GENERAL

bbc good food chicken cacciatore

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

BBC Good Food Chicken Cacciatore: A Classic Italian Delight Reimagined for Modern Palates

When you think of hearty, comforting meals that bring family and friends together, few dishes come to mind quite like chicken cacciatore. This rustic Italian stew, traditionally simmered over low heat with a medley of tomatoes, onions, bell peppers, and aromatic herbs, has earned a beloved place on dinner tables worldwide. In 2024, the BBC Good Food platform celebrated this timeless recipe with its own refined version—**BBC Good Food chicken cacciatore**—offering a fresh take that balances authenticity with contemporary cooking techniques.

In this article, we'll dive deep into the origins of chicken cacciatore, explore the BBC Good Food adaptation, and share expert tips to help you recreate this dish in your own kitchen. Whether you're a seasoned home cook or a culinary novice, you'll find practical advice, flavorful variations, and essential cooking hacks to elevate your next meal.

What Is Chicken Cacciatore? A Brief Overview

"Cacciatore" translates from Italian as "hunter," a nod to the dish's humble roots. Historically, hunters would prepare this stew using whatever ingredients were available in the forest—seasonal vegetables, fresh herbs, and locally sourced chicken. The name reflects the dish's practicality and resourcefulness.

At its core, chicken cacciatore is a tomato-based stew where pieces of chicken are braised with vegetables and herbs. The result is a tender, flavorful entrée that pairs beautifully with pasta, crusty bread, or a simple side of rice.

The BBC Good Food Twist: A Modern Classic

The BBC Good Food version of chicken cacciatore stays true to the dish's rustic essence while incorporating subtle tweaks that enhance depth and texture. Key differences include:

- Smoked paprika and fresh oregano: These herbs add a smoky undertone that complements the natural sweetness of tomatoes.
- Red wine reduction: A splash of dry red wine intensifies the sauce's richness and balances acidity.
- Slow-cooking technique: The recipe recommends simmering the stew for an extended period, allowing flavors to meld and the chicken to become incredibly tender.

These adjustments make the dish both approachable for beginners and satisfying for seasoned chefs.

Ingredients Breakdown: What You'll Need

Below is a comprehensive list of ingredients for the BBC Good Food chicken cacciatore. All measurements are for a four person serving, but you can easily double or halve the recipe.

- 4 bone in, skin on chicken thighs (or boneless if preferred)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced

- 1 red bell pepper, sliced into strips
- 1 yellow bell pepper, sliced into strips
- 2 cups crushed tomatoes (canned or fresh)
- 1 cup chicken stock
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish)
- Grated Parmesan cheese (optional, for serving)

Step by Step Instructions: From Prep to Plate

1. Season the chicken: Pat the chicken pieces dry with paper towels. Season both sides generously with salt and pepper.
2. Sear the meat: In a large, heavy bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium high heat. Add the chicken, skin side down first, and brown for 4–5 minutes per side. Remove and set aside.
3. Sauté aromatics: Lower the heat to medium. Add diced onion and sauté until translucent, about 4 minutes. Stir in minced garlic and cook for an additional 30 seconds until fragrant.
4. Introduce vegetables: Add sliced bell peppers to the pot, cooking until they start to soften, roughly 3 minutes.
5. Deglaze: Pour in the red wine, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot. Let the wine reduce by half, about 2 minutes.
6. Add tomatoes and stock: Stir in crushed tomatoes and chicken stock. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer.
7. Season the sauce: Sprinkle in smoked paprika, oregano, and add the bay leaf. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper as needed.
8. Return the chicken: Nestle the browned chicken pieces back into the pot, skin side up. Ensure the chicken is partially submerged in the sauce.
9. Simmer gently: Reduce heat to low, cover, and let the stew cook for 45–60 minutes. The chicken should be fork tender and the sauce thickened.
10. Finish and serve: Remove the bay leaf. Taste and adjust seasoning. Sprinkle chopped parsley over the top, and if desired, add a dusting of grated Parmesan.
11. Plate: Serve the stew hot over cooked pasta, polenta, or a bed of fluffy rice. Accompany with crusty bread to soak up the savory sauce.

Cooking Tips for Perfection

- Use bone in chicken: The bones impart extra flavor and help keep the meat moist during slow cooking.
- Don’t rush the sear: Proper browning creates a richer base flavor. Keep an eye on the heat to avoid burning.
- Simmer, don’t boil: A gentle simmer preserves the delicate textures of the vegetables and chicken.
- Adjust thickness: If the sauce is too thin, simmer uncovered for a few minutes to reduce further.
- Rest before serving: Let the stew sit for 10 minutes after cooking; this allows flavors to settle.

