it ☺



“These are some of our first eggs from our young Guinea Hens... one is normal and two are double yolked - what a surprise! (and very YUMMY!)”

HATCHING AND RAISING KEETS



Natural Hatching

It is very difficult to distinguish the cock from the hen, the main physical difference being in the colour and size of the wattles, which are more of a red hue in the cock, and more tinged with blue in the hen. In the females both the wattles and helmet are more swept back and smaller. The cock has a more stately strut.

The physical differences between the two sexes are relatively small, but from about 3 months old and onwards the easiest way to tell the males from the females is in their call. The females have a two-syllable call something like “buck-wheat, buck-wheat” or “pot-rack, pot-rack”. Whilst the males tend to have a one syllable machine gun kind of sound. When excited both males and females use a one-syllable cry, the male never has

uses two syllables whatever the situation - in both cases the warning call is a real racket! ☺

In their wild flocks Guineas tend to mate in pairs, and this is also likely to be the case in a domestic flock if there are an equal number of males and females, but one male to every four to six females would be sufficient.

The guinea-hen is not naturally inclined to incubating her own eggs when in a confined environment. Those with a broody hen handy, may wish to put that hen to work hatching the eggs and leave the guinea fowl to continue her egg laying. As with other poultry young, keets are susceptible to the cold, and if reared within a flock will do better in the summer months (if hand-rearing it does not make much difference as artificial heating can be used). The guinea fowl may hatch another brood later if she feels inclined and if so she will generally rear a large brood, often of twenty or more.

She usually lays on a dry bank, in secret places; and a hedgerow a quarter of a mile off is quite as likely to contain her nest as any situation nearer her home. Once a guinea-hen has gone broody and started to set she will not move off the nest, even if a predator comes at her. Often the male of the pair will stand guard nearby (at least during the day), but she is still very vulnerable to attack and a lot of sitting hens can be lost in this way.

If you would like to encourage her to make her nest inside, try to give her something to hide behind, such as a plank of wood leaned up against the wall, or some bales of straw that will give her a little hideaway.

Unlike a chicken who will wait until all chicks are out, as soon as some of the guinea keets hatch and start moving about, the guinea hen is likely to leave the nest. If that does happen, then any abandoned eggs may still have a chance of hatching if they can be swiftly collected and placed under a broody hen or in an incubator.

If you only have one Guinea hen then it is advisable not to let her sit on eggs if you can help it (especially if it is away from the safety of the coop). Her 'partner' may stand guard during the day, but he is likely to go home at night when she most needs him. She is likely not to move for anything – food, water, even a predator attack.

Often, more than one Guinea hen will contribute to the nest (up to 40 eggs can be set at any one time), and it may be that there are more than one sitting on the nest.



© Chris Eason

You may find your missing Guinea-Hen returning one day with a few extra additions 😊

Hatching in an Incubator

The hatching period of a guinea fowl egg is around 26 - 28 days. Fertile guinea hatching eggs can be purchased online from hatcheries or through sites such as ebay (they can also be purchased as keets and adults from local or online sources - all income generating possibilities you may wish to consider yourself once your own flock is established), but perhaps the easiest way if you already have adult guineas (or neighbours with some!) is to find a few eggs in a field or hedgerow and incubate them yourself.

Guinea eggs are smaller than chicken eggs, and more round (2 guinea eggs are approximately the equivalent of one large chickens egg). If there are guineas in an area, check in shrubs, ditches or patches of wildflowers for a nest with eggs. The guinea hen will pick a spot in which she feels hidden or protected. The nest itself will often be nothing more than a depression in the ground. It may not be that easy to find a nest because the female can be pretty crafty about choosing her location.

If you have some familiarity with guineas and are able to watch their movements during the day, you can most likely find a nest with eggs. The male stays with the female until she starts to sit on the eggs, and then he stays nearby during the day. Some careful observation of the male may even lead you to a nest. People have reported a different kind of cackle from the female after she has laid an egg, and this may help you in the search.

