

# BASIC TO

Whether you keep it basic or add these extra brilliant touches, these holiday roasts make the perfect centerpieces for meals to remember BY VIRGINIA WILLIS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEN BURRIS

When I was growing up in Georgia there were unwavering holiday rituals that still make me smile. Meme, my grandmother, would have one of the parades playing on the little TV in the corner of her yellow pine kitchen as she prepared our feast. Uncle Curtis, without fail, fell asleep in the chair after dinner. Company dropped by to say hello in the late afternoon. And at the table, we always had a big roast as the centerpiece of the meal. The roast was equal parts celebration and blessing, festivity and bounty.

Both my grandmother and mom were great Southern cooks and they passed on that passion to me. So after college I apprenticed in a test kitchen, then went on to culinary school, first in the U.S. and later in France. When I returned from France I worked as kitchen director for both Bobby Flay's and Martha Stewart's television shows. My training, travels and work exposed me to a world of food far beyond Meme's kitchen. Today I return to many of the dishes that Meme brought out for holidays, but I can't resist adding little chef-inspired touches—a special garnish, a more sophisticated technique for cooking or an extra side dish as an accompaniment. To me these chef-y additions are the culinary equivalent of the fine Southern

tradition of dressing up for company.

This collection of recipes includes some of my favorite basic holiday roast recipes along with a *brilliant* variation for each. For example, the Garlic-Stuffed Standing Rib Roast will be memorable no matter what—all you need to do is invest in the piece of meat and a good thermometer. To elevate the recipe to “brilliant,” slice the roasted meat then cap each portion with a fragrant, crisp herb crust. My family recipe for whole roast fish with herbs and lemon creates succulent juicy fish without any fuss. To transform the whole meal into dinner theater, bake the fish in a salt crust instead of foil. And I haven't forgotten the vegetarians in this roasting repertoire: my Roasted Stuffed Pumpkin is filled and baked with an intensely savory sage and mushroom stuffing. Make it brilliant by roasting the pumpkin seeds with spices for a garnish.

Roasting is an amazingly easy way to cook up succulent, beautifully browned foods. Done right, it produces a meal that will make you smile for years to come. Whether basic or brilliant, made just for family or dressed up for company, all of these recipes would be right at home in Meme's kitchen.

# Brilliant

## *Brilliant*

Garnish the Roasted Stuffed Pumpkin (page 67) with Spiced Pumpkin Seeds

*While the stuffed pumpkin is roasting:* Line a rimmed baking sheet with a nonstick silicone baking mat or parchment paper. Rinse pumpkin seeds to remove any flesh or strings. Dry them on a clean dish towel. Toss in a small bowl with 1 teaspoon each canola oil and fennel seed, ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper and ⅛ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Spread out on the prepared baking sheet. Roast at 350°F until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Makes about 1 cup.



Garlic-Stuffed Standing Rib Roast (sliced) with Savory Breadcrumbs

## BASIC: Roasted Stuffed Pumpkin

HXW H↑F H♥H

MAKES: 6 servings

ACTIVE TIME: 50 minutes | TOTAL: 3 hours

COST PER SERVING: under \$2.50

*This roast pumpkin with a mushroom-and-bread stuffing is a beautiful vegetarian entree for the holidays. Use a small pumpkin if you can find one, but a winter squash like kabocha or buttercup also works. For the brilliant variation (see page 65), save the seeds from the pumpkin, toss them with spices and roast them. If you use a squash, opt for store-bought pepitas; the squash seeds are too woody to eat. (Photograph: page 65.)*

- 1 4- to 5-pound pumpkin or round winter squash
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper, divided
- 6 cups whole-wheat bread, torn into  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
- 1 tablespoon canola oil or grapeseed oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 pound cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, very finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme or  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon dried
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh sage or  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon dried
- Pinch of cayenne pepper (optional)
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup low-fat milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1. Place rack in center of oven; preheat to 350°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Using a sharp knife and working at a slight angle, cut a 5- to 6-inch diameter cap off the top of the pumpkin (or squash)—just like a jack-o'-lantern. (If necessary, cut a small slice off the bottom so it rests flat.) Using a metal spoon, remove the seeds and strings from the cap and the inside. (If preparing Spiced Pumpkin Seeds, page 65, reserve the seeds.) Season the inside with  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon each salt and pepper. Place the pumpkin (or squash) on the prepared baking sheet.
3. Place bread in a bowl. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and celery. Cook, stirring, until just beginning to brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium-low, add mushrooms and season with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon each salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are tender, 6 to 8 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 45 seconds. Transfer the vegetables to the bowl with the bread. Stir in thyme, sage, cayenne (if using) and the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon pepper. Add eggs, milk and cheese and stir to combine. Fill the pumpkin (or squash) with the mixture, pushing it down if necessary so it fits inside. (If you have extra stuffing, place it in a small baking dish, cover with foil and bake during the last hour that the pumpkin roasts.) Replace the cap on top.
4. Bake for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours. Remove the cap and use a spoon to fluff up the stuffing so it comes up higher than the top of the pumpkin (or squash). Return to the oven (without the cap) and continue baking until it is tender enough to be pierced easily with the tip of a knife (check in several spots to be sure it's done) and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the center of the stuffing registers at least 160°F, 30 to 45 minutes more. Let rest for 10 minutes. Carefully transfer to a warmed serving plate. Garnish with thyme and sage.

