

Quail (Poultry & Eggs)

Interesting facts: Quail is a collective name for several species of small, plump birds in the pheasant family. Though technically a game bird, quail that is available in stores will always be from a quail farm.

How to select: Unless you hunt them yourself, you will have to purchase them online. Be sure and buy organic free-range.

How to clean and store: Can be frozen for 3-4 months; to defrost place frozen birds in the refrigerator and thaw over night.

How to prepare and cook: Grilled or Sautéed

Grill: Whole quail and stuffed quail are best cooked when seared over a high heat then allowed to finish roasting over indirect heat. On a gas grill turn the front and rear or left and right burners to medium-high and leave the middle burner off. On a charcoal grill make a pile of hot coals on each side and leave the middle clear. Apply a light coat of olive oil to the surface of the quail and season. Place quail on grill breast side down on the hot part of the grill. Cook for about 3-4 minutes until browned, flip and cook an additional 3-4 minutes until other side is browned. Move quail to the middle of the grill for indirect cooking. Cook an additional 10-12 minutes until the meat is slightly firm and juices run clear. Pre-heat oven to 350°F; roast quail in oven about 15-20 minutes until the meat is slightly firm and juices run clear.

Sautéed: Preheat oven to 300 °F. Preheat a large sauté pan over the highest temperature. Coat quail breasts generously with olive oil, then season both sides with salt and pepper. Place quail breasts into pan skin side down. Leave flame on high long enough for the pan to recover its heat, then turn flame down to medium or medium high. The object is to sear the breasts quickly so they stay rare but the skin is dark golden brown. Once you've achieved that, remove breasts and place them skin side up on a small sheet pan. Set aside.

Note: The medium-dark flesh has a mildly gamey flavor that readily takes to being marinated, stuffed, or highly seasoned. They are small, so allow one quail per person for an hors d'oeuvre, and at least 2 per person for an entrée. Because they are lean, they need to be cooked quickly over high heat and served medium rare to retain their moisture and flavor.