She is very shy, and, if the eggs are taken from her nest, will desert it, and find another; a few should, therefore, always be left, and it should never be visited when she is in sight. Collected hatching eggs should be stored in a cool place and used within 1-2 weeks.



Once you have the eggs, it's time to start incubating them. The entire process takes between 26 and 28 days. The most important things to provide at this stage are humidity and the proper temperature. The humidity is important so that the eggs do not dry out and cause the keets to stick to the inside of the shell and hinder their development (the gentle action of turning the eggs also helps with this).

There are two types of incubators, one is known as a forced-draft incubator, and has a fan to circulate the air. The other type is known as a still-air machine and has no fan. Incubators vary from manufacturer to manufacturer so you should always follow the instructions given with your particular machine. It is likely that the temperature setting for a forced-draft incubator will be around 99.5 to 99.7 degrees F. with a 57 to 58 % humidity. In a still-air incubator the temperature is likely to be a little higher at around 102 / 103 degrees F. Some manufacturers will recommend that changes to the heat and humidity are made during the final week or few days of incubation.

The eggs should be turned at least twice a day. Some incubators have automatic egg turners that will make your job easier. However, if you turn them over manually, set up a workable schedule so you don't miss a day. When turning, if you spot any rotting or damaged eggs those should be removed and thrown out.

Once you have the proper level of humidity and the correct temperature, all you need to do is turn the eggs regularly and wait. It will take around 26-28 days for your Guineas to hatch and up to 48 hours from the first crack of shell to the final escape. Under all the right conditions, a successful hatch rate of 90% is not unreasonable.

It can be concerning if they take hours to break free of their shells, but it is usually best not to interfere (I know it is hard not to – you may have to sit on your hands!). I am not sure about the exact science of it but the hatching process has something to do with the carbon dioxide level in the egg and the rate of the mix is affected by how and when the keet breaks

the air sac and shell. If the keet seems to be having trouble or taking a long break, it is not necessarily because it is too tired and needs help, there is other ‘scientific stuff’ going on.

Please Note : If the temperatures etc. I have given conflict with instructions given by the manufacturer of your incubator ALWAYS follow their guidelines over mine – not all incubators are created equal.



A video can of a Keet hatching can be seen on the ['Guinea Fowl : A Guide To Raising Guineas'](#) Video page

Raising Keets (Guinea Fowl Young)

When the babies hatch, be prepared for a flurry of activity! The young are called "keets" and they are active very shortly after hatching. Smaller than baby chicks and a lot faster, the next step in caring for your hatchlings is to keep them secure. They can easily slip through one-inch poultry mesh, so have plan "B" in effect before the cracked eggshells slide off the keet's head.

Breeders have learned that incubated keets can do well when they are placed within the flock immediately after hatching. A hen will easily adopt the babies and raise them as her own, even if her keets are older and larger than the recently hatched ones. This trait may have instinctively developed from the dangers of nature in which losing a parent is more than just a possibility. Communal nests keep the species alive and well.

The free-ranging guinea hen is not a naturally very good mother and can easily lose upwards of 75% of her babies as she wanders around looking for food - she often just tends to forget about them and leaves them behind. She is also what we would consider quite careless with her brood, and is likely to take her keets through wet grass or lead them far from home. Some of the best mothers for keets can be a broody chicken (these will often serve both to hatch and care for the keets).

Brooding Keets

If you don't have a flock to put the young keets in (or if you do, but would rather hand-rear them), you can parent them yourself. It takes about 6 weeks from hatch to full feathers. You would need somewhere to keep the keets and this is generally known as a 'brooder'.

The purpose of the brooder is to keep them warm and secure until they have grown enough feathers and size to keep themselves relatively warm and safe in the outside world. However, even with full feathers they won't be their full adult size and so you may still want to keep them restricted for a few more weeks so that they know where 'home' is and are better equipped to care for themselves in the outside world.

