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News Release

How to Improve Your Venison Cooking

Deer season is well under way and many spouses who have never prepared it have lots of questions like how to cook it to remove the game taste. If processed and prepared properly, deer meat tastes just as good as 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 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 somewhat 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. After processing it properly, its up to the cook to prepare it properly.

Hints

Here are some hints to make your next venison meal as delicious as it should be:

- Older deer will likely be drier and tougher than younger deer. Cooking methods can be varied accordingly.
- 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.
- Soaking meat in salt, vinegar and water for several hours will remove the gamey taste.
- To season venison, various combinations of marjoram, thyme, parsley, garlic or onions may be used.
- Marinades tenderize and enhance and may disguise game flavors. The following 5 suggestions can be used as marinades:
 1. Vinegar, wine or wine vinegar (to cover a roast or steak).

2. French or Italian salad dressing.
3. Tomato sauce, undiluted tomato soup, tomato juice (the acid of the juice has a tenderizing effect on the meat).
4. Pickle, orange, lemon or grapefruit juice.
5. Juniper berries can be used in small amounts in marinades. Just make sure you know how to correctly identify the Juniper berry.
 - Always start out with the more simple recipes until you have mastered them, then move onto more complex recipes.
 - To moisten the meat because it is so lean, you could use one of the following:
 - > Bacon slices (wrapped around the meat before cooking)
 - > Light cooking oil (take a brush and brush it lightly over whole surface)
 - > Other additives that can be used to enhance the flavor are: salt, pepper, onion, celery, vinegar, soy and/or Worcestershire sauce.

Recipes

Venison Chili

- 2 lbs of ground venison
- 1 pkg. chili seasoning
- 1 bottle chili sauce
- 2 (16-ounce) cans pinto or kidney beans
- 2 (16-ounce) cans diced tomatoes

Season and cook meat with salt and pepper in a skillet with a little vegetable or olive oil. Put meat in crock pot and add other ingredients; mix. Cook on high for 2 hours or low for 4 hours.

Venison Steak and Onions

- venison steak, sliced into thin strips
- ¼ cup oil
- ½ cup chopped onions
- 1 ¼ cups water
- 1 tablespoon beef or chicken bouillon granules
- 1 can mushrooms, drained
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ¾ cup water

Brown steak in hot oil. Combine onions, water, and bouillon in a saucepan and boil till onions are tender; pour over meat. Simmer till meat is done. Add mushrooms and heat. Combine flour and water and add to mixture. Cook until it thickens. Serve over egg noodles.

For more questions concerning cooking of venison or other wild game please contact Regional Extension Agent Angela Treadaway at the St. Clair County Extension office at 205-338-9416 or 205-410-3696 (cell phone).