



WILD GAME COOKING TIPS

GENERAL TIPS:

- **The secret to great tasting wild game doesn't start in the kitchen, it starts in the field.** To avoid "gamey" taste: Handle meat with clean working surfaces, tools, and gloved hands; cool meat quickly after harvest, cut out and discard bloodshot meat, remove fat and silver skin, age your meat before freezing
- Use meat as soon after the harvest as you can and avoid freezer burn by vacuum sealing before freezing if possible. Trim away any freezer burned meat before use.
- **DO NOT OVERCOOK** – use a meat thermometer; avoid the microwave
 - Wild game cooks faster than domestic meats. It's much leaner and less forgiving
 - Remember that meat continues to cook after it has been removed from the heat, so you may consider taking it off the heat a few degrees before desired temperature
- **Aging improves flavor.** If temperature and humidity can be well controlled between 34-37 degrees F, meat can be aged for 7 days or more; If temperature and humidity CANNOT be well controlled, allow at least 24 hours for the carcass to complete rigor mortis and begin to relax before processing and freezing. Hanging is recommended if ambient temperature is 40 degrees F or less but aging quartered meat in a cooler works also, so long as meat is kept on ice but away from standing water. (Tilt and leave cooler drain open)
- **A good brine can fix a lot of common complaints with game meat, especially ducks and geese.** The salt in the brine helps draw out some of the blood and can help with flavor. It will also add moisture to your meats and prevent them from drying out
- **Consider freezing any wild game meat before use.** If you want to use the meat right away, however, be sure to cook your meat well done (160 degrees F)-so as to avoid parasites including toxoplasmosis, tapeworms, etc.
- **Freezing muscle groups whole** will reduce the surface area available to freezer burn. This offers maximum flexibility of use later on as well
- **Butterfly and round cuts** help turn small muscles into generous-sized steaks. Cut steaks across the meat grain.

VENISON

- **Compared to domestic meats venison is a healthy alternative to red meat:**
 - Venison is equal in protein and lower in saturated fat & calories compared to domestic red meat; a very good source of vitamin B12 and iron; and has no added hormones, steroids, or antibiotics
- **Use the right cut for the recipe:**
 - BBQ/Fry Pan/Slow Roast in Oven/Brine and Smoke: Listed in order of tenderness: Tenderloins (cooks fast – pan sear with butter/oil in a Wok), Backstraps, Eye of Round, Sirloin Tip, Top Round, Bottom Round – Each can be used as a roast or thick steak; best cooked rare to medium-rare to retain flavor and tenderness
 - Stews: Leg shanks (debone and cut into 1" cubes or use bone in shank for recipes like Osso Bucco), Neck roast (debone and stew or slow roast)
 - Ground/Sausage: neck, shoulders, trimmings; lean and full of flavor; add beef/pork fat if fat is required.
 - Jerky: hind leg roasts are best (e.g. bottom round), however most cuts can be used. Watch closely as each cut dries at different rates, even if all jerky is cut the same thickness. Cut jerky with the meat grain
 - Organs: Heart, Liver, Kidneys, and Tongue are cooked either very fast (pan fry) or very slow (crock pot) . Brains, eyeballs, spinal cord, spleen, and lymph nodes are all off-limits as a CWD precaution.
 - Caul fat, the thin membrane which surrounds the internal organs, can be a delicious to encase meat for cooking. Freeze separately and use within 3-6 months of harvest.



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- Use as you would a very lean cut of beef
 - Bacon is often used to seal in moisture and add flavor
 - Just as good: Season, coat with oil and sear - use Vegetable/Canola oil/Butter; Olive oil as serves as a healthy alternative but avoid high heat
 - Pull venison off as soon as it reaches 135 degrees F ; or sooner if you want rare meat. Allow the meat to rest a few minutes before slicing.

WILD BIRDS

- Wild birds can be tougher than domesticated birds since they're wild and work their muscles. Brining or letting meat soak in buttermilk that has herbs and spices added is a great way to tenderize, add moisture, and add flavor to the bird
- Break down birds to cook (skin on/off) – if you cook the legs and thighs until they are tender the breasts will be so overdone you won't be able to eat them
- Make stock out of the remaining carcass
- Do not overcook. Cook breasts to medium rare for maximum flavor (135 – 160 degrees F, depending on how rare you like the meat)
- Unlike deer, duck fat can be the king of flavor and moisture, so, if willing, try searing the breasts with the skin on while basting the breasts in its own fat for added flavor, moisture, and of course, extra calories
- A wild turkey is considered done when the internal temperature (measured with a meat thermometer at the thickest point of the bird) reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit. Cooking in an oven using roasting bags works great as does deep frying and the use of crock pots especially for turkey legs!

RABBIT

- An all-white lean meat, with fewer calories per serving than chicken
- Use as you would chicken, turkey or veal
- Joint a rabbit as you would a chicken (though "breast" of a rabbit is small)
- Cook rabbit until it reaches 158 degrees F, remove from heat, rest to reach 160 degrees F
- Baste rabbit often as it cooks with olive oil to avoid it drying out
- Excellent rabbit seasonings include lemon, parsley, rosemary, sage, bay leaf, lemon-grass, coriander, and basil.

BEAR

- A very dark meat
- Remove as much fat as possible during butchering
- Season like beef, cook like pork: well done!
- Like pork, the proper cooking time for bear meat is 375 degrees F for 20-25 minutes per pound
- Internal cooking temperature should reach 160 degrees for a minimum of 3 minutes before consumption; (See USDA APHIS guidance for Trichinella)
- Cook until there is no trace of pink meat or fluid paying close attention to areas around the joints and close to the bone. Bones absorb heat and slow the cooking process in these areas.

It is important to also follow safe food handling practices endorsed by the Department of Agriculture, reach out to experienced sportsmen and women to further their game cooking education, and explore creative cooking methods on their own. Want to try a new method or technique? Perfect using on a lean cut of beef or chicken (or pork for bear) first. Once perfected, apply to wild game meats. Bon appétit!