If you are brooding them in your house then something as simple as a cardboard box and a 40 or 60 watt bulb could be enough for them – at least to start with. They grow quickly and so may need upgraded brooder boxes / pens as you go along. If they are not being brooded in a warm house (or are showing clear signs of being cold, like huddling together), then they will probably need a dedicated heat lamp. Provided they can still be kept sufficiently warm, free of drafts and secure from predators you may prefer to put them in a section of their soon to be 'adult' quarters rather than keep them in your house.

For the first two weeks, the temperature should be set at 95° F, but each week thereafter, it can be gradually decreased by 5°. Unless they start showing signs of being too cold, continue in this manner until the brooding temperature is the same as the average night time one.

In their brooder they will need a source of heat, a constant supply of fresh clean water, food and initially some kind of lining / bedding such as paper towels. These will probably need to be changed several times each day to keep the brooder as clean as possible.

Paper towels are good for the first few days of the keets life because they are easy to walk on (newspaper can be a bit slippery) and unlike pine shavings there is not much likelihood they could try to eat and choke on them. After about a week it is usually safe to change them over to a pine shavings floor (or similar), as by that time they should have gotten the hang of eating their proper food from the feeder.

Keets can survive on chick starter food but they are more suited to game or turkey starter food which tends to have a higher protein content (these feeds can come medicated to aid in the prevention of coccidiosis – if you have purchased your keets vaccinated for coccidiosis then you would not need to purchase a medicated feed).

If you have brooded chicks before you may notice that it is essentially the same process. Some keepers have even kept both chicks and keets together in the same brooder, and eating the same chick starter food.

There are differences in chick and game / turkey starter foods so if you do give them the same food, whatever food you give will not be completely ideal for both parties (the guinea keet recommended protein level in feed is about 25 % and a Turkey or Game starter food is usually the ideal for them). If you are considering that approach then the main things you will need to be aware of are:

- Keets eat more than chicks and need to be fed within 6 hours of being hatched.
- Chicks grow faster than Keets - although it does not (to my knowledge) happen much in practice, in theory it makes the keets more of a risk for being trampled on and pecked at.
- Both Keets and Chicks should have food available at all times, but the Keets *really* need it - they are so active that if left without food for only a few hours, they can die (if you run out of your starter food for any reason egg boiled hard, chopped very fine, and mixed with oatmeal can be used instead to give you a chance to get to the shops).

Despite what you might think looking at the parents, baby keets are really very cute. Those of the Pearl variety resemble young quail when hatched. The first feathers, which are brown, are replaced gradually by the 'pearled' feathers as they get older.



Keets at a few days old

If you are hand-rearing your keets, then handling little and often will help to tame them (or at least make them a little more tame than they would otherwise be). Millet is a good treat for Guineas and will aid you in getting them to come when called and eat from your hand – 'treat' being the operative word (if you give it all the time it will lose its effect).

They will usually be perching by about two and half weeks (assuming they have one). Adding a mirror in the brooder can also be a source of amusement - for them and for you!

By about six weeks old they can start to move on to their adult grower food. This will usually be a regular turkey grower feed with around 17 – 18 % protein. If you are raising them with chickens then their normal hen layer food should be fine for them (the guineas will be adding a lot of other bugs and things to their own diet – especially once they start foraging freely). The starter to grower switch over is usually a gradual process over a couple of weeks by mixing the two feeds such as 90 % starter to 10 % grower at the beginning and 90% grower to 10% starter by the end (roughly – it does not have to be as exact as that!).

6 weeks old is also a good time to move them to an area or holding pen within their ‘adult’ coop if they are not there already. They may still need extra heat if the weather is cold - especially at night - so check to see if they are huddling etc. A holding pen within the main coop is also particularly useful if you are intending to try having the guineas living with an existing flock of other guineas or chickens etc. – it gives them a chance to see and get used to each other as ‘housemates’ before they are actually completely mingled in.



*A face only a mother could love?
Keet at about 6 weeks old*

By the time the birds are about 2 months old, the brown feathers have disappeared completely and the wattles and helmet begin to make an appearance.



