

MY FAVORITE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

PART THREE

In the previous issue we discussed the first three “ingredients” to proper care after you harvest your game: microorganisms, exposure, and fat. This installment will cover temperature, both in processing as well as cooking.

We’ll start with processing. It is crucial to keep your freshly harvested meat as cold as you can. If your game meat constantly stays around 40°F, you will significantly reduce the growth of any harmful bacteria and slow the transfer of poor tasting fat into the flesh. Whenever possible, try to minimize the amount of time any particular cut of meat is being processed, and keep cuts of meat that are not being worked on stored in the refrigerator or in an ice chest.

It is very important to keep any meat which you plan on grinding extremely cold, even partially frozen. If you

run warm meat through a grinder, the mixing and cutting of the soft tissue will make for a very pasty, bright pink and a not-so-appetizing final product. Meat is best ground when it is partially frozen. Commercial grinders often add dry ice to their meat to keep the temperature from rising from the heat of the machine and the friction of the grinding process.

Most wild game, unless it is being braised in liquids, should be cooked to rare or medium-rare (110°F to 135°F). Heat is obviously very damaging to protein, so we must do all we can to avoid using too much. We have all seen the affects of heat on muscle fibers—each time you add a steak to a hot frying pan you see the surface tighten and contract. Overcooking your venison will create an excessive amount of tension, which in turn,

pushes the juices right out of the steak. There are several things you can do to avoid overcooking your game.

Rest your meat before you cook it. Pulling your roast from refrigeration an hour or two before cooking will allow the internal temperature to rise from 40°F to a more manageable 55°F to 70°F. A smaller range of temperature travel to 110°F will allow you to make a larger percentage of rare meat. Only the red portion of the roast has been cooked to rare; all the brown meat has been overcooked.

Reduce the amount of meat exposed to the heat of the oven, pan, or grill. Heat must travel from the outer edges of the meat into the center, so the outer edges essentially get overcooked while you raise the internal

MORE FROM WILD GOURMET



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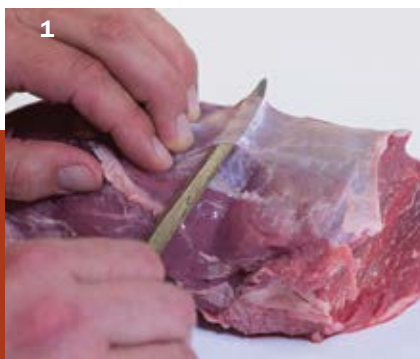
temperature. This is good reason to avoid cooking individual steaks of venison; all the exposed sides of the steak are being overcooked, limiting the total amount of rare meat. However, if the muscle is left intact and cooked whole, you can greatly reduce the exposed surface area of the meat.

Rest your meat after you cook it. Heat energy will always travel from areas of high concentration to areas of low concentration. Since the surface and first few centimeters of meat are overcooked (165°F, plus), that heat will continue to travel inward

MORE TIPS FOR PROCESSING GAME CONNECTIVE TISSUE AND SINEW

Connective tissue and sinew can easily be removed from each muscle before freezing or after thawing. There simply isn’t enough fat or moisture in wild game to overcome the dry, rubbery texture of any sinew or connective tissue. Try to remove as much of this silvery skin as possible before cooking your game.

Using a sharp boning or filet knife, slide the knife just under the white strings of sinew (1), angle the blade of the knife slightly upwards and push the blade forward (2 and 3). The sinew will cleanly separate from the muscle (4), repeat until all sinew has been removed.



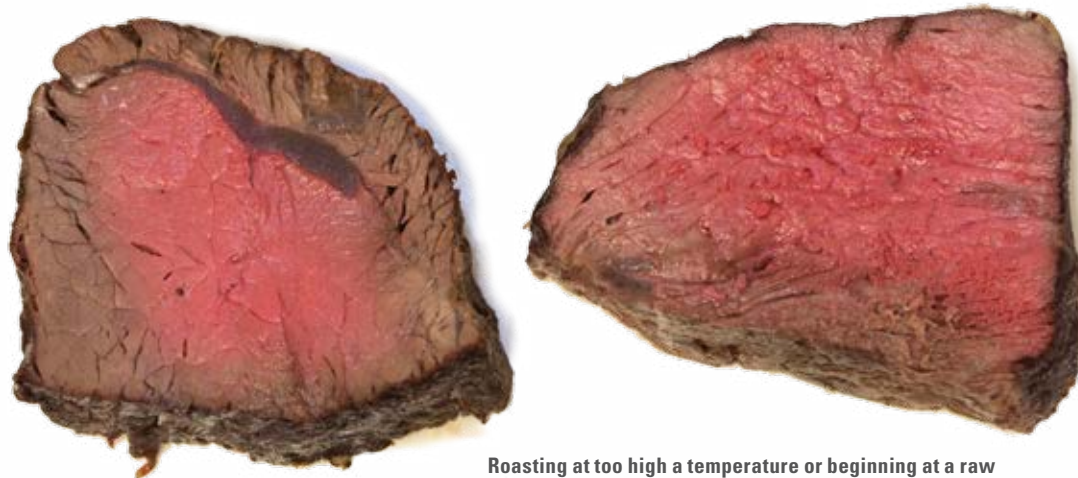
The cutting board with the roast that was rested stays dry while, the roast stays moist (right). The un-rested cutting board is drenched in the savory juices being squeezed from the roast (far right).

towards the cool center. In most instances, this heat travel will continue to cook the roast and raise the internal temperature another 5°F to 15°F. I recommend pulling 2- to 3-inch roasts at 105°F. Help the heat dissipate into the roast by keeping it in a warm area (120°F) or by placing a tinfoil tent over the roast. If you have overcooked your roast (140°F), you can avoid further cooking by letting it rest in a cool place where the heat will disperse out into the cool air and not inward. Resting your roasts after cooking also allows the built-up tension in the muscle fibers to diminish. If you cut into a roast fresh from the oven, that tension will squeeze all the juice from the meat and onto the cutting board. A well-rested roast can be completely carved without any significant liquid lost.

Even when you want to slowly braise or stew game in liquids, you must be careful

to avoid overcooking your game. Generally braising and stewing are cooking methods used on the tougher cuts of meat, like chuck or shank, which are heavily laced with sinew and fat. The objective is to raise the temperature of the meat over 170°F and hold it there for one to two hours. This time and temperature combination begins to break down the tougher connective tissues into shorter, more savory protein chains like glutamates. Domestic cuts of chuck and shank can handle being cooked at much higher temperatures because the meat is comprised of 15 to 30 percent fat. Wild meat, with its incredibly lean nature, is not so lucky. Take care to rest these meats prior to cooking

to pull some of the chill out of it. Cook them very slowly at temperatures no greater than 225°F to help warm the entire dish evenly. Watch your internal temperature closely. I would even suggest buying a remote thermometer which will show you exactly where you are at, and once you have maintained the magical 170°F for 90 minutes, stop cooking. Pull the pot from the oven and let rest for another hour. ■



Roasting at too high a temperature or beginning at a raw core temperature below 40°F can significantly diminish the percentage of perfectly cooked meat (left); whereas proper roasting temperatures and a raw core temperature from 55°F to 70°F will yield much better results (right).



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