PER SERVING: 316 calories; 9 g fat (3 g sat, 4 g mono); 100 mg cholesterol; 46 g carbohydrate; 3 g added sugars; 18 g protein; 6 g fiber; 534 mg sodium; 1,535 mg potassium. NUTRITION BONUS: Vitamin A (411% daily value), Vitamin C (45% dv), Potassium (44% dv), Folate (28% dv), Calcium (25% dv), Iron (24% dv), Magnesium (23% dv), Zinc (22% dv).

## BASIC: Garlic-Stuffed Standing Rib Roast

HXW

MAKES: 12 servings, plus plenty of leftovers

ACTIVE TIME: 35 minutes | TOTAL: 4 hours

COST PER SERVING: under \$8.50

*A beef rib roast screams celebration. The meat is expensive, but rewards minimal effort with amazing, juicy flavor. All you need to do is poke pieces of sliced garlic into the meat, season it with salt and pepper and roast it. Serve with mashed potatoes and greens. Or make it brilliant with savory herb, Parmesan and horseradish breadcrumbs (see right). Use leftovers in sandwiches or roast beef hash.*

- 5 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- $2\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- $2\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons freshly ground pepper, divided
- 1 8- to 9-pound, 4-rib standing rib roast (prime rib), fat trimmed to  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (see Note, page 94)
- 1 tablespoon canola oil

1. Toss garlic in a bowl with  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon each salt and pepper.
2. Cut  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-deep slits every 2 inches on the meaty sides of the roast. Insert a sliver of seasoned garlic into each slit. Let stand at room temperature for 1 hour.
3. Preheat oven to 450°F.
4. Season the meat all over with the remaining 2 teaspoons each salt and pepper.
5. Place a large roasting pan over two burners on medium-high heat. Add oil and heat until shimmering. Add the roast, fat-side down. Cook until dark brown and crusted on all sides, 2 to 5 minutes per side. Finish with the roast meat-side up and rib-side down.
6. Transfer the pan to the oven and roast for 15 minutes. Reduce the heat to 350° and continue roasting for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours, depending on weight (estimate 12 to 16 minutes per pound). The roast is done when an instant-read thermometer inserted deep into a fleshy part registers 125°F for medium-rare, 135° for medium. (If you are planning to use the “brilliant” technique and prefer your meat medium-rare, remove the roast from the oven when the instant-read thermometer registers 115°. The meat will be rare when it comes out of the oven, but after you slice it and finish it under the broiler—as instructed in the brilliant technique (right)—it will be cooked to medium-rare.)
7. Remove the roast to a carving board; cover loosely with foil. Let it rest for at least 15 minutes and up to 30 minutes.
8. To carve, stand the roast on end, holding it by the ribs. Using a large chef's knife, cut along the contour of the bones to separate the meat from the bones in one piece. Trim any excess fat and slice the meat into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. Serve immediately.

PER 3-OUNCE SERVING: 218 calories; 13 g fat (5 g sat, 6 g mono); 76 mg cholesterol; 0 g carbohydrate; 0 g added sugars; 23 g protein; 0 g fiber; 164 mg sodium; 295 mg potassium. NUTRITION BONUS: Zinc (28% daily value).



### Brilliant Top slices of the Garlic-Stuffed Standing Rib Roast with Savory Breadcrumbs

While the beef is roasting: Combine  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups whole-wheat fresh breadcrumbs, (see Tip, page 94),  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped fresh mixed herbs (parsley, thyme, basil, rosemary, chives),  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, 2 tablespoons freshly grated horseradish and 2 tablespoons olive oil in a bowl. Season with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon each salt and pepper. When the beef is done: Position a rack 4 inches below the broiler; preheat the broiler. Trim any excess fat from each slice of roast. Arrange half the slices in a single layer on a large baking sheet. Divide half the breadcrumb mixture among the slices, patting it on top. Broil until golden brown, 1 to 4 minutes. Repeat with the remaining slices of roast and topping.

For “Basic + Brilliant” recipe analyses, see the Recipe Index (page 6) or go to [eatingwell.com](http://eatingwell.com).