Young Guineas at about 2 months old

Letting the Keets free-range

Young guineas are most at risk from hawks – especially around spring time when the hawks are breeding and wanting to feed their own young chicks. From a size / safety point of view they are better equipped at 3-4 months old than they are at 2 months old. Leaving them penned until 6 months old and older is not unusual but may not be practical – it really depends on your situation (and if they have enough room to stay penned).

As discussed in the earlier chapter on free-ranging, letting them free-range completely on their own is always a bit of a leap of faith. There is a chance that they could just wander off. The longer they have been in their coop / pen and have a food routine, the less likely they are to disappear completely, but there are no guarantees.

When you do take the plunge, depending on how much of the outside world they could see from their coop, they probably will not rush to leave - it could be that just a few of the brave ones will come out when they are ready to and explore a little (sometimes they won't venture out at all for the first day or two that you try to free range them). A little treat of millet from your hand is a nice reward to any brave ones that do make it out from the safety of their coop / pen.

You may have to help them find their way back in (they are not always bright enough to realise that if they go out of a door, they have to use the door to get back in!) ☺ If they are used to having an evening meal before it gets dark then you should find that they come back before dusk.

Ways to increase that likelihood include leaving a few guineas still in the coop for the first few times so that the others stay within screeching distance. Also, if the first few outings are only an hour or two before dusk, then in theory, they should stick closer to their coop so that they can be back in time for their meal. The odd surprise appearance of a handful of millet in a few places you would like them to stay near can also encourage them to stay close so they can check the ‘surprise’ spots regularly.



Conclusion

I hope you have enjoyed these brief forays into the world of the guinea fowl and have perhaps learnt a little bit more about your guineas if you already have some. If you don't, hopefully this will have helped you prepare for (or decide if you are ready for!) guineas in your life.

There'll never be a dull moment with guineas around 😊

All the best!

Gina Read

COOKING GUINEA FOWL

A Collection Of Guinea Fowl Recipes

"We'd never tasted guinea fowl meat, so two were sacrificed to our table. To this day, I do not know if things were done in the wrong order. Do you pluck before you hang, or do you hang before you pluck? I seem to remember I made a half-baked attempt when the birds were still warm, but the feathers were hard to remove and my hands were soon sore. I gave up and suspended the half-naked corpses above the laundry tub. The weather was hot, so I took them down after twenty-four hours and prepared them. One went into the freezer; one to the oven. Perhaps it was my inexperience in the whole process, but after the meal we all agreed that the lives of our guinea fowl would no longer be in danger."

Margaret Hargrave

Guinea Fowl should not be fattened, but have a good supply of grain and meal for a week or two before being killed. Although it has a slightly darker meat it is very similar to chicken in the way that it is prepared for the table, and even in how it tastes (although there is a slight 'gamey' edge to it). It is eaten fresh like chicken and does not need to be hung. The flavour of a younger bird is preferred over an older bird by many. It should look firm in texture with a plump breast.

The average weight of a guinea fowl dressed for the table is 1.3–1.5 kg (3-3½ pounds). One bird is usually enough for 4 people.

In terms of the 'processing' of your guinea fowl, you may have a local butcher or processing plant that will do it for you. Here are some guides that may help if you are interested in doing it yourself :

<http://www.self-sufficient-life.com/1/HomeProcessing>

<http://www.self-sufficient-life.com/1/HomeProcessing2> (with photos)

Apple-Stuffed Guinea Fowl

Serves 2

Ingredients :

½ small Onion
1 x Dessert apple
1 tablespoon Shelled pistachio nuts
1 tablespoon Chopped parsley
Salt and freshly ground pepper
A 2lb guinea fowl
1½ oz Butter

Directions :

1. Preheat oven to Gas Mark 4/350F/180C.
2. Chop the pistachio nuts.
3. Peel and finely chop onion. Quarter, core and finely chop apple.
4. Mix together the chopped onion, apple, pistachios, parsley, salt and pepper.
5. Season the guinea fowl with salt and pepper and fill the guinea fowl cavity with the apple mixture. Place on roasting tray.
6. Dot guinea fowl with butter. Roast for 1¼ - 1½ hours until cooked through, basting often. Serve.

