

## **“Wild Game from the Field to the Table”**

By Leo Roth, Sports Columnist, Democrat & Chronicle  
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Eastern Woodlands Indians believed all wildlife were gifts from The Creator and to kill an animal for their own survival was not taken lightly.

In giving thanks for their food and in honor of their woodland “brothers,” they would sprinkle tobacco over the harvested animal and release its spirit back in harmony with nature.

Don Beusman knows of this harmony. And on Saturday, as firearms season for whitetail deer commenced in New York’s Southern Zone, the 76-year-old Canandaigua resident was thankful to be celebrating his 60th year of heading into the woods in pursuit of food for his family’s table.

“A lot of people (who don’t hunt) are missing the boat,” Beusman said. “I think it’s a mental thing. When I see a deer and pull the bow back or pull the trigger, I don’t see an animal I want to kill. I see venison sausage I’m harvesting. I look at it that way because I hunt for food.”

By doing so, Beusman’s connection to the land is so much deeper than any 10-point rack could deliver. “Every magazine you pick up these days, it’s all about shooting the big trophy,” he said. “To me, that puts competition on the hunter and gets away from why we hunt — because the food we get from that animal is beautiful meat that we can use and we are very thankful for it.”

And after the hunt, the fun and satisfaction for Beusman is just starting. While many hunters don’t have the time or skill for this, the retired Churchville-Chili industrial arts and technology teacher prepares his venison every step of the way from field to table.

He does all of his own butchering and with his wife, Sue, by his side has developed dozens of recipes, from venison summer sausage to bourbon jerky, that he has shared with family and friends, including author Steve Loder, whose *Quality Venison* cookbooks are among the best on the market. “It’s been 50 years of experimenting,” Beusman said. “It takes a lot of time and patience but when I prepare the venison I cut all my own meat. I realize there are a lot of good game processors out there, but in our family, we handle it ourselves and take a lot of pride in how we do it.”

According to Moira Tidball, human ecology and nutritional resource educator for Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension, a growing segment of sportsmen want to know more about preparing their game or fish for consumption, a trend related to the “eat local” food movement.

Wild game and fish are locally produced — by nature. They are a sustainable resource, Tidball said. “Like a person who has a garden and enjoys eating tomatoes they grow, take it one step further and it’s about eating the animal you harvested or the fish you caught,” Tidball said. “There is a lot of satisfaction in that.” Recently, Tidball hosted a workshop on canning meat and jerky making attended by more than 20 people. She also maintains a terrific website she started ([wildharvesttable.com](http://wildharvesttable.com)) dedicated to sharing game and fish recipes, tips, and stories from the woods and water.

“What’s often lacking is what to do once you harvest an animal,” said Tidball, who hunts and fishes with her husband, Keith, after growing up in a non-hunting family in Penfield. “Some people love wild game and know how to cook it and others may have had a bad experience. The key is for people to understand that it’s a lean meat and you need to prepare it a certain way. But when you know how, it’s delicious and very nutritious.”

Some of Tidball’s recipes are tweaks on traditional meals and involve substituting wild game for store-bought beef. The key is slow cooking (think a crockpot) to break down the fibrous meat resulting from a natural diet free of the hormones and antibiotics given domesticated animals.

Tidball, who owns culinary and nutrition degrees from Boston University and Kentucky, has a squirrel fricassee recipe lined up for her 12-year-old daughter Victoria’s first squirrel.

“It’s a hard leap of faith to make but it’s delicious,” she said.

And don't forget the Hasenpfeffer (German stew) with rabbit.

While it's true that it takes a small investment to acquire the equipment needed to butcher meat, can, make sausage or smoke fish, most of it is very mechanical in design and will last a lifetime. Tidball and Beusman also stressed how important it is to review proper field dressing techniques and meat handling, things that are vital to good tasting and safe meals.

After he harvests a deer, Beusman raises it into a tree where he does the deboning process on the spot, which is allowed by law, taking extra care with the choice cuts (tenderloins and back straps.) He packs out the tagged meat to eat and the hide to donate to the Canandaigua V.A. Medical Center; vets turn the hides into leather goods.

Anything that remains of the deer, the coyotes, raccoons, fishers and birds take care of. "It's the best recycling we have and it's free," said Beusman, a member of the Middlesex Conservation Club where he mentors young teens about the outdoors.

Last week, portions of a fresh doe Beusman harvested during the final days of early archery season were cooling in his garage in preparation for his bourbon jerky and his wife's venison stroganoff. The couple raised five kids on pheasant, rabbit and venison and their 10 grandchildren are learning to appreciate nature's bounty the same way.

"It's not something for nothing," Beusman said. "We work hard for what we get and the final product is excellent. "I tell folks, 'Listen, I don't 'kill' animals I 'harvest' animals the same way I would harvest tomatoes and radishes from the garden. To take a deer from the woods is the same thing and I really believe that.' And after doing so, we always say a simple prayer: 'Thank you Lord for giving us this food, Amen.' That's what a lot of us hunters do."

Just like the Eastern Woodland Indians, in harmony with nature.



*Caption: Don Beusman of Canandaigua processes a doe that he harvested during archery season. Beusman quarters the deer in the field and transports the meat back to his home, where he prepares the rest of the animal to be cooked into steaks, jerky, sausage and stew.*



*Caption: Beusman inspects a damaged arrow used to harvest a deer. The 76-year-old, a retired Churchville-Chili industrial arts and technology teacher, has hunted for 60 years.*



*Caption: Don Beusman of Canandaigua packs his rope and block & tackle into a backpack. After he harvests a deer, Beusman uses this gear to raise it into a tree, where he does the deboning process on the spot, which is allowed by law, taking extra care with the choice cuts (tenderloins and back straps).*



*Caption: Beusman consults a venison cookbook by author Steve Loder. With his wife, Sue, Beusman has developed dozens of recipes, from venison summer sausage to bourbon jerk that he has shared with family and friends, including Loder.*



*Caption: Don and Sue Beusman raised five children on pheasant, rabbit and venison. He's preparing venison for his bourbon jerky and his wife's venison stew.*



*Caption: Beusman stresses how important it is to review proper field dressing techniques and meat handling, things that are vital to good tasting and safe meals.*



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