Variations to Suit Every Palate

While the BBC Good Food chicken cacciatore is a delightful baseline, you can tailor the dish to match your taste preferences or dietary needs. Below are a few creative variations.

Vegetarian Cacciatore

Replace chicken with a mix of hearty vegetables such as eggplant, zucchini, and mushrooms. Use vegetable stock

and skip the wine or replace it with a splash of balsamic vinegar for depth.

Chicken Cacciatore with Mushrooms

Add sliced mushrooms to the sauté step. Their earthy flavor complements the tomato sauce and adds an extra layer of texture.

Spicy Cacciatore

Introduce crushed red pepper flakes or a dash of hot sauce during the sauté stage. This will give the dish a pleasant kick without overpowering the other flavors.

Low Carb Cacciatore

Serve the stew over cauliflower rice or spiralized zucchini noodles instead of traditional pasta. You can also reduce the amount of tomato sauce slightly to lower carbohydrate content.

Pairing Ideas: What Goes Best With Chicken Cacciatore?

Choosing the right side dish can elevate the entire dining experience. Here are some tried and true pairings:

- Pasta: Spaghetti, fettuccine, or penne are classic options. Toss the pasta in a little olive oil before adding it to the sauce to prevent sticking.
- Polenta: Creamy polenta offers a smooth base that soaks up the savory sauce beautifully.
- Rice: A simple white or brown rice pilaf provides a neutral backdrop for the rich flavors.
- Crusty Bread: A baguette or sourdough loaf is perfect for dipping into the sauce.
- Salad: A light green salad with a citrus vinaigrette balances the dish's richness.
- Wine Pairing: A medium body red like Chianti or Sangiovese complements the tomato base. For a white wine option, try a crisp Pinot Grigio.

Nutritional Snapshot (per serving)

Approximate values for the BBC Good Food chicken cacciatore (serving size: 1/4 of the recipe):

- Calories: 420 kcal
- Protein: 28 g
- Fat: 18 g (mainly from olive oil and chicken skin)
- Carbohydrates: 28 g
- Fiber: 5 g
- Sodium: 650 mg (adjustable based on stock and added salt)

These figures can vary depending on ingredient choices and portion sizes.

How to Store and Reheat Chicken Cacciatore

Chicken cacciatore stores well and often tastes even better the next day as flavors continue to meld. Here's how to keep it fresh:

- Cool promptly: Allow the stew to cool to room temperature before refrigerating.
- Use airtight containers: Store in the fridge for up to 4 days or freeze for up to 3 months.
- Reheat gently: Warm on the stovetop over low heat, stirring occasionally. If frozen, thaw in the refrigerator overnight before reheating.
- Add a splash of stock or water: If the sauce has thickened too much, add a little liquid to reach the desired consistency.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can I use boneless chicken for this recipe?

Yes, boneless chicken thighs or breasts work well. However, bone in pieces tend to stay juicier and impart richer flavor during simmering.

What if I don't have fresh tomatoes?

Crushed canned tomatoes are a convenient substitute. Opt for high quality, no salt added varieties for best flavor.

Is it necessary to use red wine?

Red wine adds depth and acidity, but you can replace it with an equal amount of chicken stock and a splash of balsamic vinegar or a pinch of sugar to balance acidity.

Can I make this dish ahead of time?

Absolutely. Chicken cacciatore is a classic make ahead meal. Let it cool, refrigerate, or freeze, then reheat gently before serving.

What's the best way to keep the chicken from drying out?

Use bone in, skin on pieces and simmer gently. The skin helps retain moisture and adds flavor.

Conclusion: Why BBC Good Food Chicken Cacciatore Is Worth the Effort

Chicken cacciatore embodies the comfort and simplicity of Italian home cooking, and the BBC Good Food version elevates the classic with thoughtful enhancements. Whether you're cooking for family, entertaining guests, or simply craving a hearty meal, this recipe offers a satisfying blend of tender chicken, savory tomatoes, and aromatic herbs.

With its clear instructions, versatile ingredient list, and practical tips, you can recreate a dish that feels both authentic and modern. So grab your pot, gather your ingredients, and bring the rustic charm of the Italian countryside to your own kitchen. Buon appetito!

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