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GAME FOR A NEW MEAT?

Workshop offers tips, recipes for cooking venison



Venison

At a recent venison workshop put on by the Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Moira Tidball provided a variety of preparation tips. Venison "veal" cutlets were soaked overnight in salted water. The cutlets were breaded in panko bread crumbs and served with a slice of lemon.

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WATERLOO — The Finger Lakes is wild-game heaven.

And, more and more people are bringing a taste of that heaven to their tables.

Moira Tidball, nutrition resource educator for Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension, focused on processing and cooking venison at last Saturday's workshop. Although the three hunters on hand were experienced in processing and cooking their kills, they were more than happy to hear tips on food safety and sample some of Tidball's venison recipes.

As Hugh Mecum of Waterloo and brothers Joe Emmons of Cicero and John Emmons of Memphis introduced themselves, they tasted venison/cheese pepperoni made by Caver Meats of Clyde. Tidball shared her background as a trained cook who also happens to be a hunter herself; in addition, she and her husband raise grass-fed beef.

Tidball wondered if Mecum and the Emmonses had encountered family resistance to eating the fruits of their hunt — many people have the perception that venison is too tough or "gamey" tasting. Others just can't get over what Tidball called "the Bambi factor."

Mecum said he uses ground venison in chili and most people can't tell the difference. Joe Emmons said he eventually sold his family on venison dishes over time.

"As I learned to make it more edible I couldn't keep them away from it," he said.

Maximizing taste starts as soon as the deer is slain.

Rog's Favorite 'Slow Cooked' Venison Chili Soup

Ingredients

1½ to 2 pounds venison stew meat, cubed small	2 tsp. chili powder
1 pound bacon, diced small (fat trimmed off)	¼ cup brown sugar
½ a can of jalapeño peppers, or 1 cup jalapeño pepper sauce	1 can (10 to 15 ounces) stewed tomatoes
1½ cups chopped green onions	1 cup red wine, catsup, salsa or a combination
2 to 3 garlic cloves, diced	2 cans (15 or 16 ounce) chili beans in sauce
1 can mushroom soup with a soup can of water added	1 cup barbecue sauce
	8 oz. fresh mushrooms, sliced

Spray your slow cooker bowl with nonstick cooking spray for easy cleanup. Add venison, bacon, jalapeño peppers or pepper sauce, green onions, garlic and mushroom soup with a can of water and stir well. Add all remaining ingredients and again stir well. Cover slow cooker and cook on high for 4 to 5 hours or on low for 6 to 8 hours.

— Steve and Gale Loder

Venison Meatballs

Ingredients

1 pound ground venison
2 eggs, stirred
6 Tbsp. grated parmesan cheese
½ cup bread crumbs or quick oats
1 or 2 Tbsp. olive oil
½ cup chopped fresh parsley
1 Tbsp. Italian seasonings (thyme, oregano, basil)
1 clove minced garlic
¼ cup minced onion (optional)
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. black pepper



These venison meatballs prepared by Moira Tidball were well received by three hunters who attended the workshop.

In a large bowl mix all ingredients. Form into 1½-inch meatballs. Lightly oil a large, heavy skillet or use a non-stick saute pan and cook the meatballs over medium heat until brown and cooked through, turning frequently (about 15 minutes). If you prefer a different cooking method, the meatballs can be baked in a preheated oven set at 375 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes, or until cooked through.

— Moira Tidball, Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension



At a recent venison workshop put on by the Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Moira Tidball provided a variety of presentation tips. At left is her agenda for the workshop. Above, these venison "veal" cutlets were soaked overnight in salted water. At top, Tidball fries the cutlets on a griddle as (from left) John Emmons, Hugh Mecum and Joe Emmons watch. The cutlets were breaded in panko bread crumbs and served with a slice of lemon.



Tidball said correctly aging a deer carcass is important to break down the animal's connective tissues, which in turn makes the meat softer. She recommended a hanging time of at least three days, but preferably seven days, at a temperature of 40 to 45 degrees.

Mecum noted if the deer freezes "you get meat with ice crystals." To prevent that, he will sometimes wrap his deer in a tarp with a light underneath it.

