Introduction

For centuries, people around the world have enjoyed the culinary delights of rabbit meat. Rabbits are a major source of protein in Europe, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, North America, and other regions of the world.

Rabbit domestication began around 1,000 BC when the Phoenicians reached Spain. However, rabbit meat production became standardized in the nineteenth century. Today, Italy and France maintain a high demand for rabbit meat, and are leaders in rabbit production.

Because of minimal need for space, rabbitries can be found in urban and rural areas throughout the world. Commercial processors market rabbits by selling whole carcasses or cut pieces to groceries and restaurants. Preferences and consumption patterns of rabbit meat depend on cultural and traditional backgrounds, and the age at which rabbits are processed. There are fryers and roasters. Carcass weight for fryers is estimated around 2-5 lb (4-5 lb live weight). Dress-out percentage for fryers is between 50-60%. Rabbits weighing more than 5 lb (live weight) or older rabbits are sold as roasters, and at a large discount. Retail prices for rabbit meat vary widely, and product is not readily available. Prices can vary from $3-6 a pound, or higher. Meat from mature rabbits can be ground and cooked for tacos or spaghetti, or further processed into meat products such as sausage.

Rabbit Meat Does a Body Good

Rabbit meat is lean and mostly white with favorable nutritional qualities. The benefits of white meat include low cholesterol, calories, saturated fats, and sodium, although it is high in protein. Rabbit meat has 33% less sodium than chicken meat. These benefits make rabbit meat an excellent choice for health conscious consumers or those with dietary concerns. Rabbit meat has been recommended for heart disease patients, the elderly, low sodium diets, and weight reduction diets.

Although the United States continues to have an increasingly diverse population, the long-term success of the rabbit meat industry in the United States will be determined by the meat’s nutritional value and culinary interest.
your physician or certified dietician if you have dietary concerns about rabbit meat.

As shown in Table 1, rabbit meat is lower in calories, total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than traditional meats.

The amount of protein found in rabbit meat is 81% of the available nutrition. Micronutrients found in rabbit meat include an abundance of B vitamins including B6 (51% of recommended daily allowance) and B12 (100% of the recommended daily allowance). It is also a good source of phosphorus, niacin, vitamin B12 and selenium. The micronutrients and protein found in rabbit meat assure a very healthy meat choice.

Comparatively, rabbit meat also contains higher potassium content and lower sodium levels. Rabbit meat closely resembles the color and texture of chicken or turkey, and because of its nutritional value, it’s an ideal candidate as a “healthy white meat.” According to the Harvard School of Public Health, saturated fats (bad fats) increase the risk for cardiovascular disease and other chronic conditions. Unsaturated fats (good fats) improve blood cholesterol levels, ease inflammation, stabilize heart rhythms, and play a number of other beneficial roles.

The amounts of fats in our diets are a concern for daily meals, particularly, the amounts of saturated versus unsaturated fats. The saturated fatty acids are difficult for the human body to digest and lead to many health issues. In rabbit meat, the amount of saturated fats is 10% of the total fat, and unsaturated fatty acids are 63% of the total fatty acid content. In comparison, beef has 28% of saturated fats per serving, and pork has 45% of saturated fats.

Based on these nutritional findings and low cholesterol levels, a health claim can be made that rabbit meat helps to reduce the risk for atherosclerosis and coronary heart disease. Therefore, rabbit meat can be included in a heart-healthy diet.

**Culinary Appeal**

Rabbit meat is a dietary staple and a delicacy served in many specialty dishes prepared around the world, particularly at special gatherings. Each population has different preferences for the type and weight of rabbit they purchase. Most consumers

<table>
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<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Rabbit</th>
<th>Chicken</th>
<th>Beef</th>
<th>Pork</th>
<th>Lamb</th>
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<tr>
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<td>162</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fat (g)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat (g)</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol (mg)</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>78.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Frozen rabbit meat is starting to become available in some markets, cooking with this nutritious meat can help you in preparing healthy meals for your family.
will prefer meat from younger rabbits; while there will be those who prefer meat from older rabbits for stews and soups.

If rabbit meat is to make its transition into mainstream America, consumers need to learn a few basic rules regarding cookery. First, the cuts from younger rabbits can be fried or prepared numerous ways depending on preference. It is important to cook meat from older rabbits longer in liquid at low temperatures. Rabbit meat can be easily overcooked. If overcooked, the meat becomes tough and loses moisture quickly because of its low-fat content and lack of marbling.

Second, cooking any type of rabbit meat with moisture is ideal. To enhance flavor and to increase tenderness, use a marinade on the meat before cooking and cook with moist heat, such as stewing or in a crock pot. Onions, garlic, and various spices, herbs, and specific vegetables will add flavor.

Rabbit meat can be prepared the same way as any recipe using chicken. Here are a few rabbit recipes to get you started. Enjoy!

Rabbit Recipes

Cheesy Rabbit Pot Pie

Ingredients
1 8 oz pkg of cream cheese, cubed small (cheese is optional)
½ cup chicken broth
3 cups chopped cooked rabbit (precooked in liquid and seasoning of choice in a crock pot)
1 pkg (16 oz) frozen mixed vegetables, thawed
½ tsp garlic salt
1 egg
½ cup milk
1 cup all-purpose baking mix
Preferred spices

Tip: You can use a premade pie crust to save time.