Breast of Guinea Fowl with a Dried Fruit Salad

Serves 1

Ingredients :

1 x 800 g guinea fowl
1 tablespoon Nut oil
15 grams Butter
100 ml Double cream

For the Marinade

¼ teaspoon Chilli powder
¼ teaspoon Ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon Garam masala
¼ teaspoon Cumin
¼ teaspoon Paprika
2 x Cloves
10 x Coriander seeds, crushed
4 x Cardamom seeds, crushed
125 ml Yoghurt

Dried Fruit Salad

15 grams Walnuts, crushed
15 grams Dried apricots
15 grams Dried figs
15 grams Almonds, flaked and toasted
100 ml Lemon juice
15 grams Cashew nuts, toasted and crushed

Stock

1 tablespoon Nut oil
1 x Shallot, finely chopped
1 x Carrot, diced
1 sprg thyme
1 ¼ lt Chicken stock
75ml Port

Directions :

1. Marinate the breasts in the spices and yoghurt mix and leave in a cool place for 6-8 hours.
2. Dried fruit salad: Chop all dried fruits to manageable pieces. Mix all ingredients together and keep refrigerated until ready for use.
3. For the stock, fry the carcass and drumsticks and wing tips in the nut oil, until browned. Add the shallots, onion, carrot and a sprig of thyme. Add the port wine, chicken stock and simmer for 50 minutes, then strain.
4. Brown the breasts in a little oil and butter then add stock to cover. Cook for 8-10 minutes, then remove the breasts and reduce the liquid.
5. To serve place a ring and fill with salad. Place guinea fowl on plate and coat with the sauce.

Grilled Guinea Fowl with Creamed Spinach and a Herb Butter

Serves 8

Ingredients :

8 Guinea Fowl Breasts (the legs can be saved for use in another recipe)
200 ml whipping cream
1 x bay leaf
6 x peppercorns
1 x parsley stalk
1/2 x onion sliced
250 grams unsalted butter at room temperature
Grated zest of 1/2 small lemons
3 cloves garlic crushed with salt
2 x handfuls coarsely chopped herbs (parsley tarragon basil and chervil plus a little thyme and rosemary)
Tabasco to taste
500 grams fresh spinach
Nutmeg
Olive Oil
Lemon Juice

Directions :

1. 8 Guineafowl breasts scored and ribbed with olive oil, a little lemon juice and some herbs
2. Heat the cream with the bay leaf, peppercorns, parsley stalk and onion till just about to boil, then set aside to infuse. (This can be done in advance and the cream refrigerated).
3. To make the herb butter : In a bowl combine by hand the butter, lemon zest, one of the garlic cloves herbs and Tabasco with salt to taste.
4. Place the butter on a sheet of clingfilm. Roll into a cylinder about 3cm in diameter and seal the ends like a Christmas cracker. Refrigerate (or place in freezer if short on time).
5. Reheat the cream, strain and reserve.
6. Put 4 tablespoons of water in a large saucepan with a close-fitting lid over a high heat.
7. Add the spinach with a little salt and put on the lid for 2 minutes. Remove the lid give it one quick stir, strain and press out the excess water.

8. While it is still warm place in a food processor and dribble in the cream until it forms a smooth purée (you may not need all the cream).
9. Mix in the remaining garlic cloves season and add a few gratings of nutmeg.
10. Set aside.



11. Grill the breasts on a medium to high heat for 7 minutes on each side (or until juices run clear)
12. Remove the breasts to a warm dish and set aside.
13. Reheat the creamed spinach and divide between 8 plates.
14. Slice the breasts on the diagonal and place on top of the spinach along with any of the meat juices that have gathered in the pan.
15. Top with a generous slice of the herb butter.