All of the men said one reason they process their own deer is they are guaranteed the meat is from the deer they killed and cut the way they like. It's cheaper too.

When it comes to freezing, Tidball said one common mistake is putting all of the cut meat pieces in a box and sticking that in a chest freezer.

"Anything in the center doesn't necessarily freeze," she said, adding it's better to freeze the meat on racks, in single layers.

The pieces should be wrapped well, preferably vacuum-sealed, so their freezer life is longer and freezer burn is less likely to occur.

Tidball touted the nutritional benefits of venison, which is much leaner than traditional red meats. Ground venison can be used in the same way as ground beef, although sometimes you may want to add an egg as a binding ingredient.

"If you put your burger together it could fall apart because it's so lean," she said.

The men gobbled up Tidball's venison meatballs and returned for seconds. Tidball noted she uses quick oats instead of bread crumbs to boost the meatballs' fiber content.

Next on her demonstration menu were venison "veal" cutlets, which she soaked overnight in salted water to draw the blood out. Tidball used pieces from a hind roast cut thinly — about the size of a deck of cards.

"You could probably do it with a shoulder too," she said, "because you are pounding the heck out of it to tenderize it."

In addition to pounding the cutlets, this preparation relies on soaking the cutlets in salted water and replacing the water often. Tidball breaded hers in Panko bread crumbs and lightly fried them on a griddle, serving them with lemon slices when done.

The cutlets can be cooked in a variety of ways, through. Marsala wine or a parmesan dish are other options, for example.

"You can really do some fancy stuff," Tidball said.

Mecum said he's always wanted to make venison jerky and was excited when Tidball turned to that topic. She said a new safety step calls for cooking the meat before drying it.

The men also shared tips among themselves; Mecum spoke of making venison sausage mixed with ground pork, while John Emmons said he adds cheap bacon when processing his sausage.

John Emmons said one of his favorite ways to prepare venison is to take the backstrap pieces, wrap them in bacon and throw them on the grill — an approach that piqued Mecum's appetite.

Should these hunters, or others, be interested in other venison recipes, they might want to check out Clyde native Steve Loder's cookbooks.

Loder, now living in Pennsylvania, has self-published three cookbooks, selling 64,000 copies. Stackpole Publishing selected some of his best recipes from those prior books and released the "Quality Venison Cookbook: Great Recipes from the Kitchen of Steve and Gale Loder."

This book — it features 380 venison recipes — is divided into cooking categories like Italian style, slow cooker, traditional (baking/ frying), Southern-style and Loder family favorites.

Like Tidball, Loder touted the nutritional benefits of venison, mentioning its low-fat qualities and the fact it's high in protein and low in carbohydrates.

Also like the hunters at the local venison workshop, Loder prefers processing his own deer — that way, his venison is carefully trimmed of bone, fat and hair.

"And, you have a year's supply of venison that means so much more to you because you've taken it from field, to freezer to table," he said. "It makes you appreciate the hunting experience from season to season."

Loder, who estimates he's done 400 to 500 book signings, encourages those on hand to try the samples he's brought along. Those who are open to trying venison are often "shocked" how good it is.

He believes that's because his recipes are "95 to 98 percent accurate" for "middle-of-the-road" taste buds. Loder said he thinks the samples are so well received because nowadays homestyle cooking is on the decline, so what he makes tastes like a treat.

"I don't have any magic wand or special ingredients; there's nothing different in there," Loder said. "It's just that [the dishes] are made with care, from my dinner table to yours."

Loder's cookbook was featured in the fall 2011 issue of New Pioneer magazine, which caters to those who grow their own crops and raise their own meat. He thinks the "eating locally" movement may mean more people might turn to cooking venison.

"Yes, there is apparently this national movement of eating your own vegetables, hunting and then enjoying your natural game harvest on your family's dinner table," he said.

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Loder's cookbooks are available at Wegmans, Barnes and Noble, Bass Pro Shops, Cabela's and online at www.stackpolebooks.com, www.barnesandnoble.com and www.amazon.com.