Preparation
1. Pre-heat oven to 400°F.
2. Cook cream cheese and broth in large saucepan on low heat until cream cheese is completely melted and mixture is well blended, stirring frequently with whisk.
3. Stir in rabbit, vegetables, garlic salt, and other preferred spices; spoon into 9-inch pie plate.
4. Beat egg, milk, and baking mix in medium bowl with whisk until well blended. Stir in baking mix until moistened, then spoon the mixture over the rabbit meat.
5. Place pie plate on baking sheet.
6. Bake 25-30 minutes or until golden brown.
Grilled Rabbit with Vegetables

Ingredients
4 young rabbit legs (1 lb)
¼ cup vinaigrette dressing, divided
1 zucchini and squash, cut into chunks
1 red pepper, cut into chunks
1 cup cut-up fresh asparagus spears
1 small red onion, cut into chunks
Preferred spices (to taste)
¼ cup pineapple chunks (optional)

Preparation
1. Heat grill to medium-high heat.
2. Brush rabbit legs with 2 tbsp of dressing, then let stand for 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, poke holes in bottom of disposable aluminum foil pan.
4. Toss vegetables with remaining dressing.
5. Place in prepared pan.
6. Sprinkle preferred spices over ingredients
7. Place rabbit legs and a pan of vegetables on grill grate.
8. Grill 20 minutes or until rabbit is done (165°F) and vegetables are crisp-tender, turning rabbit over after 10 minutes and stirring vegetables occasionally.

Tip: Use an aluminum foil pan with holes to create a disposable grill basket for easy clean up.

One Dish Rabbit and Sweet Potatoes

Ingredients
½ cup Italian dressing
3 tbsp brown sugar
1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme
1½ lb sweet potatoes (about 3), cut into 3/4-inch-wide wedges
1 young rabbit (3 lb), cut into 8 pieces

Tip: Season potatoes with cinnamon if desired.

Preparation
1. Heat oven to 375°F.
2. Mix dressing, sugar, and thyme in large bowl.
3. Add potatoes; toss to coat.
4. Transfer potatoes to 15x10x1-inch pan, reserving dressing mixture in bowl.
5. Add young rabbit to reserved dressing mixture; toss to coat.
6. Place in pan with potatoes.
7. Bake for 1 hr or until potatoes are tender and rabbit is done (165°F).
8. Transfer rabbit and potatoes to platter.
9. Strain drippings from pan; pour strained sauce over rabbit.

Tip: To vary the recipe, substitute fresh rosemary or 1 tsp dried thyme leaves for the fresh thyme.
Creole La Pin

Ingredients
1 large, young or adult rabbit, quartered
1 can chicken broth or bouillon cube mixed with water
or other liquid beverage
1 can tomato sauce or soup
1 medium onion, chopped or sliced
½ tbsp minced or ½ tsp powdered garlic
2 tsp pepper sauce or spicy peppers
Salt, pepper, cilantro, and other spices of choice

Preparation
1. Mix broth and seasonings in stew or crock pot,
or roasting pan.
2. Add rabbit meat.
3. Slow cook until done.

Tip: Ideal to serve over rice and beans.

Pulled Barbeque Rabbit

Ingredients
½ cup chicken broth
1 older rabbit
½ cup beer or wine, if desired
½ tbsp garlic or ½ tsp garlic powder, if desired
¼ cup chopped onion, if desired
BBQ spices and sauce
2 bay leaves

Preparation
1. Slow cook all ingredients in liquid with seasonings of choice in a crock pot or roasting pan until
done.
2. After it is cooked all the way through, extract rabbit, and allow the meat to rest (drain and cool).
3. Pull rabbit meat from bones once it is cool enough to handle.
4. Return pulled meat to crock pot or pan, add barbeque sauce to taste.
5. Reheat meat with BBQ sauce.

Tip: Ideal to serve pulled BBQ rabbit over buns or sliced bread.

Figure 4. Quartering the rabbit.
Photo courtesy ChiotsRun@Flickr.com
Pulled Rabbit Tacos

Ingredients
½ cup chicken broth
1 older rabbit
½ cup beer or tequila, if desired
½ tbsp garlic or ½ tsp garlic powder, if desired
¼ cup chopped onion, if desired
All your preferred Mexican type spices/seasonings; or, you can use a commercial taco mix packet
2 bay leaves
Taco shells
Condiments: shredded lettuce, chopped tomatoes, cheese, salsa, sour cream, and jalapeños if desired

Preparation
1. Slow cook rabbit in liquid with above ingredients and seasonings of choice in a crock pot or roasting pan until done.
2. Cool after it is cooked all the way. Remove rabbit meat and let it rest (drain and cool).
3. Pull meat off bones, place back into crock pot or pan, and add seasonings to taste.
4. Reheat pulled rabbit meat.
5. Serve once it is thoroughly reheated.
6. Move to serving dish.
7. Load taco shells and garnish as desired.

Tip: Try flour tortillas instead of taco shells to change things up

Figure 5. Flour tortillas will also work with this recipe if your family doesn’t like the hard, corn taco shells.
References


Robert Spencer, Urban Regional Extension Specialist, Alabama A&M University; and Faith Clarke, Small Farms Specialist, Florida A&M University.

Recipes submitted by Robert Spencer Urban Regional Extension Specialist; Sydne Spencer, Engineer and Rabbit Producer; and Faith Clarke, Small Farms Specialist, Florida A&M University.

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county’s name to find the number.

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