

## Venison for a Healthy Holiday Treat

Getting tired of turkey or ham leftovers? Consider venison as a departure from the standard Christmas leftovers, as suggested by Angela Treadaway, Regional Extension Agent for Food Safety, Preparation and Preservation...

If processed and prepared properly, deer meat tastes just as good as other any other meat and in most cases is much healthier because it is much leaner. Wild animals such as deer, which are constantly on the move and never feed under artificial conditions, have meat with a higher ratio of protein to fat than that of domestic animals; for example, while you may see venison with some distinct fat layering, you will never see it marbled with fat.

Apart from the favorable ratio of protein to fat in the meat of game animals, it also contains certain necessary minerals, in fairly generous amounts. All of the red meats are good sources of phosphorus and iron (but not of calcium). Of the fifteen different minerals required for human nutrition, most game meat (notably venison) contains sodium potassium and magnesium, as well as traces of calcium, cobalt, zinc, manganese and aluminum.

What the hunter does with the meat he has bagged is another question, and not too infrequently the answer to that question creates a bad image for game meat. Immediate and proper handling of the kill is most important in not only how the meat will taste, but also how the non-hunters of the family will react to it.

Aside from proper techniques of handling, cleanliness is important, from both the practical and psychological viewpoint. A perennial complaint from the female non-hunter, who is ultimately asked to prepare the meat, is about the careless manner in which the animal is handled, transported and processed. Once you understand this attitude, it is not difficult to understand why so much excellent food has gone to waste, just because the cook was unwilling to work with it.

Finally, the cook should understand that the meat from all species of wild animals does not taste the same. Some animals, such as deer, caribou, elk and moose, are some what similar to beef in their taste, texture and cooking requirements. Others, such as beaver and bear, are somewhat similar to pork. The flavor of game meat can even vary within a species, depending upon the age of the animals, the type of diet it lived on, and -- to perhaps belabor a point - how it was handled after being killed.

Here are some hints to make your next venison meal as delicious as it should be. First, older deer will likely be drier and tougher than younger deer. Cooking methods can be varied accordingly. Second, you can make almost any meat tender by cooking it in some water over very-low heat until it is done. High heat toughens meat and may dry it out. Third, soaking meat in salt, vinegar and water for several hours will remove the gamey taste.

Finally, marinades tenderize and enhance -- and may disguise - game flavors. The following are suggested as marinades: Vinegar, wine or wine vinegar (to cover a roast or steak); French or Italian salad dressing; tomato sauce, undiluted tomato soup, or tomato juice (the acid of the juice has a tenderizing effect on the meat); or pickle, orange, lemon or grapefruit juice.