

Legolas's Duck in Lettuce Boats

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Lord of Lothlórien, Celeborn, equips the Fellowship with three Elvish boats to aid their journey south, along the Silverlode (see page 48) and then on down the Great River toward Gondor. Tolkien describes the boats as made out of a gray wood but very light and propelled with short paddles with leaflike blades—and as rather hard to steer, even if remarkably buoyant. It's a description that might make us think of the wicker-and-hide-covered boats of ancient Britain and Ireland—the Irish corrach and Welsh coracle—fragile boats that the early wandering saints of the islands were said to sail in as they went from community to community spreading the word of God.

Our Eastern-inspired dish here uses lettuce-leaf coracles in which to float lightly spiced spoonfuls of duck—a bird that, incidentally, would probably have flourished along the reedy banks of the Anduin, and which the expert marksman Legolas could easily have hunted with his bow. Some of the other ingredients he might have found it harder to come by, though!



The essential ingredient in this sticky and fragrant hot duck salad is Chinese five spice, a warming mix of fennel, clove, star anise, cassia, and ginger. For a more substantial meal, serve the duck over a tangle of egg noodles, perhaps with steamed bok choy on the side.

Serves 4

Prep + cook time 30 minutes

- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- 2 duck breasts, about 6 oz. each, cut into thin strips
- 2 teaspoons Chinese five spice powder
- 2 tablespoons dark soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons clear honey
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds
- 8 Boston lettuce leaves

To garnish

- 4 scallions, finely chopped
- 1 small carrot, peeled and grated

1. Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet. Toss the duck strips with the Chinese five spice powder in a bowl, then fry over high heat for 8–10 minutes until cooked and crispy. Add the soy sauce and honey, and cook for an additional 2 minutes to coat in the sticky glaze. Sprinkle with the sesame seeds and keep warm.
2. Wash and pat dry the lettuce leaves and place on a serving board. Place spoonfuls of the duck into the leaves, then garnish each with the scallions and carrot.