## Brilliant

### Serve the Seven-Hour Leg of Lamb with Creamy White Beans

The night before you make the lamb: Place one 16-ounce bag dried **white beans** in a bowl and add **water** to cover. Soak overnight. About 3 hours before the lamb is done: Heat 1 tablespoon **canola oil** in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Cook 1 chopped medium **onion** until translucent, 3 to 5 minutes. Add 10 cloves peeled **garlic** and cook until fragrant, about 45 seconds. Add 4 cups **reduced-sodium chicken broth**, 2 cups water, 3 large sprigs **fresh thyme** and 1 **fresh bay leaf**. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for about 20 minutes. Add drained beans; return to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Season with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon freshly ground **pepper**. Cover and simmer until very tender,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours, depending on the type of beans. Season with more pepper, if desired. Serve warm. Makes about 6 cups.



Seven-Hour Leg of Lamb with Creamy White Beans

### BASIC: Seven-Hour Leg of Lamb

H X W H V H

MAKES: 12 servings, plus leftovers  
ACTIVE TIME: 55 minutes | TOTAL: 7 hours 35 minutes  
COST PER SERVING: under \$3

A seven-hour leg of lamb is a traditional technique for slow-cooking lamb until it is fall-off-the-bone tender and luscious. This one is seasoned with plenty of garlic, lemon and fresh herbs and the resulting rich jus is served alongside the meat.

For a brilliant accompaniment, cook up savory white beans in chicken broth with garlic, thyme and bay leaf (see left).

- 1 6-pound bone-in leg of lamb, trimmed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil (not extra-virgin)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon freshly ground pepper, plus more to taste
- 2 lemons, halved
- 1 bottle (750-ml) dry white wine
- 2 medium leeks, white and light green parts only, sliced (see Tip, page 95)
- 1 head garlic, cloves separated and peeled
- 5 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 4 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme
- 4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth

1. Preheat oven to 300°F.
2. Rub lamb with oil and season with salt and pepper. Place a large roasting pan over two burners on medium-high heat. Add lamb and cook, turning occasionally, until browned on all sides, 10 to 12 minutes. After about 5 minutes, add lemons and cook, cut-side down, until well browned; transfer to a plate to cool.
3. When the lamb is browned, squeeze the juice from the lemons over it. Add the juiced lemons to the pan along with wine, leeks, garlic, bay leaves, rosemary and thyme. Tightly cover the pan with foil.
4. Roast the lamb for 3 hours, turning over every hour or

so. (Uncover the pan carefully when you check the roast—watch for escaping steam.)

5. After 3 hours, turn the lamb over once again. Add broth to the pan, stirring to combine with the vegetables, herbs and liquid. Cover with foil and continue roasting, turning and basting the lamb every hour or so, for 4 hours more.

6. After 7 hours of cooking, transfer the lamb to a warmed platter and tent with the foil to keep warm. The lamb will be practically falling off the bone at this point.


7. Place the roasting pan over 2 burners on medium-high heat. Bring to a boil; reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes while the lamb rests. Strain the cooking liquid into a bowl, pressing on the solids. (Discard the solids.) Season the jus with pepper, if desired, and serve it with the lamb.

PER SERVING: 268 calories; 12 g fat (4 g sat, 6 g mono); 80 mg cholesterol; 4 g carbohydrate; 0 g added sugars; 25 g protein; 0 g fiber; 382 mg sodium; 422 mg potassium. NUTRITION BONUS: Zinc (29% daily value).

### BASIC: Whole Roasted Fish

H X W H V H

MAKES: 4 servings  
ACTIVE TIME: 20 minutes | TOTAL: 45 minutes  
COST PER SERVING: under \$6.50

 Cooking a whole large fish is scary, but it doesn't have to be the culinary equivalent of a call from the IRS. Just wrap the fish in foil and it becomes easy as can be—and a great way to impress guests. Once you've mastered the basic foil-roasted fish, try the brilliant technique for salt-crusting instead (see opposite). The salt seals in the juices, but amazingly doesn't overwhelm the fish with a salty taste. Present the whole salt-crusting fish at the table, then take it to the kitchen for "surgery."

- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon best-quality extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 2- to 3-pound whole striped bass or tilapia, cleaned with head and tail intact (see Note, page 94)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 4 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 10 sprigs fresh thyme
- 8 sprigs flat-leaf parsley
- 2 lemons, one sliced and one cut in wedges, divided

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Place a piece of foil (a little more than twice the length of the fish) on a rimmed baking sheet. Brush 1 tablespoon oil over an area about as big as the fish.

2. Place the fish on the oiled foil. Open the fish up and season the inside with salt and pepper. Then add a layer of half the herbs, a layer of the lemon slices and then of the remaining herbs. Close the fish and fold the foil over it; crimp the edges to seal.

3. Roast the fish until the flesh is opaque and flakes, 20 to 30 minutes (8 to 10 minutes per inch of thickness). Open it up and gently scrape off the herbs and lemon slices. Use an offset spatula to remove the top fillet; transfer to a warmed serving plate. Lift away the bottom fillet and place on the plate.