Grilled Guinea Fowl with Lentils and Green Apple Mustard

Serves 4

Ingredients :

4 x Guinea fowl legs
¼ cup Virgin olive oil
4 tablespoon Balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon Honey
1 tablespoon Dry thyme leaves
1 cup Dried lentils
3 tablespoon Extra-virgin olive oil
6 tablespoon Red wine vinegar divided
1 tablespoon Freshly-chopped rosemary leaves
1 x Celery rib finely chopped
½ medium Carrot finely chopped
Salt to taste
Freshly-ground black pepper to taste
1 medium Green apple, Granny Smith cored, seeded
3 tablespoon Dijon mustard
½ cup Extra-virgin olive oil

Directions :

1. In a mixing bowl, stir together ¼ cup virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar, honey and thyme leaves. Remove the bones from the guinea fowl legs and then add to the mixture. Allow to marinate overnight in refrigerator (or for 2 hours at room temperature).
2. Boil lentils until tender but "al dente". Drain and toss into saute pan with extra-virgin olive oil, 3 tablespoons of the red wine vinegar, rosemary, celery, carrot and bring to boil. Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper. Allow to cool.
3. Chop the apple into ½-inch pieces and place in a blender. Add the mustard and 3 tablespoons vinegar, extra-virgin olive oil and mix until smooth.
4. Drain guinea legs from marinade and pat dry. Under a pre-heated grill cook until dark brown and crisp on skin side. Season with salt and pepper and turn over and cook until just cooked through. Arrange lentils in center of serving platter and then arrange the cooked guinea legs over the top. Drizzle with apple vinaigrette and serve.

Guinea Fowl, Parsnip Chips and Gravy

Serves 2

Ingredients :

1 tablespoon Olive oil
1x Guinea fowl
Salt and pepper

Onion Gravy

1 tablespoon Olive oil
1 small Onion
400 ml Red wine
1 tablespoon Balsamic vinegar
Knob of butter

Parsnip Chips

Sunflower oil for deep frying
2x Parsnips, peeled
Salt and pepper

Stuffing

1 tablespoon Olive oil
1 small Onion, finely diced
1 x Egg
2 tablespoons Fresh sage, chopped (2 to 3)
25 grams Breadcrumbs

Directions :

1. Preheat the oven to 220c/425f/Gas 7. Heat the oil in a saute pan (suitable for the oven). Remove supremes (breast and joint) from guinea fowl and fry for 1 minute on each side.
2. Season and transfer to the oven for 10-15 minutes until cooked through.
3. Remove from the oven and allow to rest, reserving the juices. Serve with the onion gravy, parsnip chips, stuffing and thyme.

Onion Gravy:

1. Heat the oil in a small frying pan. Peel and slice the onion and fry until softened. Add 200ml of the red wine, the balsamic vinegar and reduce until thickened.
2. Put the reserved guinea fowl juices in a small pan and heat. Add the remaining red wine, onion mix and the butter to the pan and heat through.

Parsnip Chips:

Heat a medium pan third filled with sunflower oil. Finely slice the parsnip and deep fry until crisp and golden. Drain on kitchen paper and season.

Stuffing:

Preheat the oven to 220c/425f/Gas 7. Heat the oil in a small frying pan and fry the onion until softened. Beat the egg in a bowl and season. Mix the egg, onions, sage and breadcrumbs in a bowl. Mould into balls and place in a greased gratin dish and bake for 5 mins.

Guinea Fowl in Orange Sauce



Serves 2

Ingredients :

1 x 3 lb. Guinea hen, split lengthwise
1 tablespoon olive oil
10 x Shallots, peeled
 $\frac{2}{3}$ x diced pancetta
30 ml Plain Flour, (2tbsp)
150 ml Chicken stock, ($\frac{1}{4}$ pt)
300 ml Fresh orange juice, ($\frac{1}{2}$ pt)
2 small Oranges, juice and zest
15 ml Soft demerara sugar, (1 table spoon)
2 x Cloves garlic, finely chopped
45 ml Parsley, finely chopped (3 table spoons)
30 ml Thyme, finely chopped (2 table spoon)
5 ml Salt, (1teaspoon)
60 ml Single Cream, (4 table spoons)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions :

