

Partridge for dinner

"The first day of Christmas
My true love sent to me/A partridge in a pear tree."

For a truly fitting and unique dining experience this Christmas, make way for the partridge, the fowl that Webster defines as a, "stout bodied Old World gallinaceous game bird with variegated plumage."

The only problem is, that while there are many types of partridges, the partridge does not exist.

Those birds that we generically call partridges, possessing short legs and neck, and short wings and tail, defy definition, and embody more of a poetic concept.

The "true" partridge was introduced into France by Rene, King of Naples, and in French is called the *perdrix*—an adult partridge. A young partridge killed the year of its hatching is *perdreau*.

The partridge is an international bird, but seems to be most popular in France, where it is cooked with cabbage and other vegetables.

When it is prepared as such

it is called *Perdrix aux Choux*.

It may also be prepared in its more aristocratic form as the sublime *Perdrix en Charentaise* (partridge and cabbage in a decorative mold).

These two methods are the only instances when an older bird is preferable to the *perdreau*. The reason for this is that an old bird, because it can be cooked longer, imparts more flavor to the cabbage than a young one, which should not be cooked for more than 15 minutes. Unfortunately, the cabbage absorbs most of the flavor of the *perdrix*, leaving it bland.

The solution is to roast a *perdreau* apart from the main dish, substituting it for the *perdrix* during the last five minutes of cooking.

If possible, this is the ideal way to prepare the partridge and cabbage meal. However, you may still be satisfied with just the *perdrix*, if you can't afford both birds.

In either event, if you're willing to follow the French prescription for partridge, this year's Christmas dinner may be a real *tour de force*.

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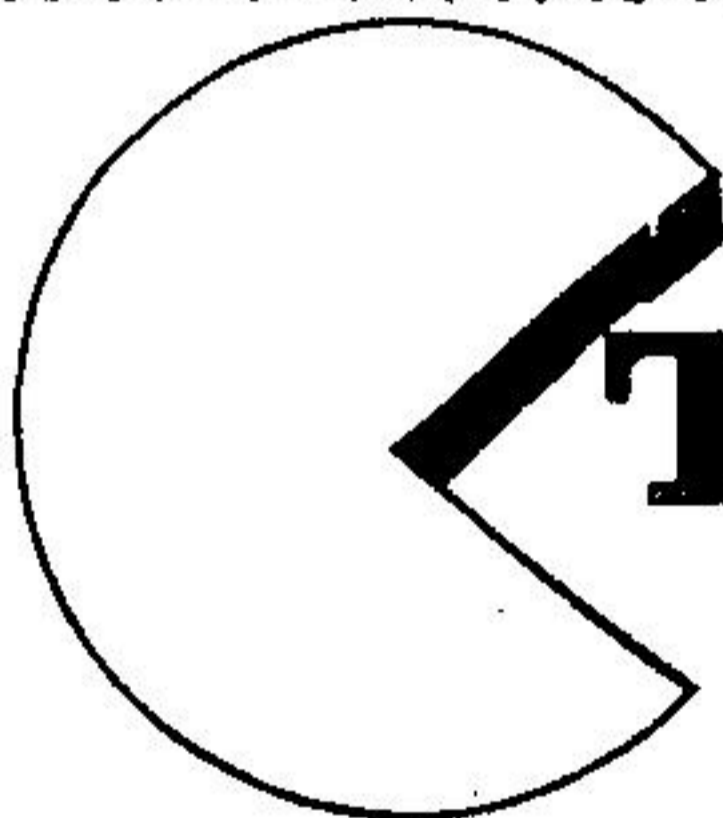


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