WHAT TO DO WITH A Dead Duck

You're not a true Duck fan until you stick one in the oven.

Belly's owner and chef, Brendan Mahaney, a prestigious James Beard Awards semi-finalist, says that getting your hands on duck can be a bit difficult, but in Eugene he'd head straight for Long's Meat Market. "They'll carry it — usually frozen, sometimes fresh — and they can order more for you if you need it," Mahaney says.

Going through a reputable butcher, he says, means that you probably don't need to worry about receiving spoiled fowl, but it's going to be clear if you do. Rotting duck has a funny odor similar to rotting chicken. Stick to the good butchers, Mahaney says. "I have never run into bad duck. I just haven't."

Some like to roast duck whole, making Peking duck or orange duck. But "we're more likely to divide and conquer," Mahaney says. "We're most likely to separate the leg meat from the breast, and we'll treat each of those differently." The composition of the two cuts means you can't just sub a breast for a leg, so it's necessary to pick your recipe based on what you've got — or order the meat well ahead of time to make sure the cut you need is available.

"The leg is moist and fatty and flavorful and meaty," Mahaney says, "and it does well if it's slowly cooked, and that can either be with a braise, or we do a lot of confit, where it's cooked slowly in its own fat." He recommends cooking the leg from two to four hours.

The breast, Mahaney says, is another story. "There's this thick layer of fat on the breast," he says. "It's what keeps the duck warm in the cold water, right? And it's really too much. It's an inch of fat." He sears the breast, fat side down, and pours off the excess, so that what remains is easier to cook with.

"Often duck is paired with bright, sweet, tangy or sour flavors," he says. He recommends trying recipes with orange, huckleberry, pomegranate, even dark chocolate (but not for dessert).

Eating out? Belly is serving a duck confit over a salad of pomegranates and chicories, and Mahaney says he recently had a tasty duck breast at Rye. And while some might delight in eating duck while the Ducks fight them some Wildcats, UO alum Mahaney will be sticking to a seven-layer dip. "There should be no cooking of ducks on the day of the Fiesta Bowl," he says. — *Shannon Finnell*

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