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.
2. In an oven proof skillet, on high heat brown skin side of guinea fowl in olive oil until golden in colour. Remove guinea hens to a plate. Set aside.
3. Add shallots to the same pan and saute until soft.
4. Add pancetta and let it brown a little.
5. Add the flour and cook for 1 minute, stirring continually.
6. Gradually add the stock and orange juice, bring to the boil, stirring until thickened.
7. Stir in the orange zest, sugar, garlic, parsley, thyme and salt. Return the guinea fowl to the dish, cover and transfer to a preheated oven at 200 C, 400 F, gas mark 6 for 45 minutes or until the guinea fowl is thoroughly cooked.
8. Transfer the guinea fowl to a serving plate. Stir the cream into the sauce, add salt and pepper to taste. Pour the sauce over the guinea fowl and serve with broccoli, couscous, mashed potatoes or wild rice.

Guinea Fowl with sausage stuffing



Stuffed Guinea Fowl - Photo by Jeremy Keith

Serves 4

Ingredients :

2x 2½ lb guinea hens
4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 medium onions, peeled and coarsely chopped
1 lb. pork sausages, cut into large pieces
1 tbsp. coarsely chopped fresh sage
1 tbsp. coarsely chopped fresh rosemary
6 slices bacon

Directions :

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. Rinse guinea hens, then pat dry with paper towels. Rub birds with 2 tablespoons of olive oil, season inside and out with salt and pepper
2. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons of oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add onions and cook for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they are soft.

3. Increase heat to medium-high, add sausage, and brown, stirring occasionally for about 8 minutes.
4. Stir in sage and rosemary, season with salt and pepper, and set aside to cool.
5. Spoon stuffing into hens. Place 3 slices of bacon over each hen's breast, then truss, securing bacon in place with kitchen string.
6. Place hens on their sides in a medium roasting pan. Cook for 10 minutes, then turn hens onto their other sides. Cook for 10 minutes more, then reduce heat to 325 degrees F.
7. Turn hens breast side up and continue cooking for about 20 minutes until skin is golden and thigh juices run clear.
8. Remove from oven and allow to rest for 5–10 minutes before carving and serving.

Pan-Fried Guinea Fowl with Curry Potato Gratin and Mango Dressing

Serves 4

Ingredients :

2 x guinea fowl - take the breast and legs off the carcass

Sauce :

2 Guinea fowl carcasses

500 grams Onion

500 grams Celery

50 grams Garlic

1 lt Chicken stock

½ lt Red wine

10 ml Olive oil

100 grams Butter

Seasoning to taste

Potato Gratin :

500 grams Potatoes, (Maris Bard)

20 grams Garlic

5 grams Thyme

400 ml Double cream

20 grams Curry powder

Seasoning

Mango Dressing :

Mango

Spring onion

Red chilli

Olive oil

Balsamic vinegar

Caster sugar

Lemon juice

Chives

Salt and pepper

Directions :

1. Trim the breast and wing bone and thigh bone and the leg. Pan fry the breast skin side down and the leg for 1 minute. Finish in the oven, breast should take about 8 minutes, the leg about 12 minutes at 180C.
2. Roast carcasses in the oven at 180C for about 10 minutes until brown.
3. In a separate pan brown the onion and celery in butter and olive oil (about 5 minutes).
4. Add the garlic, then the red wine and reduce for about 4 minutes on a high flame.
5. Add chicken stock and reduce again for 30 minutes. Strain the liquid into another pan and reduce to a sauce consistency.
6. Bring the cream to the boil with the thyme, garlic, seasoning and curry powder. Slice the potatoes on a mandolin and arrange nicely in a roasting tray. Pass the infused cream on to the potatoes. Bake in the oven for 40 minutes at 180C.



7. Remove the potato gratin from the oven, cool and refrigerate until required. Using a cutter cut in to portions and reheat at 180C for approximately 5-8 minutes.
8. Peel and dice mango. Finely chop spring onion, chives and chilli. Combine the ingredients in a bowl. Infuse for 24 hours before use.