4. Drizzle the fillets with the remaining 1 teaspoon oil and garnish with lemon wedges. Serve immediately.

PER SERVING: 143 calories; 4 g fat (1 g sat, 2 g mono); 110 mg cholesterol; 0 g carbohydrate; 0 g added sugars; 24 g protein; 0 g fiber; 374 mg sodium; 356 mg potassium.



*Brilliant*  
Make the Whole  
Roasted Fish in  
a Salt Crust

After you preheat the oven: Line a rimmed baking sheet with a piece of foil. Combine 2 pounds kosher salt, 1 cup water and 1 tablespoon herbes de Provence in a bowl; mix until it's the consistency of wet sand. Spread half the mixture on the foil in a rectangle just larger than the fish. Season the inside of the fish, stuff with lemon and herbs (see Step 2, opposite) and place on the salt. Pat the remaining salt mixture over the fish to cover completely. (If the tail sticks out, it's OK.) Bake for 30 minutes. Let cool for 2 minutes. Using a large spoon, rap all around the edge of the salt crust to loosen it. Remove the salt top and carefully remove the skin. Use an offset spatula to remove the top fillet from the bones and transfer to a warmed serving plate. (Wipe away any stray salt.) Use the spatula to lift away the bottom fillet and place it on the plate. Finish with Step 4 (opposite).

Whole Roasted Fish in a Salt Crust



*Brilliant*  
Pair the Roasted Quail with Muscadines with Savory Chestnut Puree:

Before preparing the quail: Combine one 14-ounce jar **roasted chestnuts** (see Note, page 94), 1 cup each **reduced-sodium chicken broth** and **water**, 1 sprig **fresh thyme** and 1/8 teaspoon **kosher salt** in a medium saucepan. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook, partially covered, until the chestnuts easily break apart, 10 to 20 minutes. Remove the thyme. Puree in a food processor until the mixture is very smooth and has the consistency of a thick spread. Add a little more broth if a thinner consistency is desired. Return the puree to the pan; cover to keep warm. Reheat over low heat just before serving; thin with a little water, if desired. Makes about 3 cups.



Roasted Quail with Muscadines & Savory Chestnut Puree

**BASIC: Roasted Quail with Muscadines**



**MAKES:** 4 servings  
**ACTIVE TIME:** 45 minutes | **TOTAL:** 45 minutes  
**COST PER SERVING:** under \$14

*Muscadines are wild grapes indigenous to the Southeast. If you can find them, by all means use them; otherwise use regular grapes. Either makes a lovely sweet-tart accompaniment for rich quail. The traditional French pairing for quail is chestnuts. So try whirring up a brilliant chestnut puree in the food processor to serve alongside—so easy, so elegant.*

- 8 semiboneless quail (about 4 ounces each; see Note, page 94)**
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt**
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- 1 tablespoon canola oil**
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme**
- 2 tablespoons bourbon, brandy or Cognac**
- 1 cup dry white wine**
- 1 1/2 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth**
- 4 ounces muscadines or scuppernongs, halved, seeded and peeled (about 3/4 cup; see Note, page 94), or large seedless grapes, halved**

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Pat quail dry and season with salt and pepper. Place a

large roasting pan over two burners on medium-high heat, add butter and oil and heat until shimmering. Add the quail skin-side down and sear until deep brown, 2 to 3 minutes, moving them to different spots in the pan to brown evenly.

3. Turn the quail over and place a thyme sprig on each; transfer the pan to the oven. Roast until cooked through but still a little pink in the leg, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer the quail to a warmed large platter and tent with foil.

4. Add bourbon (or brandy or Cognac) to the roasting pan and return it to the stovetop. Turn the two burners under the pan to medium-high heat, add wine and bring to a boil, stirring with a wooden spoon to loosen any browned bits. Simmer, stirring often, until the liquid is reduced to about 1/4 cup, 3 to 5 minutes. Add broth and continue to simmer until reduced by half (about 1/2 cup), 5 to 7 minutes. Reduce the heat to low, add grapes and stir to warm them, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve the quail with the grape sauce.

**PER SERVING:** 353 calories; 15 g fat (6 g sat, 5 g mono); 110 mg cholesterol; 7 g carbohydrate; 0 g added sugars; 31 g protein; 0 g fiber; 491 mg sodium; 497 mg potassium. **NUTRITION BONUS:** Iron (36% daily value), Zinc (26% dv), Vitamin C (22% dv). 🍷

*Virginia Willis is a cook, teacher, author and culinary television producer. Some of these recipes were adapted with permission from her new book, Basic to Brilliant, Y'all: 150 Refined Southern Recipes and Ways to Dress Them Up for Company (copyright © 2011; published by Ten Speed Press, a division of Random House, Inc.).*