Pan Fried Guinea Fowl with Red Wine Sauce

Serves 6

Ingredients :

25 grams butter
1 tablespoon oil
6 x guinea fowl breast fillets each about 150g
175 grams rindless streaky bacon chopped
225 grams button mushrooms
225 grams button onions peeled
2 tablespoon plain flour
90 ml brandy
350 ml red wine such as cabernet sauvignon
600 ml chicken stock
1 tablespoon redcurrant jelly
1 x salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions :

1. Preheat the oven to 220c/425f/Gas 7.
2. Melt the butter and oil in a saute pan on the boiling plate.
3. Add the guinea fowl, skinside down, and cook for 3 to 4 minutes until a deep golden brown.
4. Turn and seal the other side.
5. Transfer the guinea fowl to an ovenproof dish and place in the simmering oven while you make the sauce.
6. Add the bacon, mushrooms and onions to the saute pan.
7. Cook on the boiling plate for 4 to 5 minutes or until golden.
8. Add the flour stirring until smooth.
9. Stir in the brandy and wine bring to the boil and let bubble furiously until reduced by half either on the boiling plate or on the floor of the roasting oven for 5 minutes.
10. Add the stock and redcurrant jelly.
11. Bring to the boil, season and return the guinea fowl to the pan.
12. Cover and cook in the simmering oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

Poached Guinea Fowl

Serves 4

Ingredients :

1 lt chicken stock (qv)
200 ml dry white wine
1 clv garlic crushed
1 x bay leaf
Fresh rosemary and thyme 1 sprig of each
½ x diced leek
1 x shallot sliced
1 x carrot diced
celery stick sliced
4 x breasts of guinea fowl skinless

Directions :

1. Prepare the poaching liquid by combining all the ingredients except the breasts then simmer until well infused.
2. Pass through a fine sieve.
3. Poach the guinea fowl breasts in the liquid until cooked but still pink.



Poached Guinea Fowl topped with bacon and served with a with celeriac mash and Brussels Sprouts with Pancetta, cabbage and onion.

Photo by Jeremy Keith

Roasted Guinea Fowl

Serves 4

Ingredients :

1 x Guinea hen - (3 to 3 ½ lbs)
1 sprg Thyme
½ x Lemon
2 tablespoon Olive oil divided
Salt and freshly-ground black pepper to taste

Directions :

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
2. Rinse hen and pat dry. Remove liver and giblets. Place sprig of thyme and ½ lemon in cavity of bird, rub skin with 2 tablespoons of oil and season, inside and out, with salt and pepper. Place on roasting rack in roasting pan in oven. Cook for 50 minutes or until juices run clear from knife cut at thigh joint.
3. Remove guinea hen when cooked, let rest 5 minutes.



*Roasted Guinea Fowl on a bed of winter vegetables
Photo by Jeremy Keith*

Stir-Fry Guinea Fowl

Serves 6

Ingredients :

50 ml Sesame oil
6 x Guinea fowl supremes, thinly sliced
1 x Clove garlic, crushed
2 bn Spring onion, chopped
1 x Red, green and yellow pepper, finely sliced
85 grams Mange-tout, baby sweetcorn and leek, thinly sliced
1 teaspoon Five spice
Salt
Black pepper, freshly milled

Sauce :

1 tablespoon Cornflour mixed with
2 tablespoon Soy sauce
1 tablespoon Oyster sauce
1 tablespoon Sherry
60 ml Chicken stock

Directions :

1. Thoroughly mix all the sauce ingredients into a glass bowl and place to one side until required.
2. Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large frying pan, when it is hot add the guinea fowl supremes and garlic and stir fry for 4 minutes.
3. Add the onions, peppers, mange-tout, sweetcorn and leek, stir fry for 2 minutes, adding the ginger, five spice and seasoning well with salt and freshly milled black pepper. Stir fry for a further minute and add the sauce mixture. Stir fry finally for 2 minutes and serve with Chinese noodles.



“I liked him shot from below, I think he liked it too! As I continued to take pictures, I could see it going to his head”