

# MY FAVORITE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

## PART TWO

**In the previous issue we discussed the first two “ingredients” to proper care after you harvest your game: microorganisms and exposure. This installment will cover fat, an often overlooked component of wild game meat.**

Wild game fat is not something that I used to give much thought, but as I began to delve deeper into the components of quality tasting wild game, I found that not all fat is created equal. Fat quality is a major contributor to the resulting “gameyness” of wild meat. The best wild fats come from non-diving ducks and geese; some of the worst fats are in cervids (venison) and mammalian males. Adipose tissue or fat stores many of the

minerals and hormones in the body, and in nature, these flavors can be quite overwhelming. It is important to know the quality of fat specific to the game you are harvesting. If you are dealing with the high quality fat of ducks and geese—even squirrel, rabbit, bear, or wild boar—then it will be in your interest to keep the fat on the animal (as long as it is kept cold) until you process it. If you are dealing with poor quality fats like venison and elk, or the high hormone-laden fat of mammalian males, it is important that you remove as much of the fat as possible as quickly as possible. I am not suggesting that you throw this fat away; keep it. It still has useful and delicious capabilities, and splitting the fat and flesh will give you more control over the flavor of your dishes.

I always skin my venison and mammalian males. The skin of all game is covered in a thin layer of adipose and until that fat completely hardens (40°F) the flavor profile is constantly seeping into the flesh. Even the energy from sunlight is sufficient to thaw dermal fat enough that flavor transfer quickens. The strong glands of male animals is particularly pungent and this scent can be off-putting enough to make some unwilling to eat the meat.

It is best to leave the hide on while in the field as the damage from microorganisms is worse than the detriments of fat. But once you are in a clean and manageable environment, remove the hide

from these animals as quickly as possible. Keep the flesh from drying out by covering the muscle with plastic wrap or plastic bags. If I am deep in the heart of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, far from the clean sanctuary of my processing room, I will break the carcass into manageable sections, usually consisting of the neck, chuck/grinding meat, plates/flanks, rib meat, loins, rounds, shanks/bones. I place each group into large black plastic bags (remove all the air) and seal, then layer in a large cooler with hard frozen ice packs. No buck-pole sunlight is going to taint the quality of the flesh this animal worked so hard to produce; my delicious dinner will age just beautifully tucked away in the cold, dark cooler.

Wild game does not often suit traditional consumer butchering, cutting whole muscle groups into the individual steaks and roasts

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we see in grocery isles. Domestic meats are better suited for whole roasts or large cross-cuts of complete muscle groups or individual steaks because they have a much higher and more palatable fat content. This added fat helps negate the toughness of intramuscular sinew and keeps the mouth moist while chewing. It also makes for a much more forgiving meat, which can be cooked well-done and still be reasonably tasty. Without this fat, the connective tissue can easily become a rubber band and if the meat is overcooked; it becomes stuck in an arid and burdensome oral desert.

Fat, temperature, connective tissue, and muscle grain must always be under constant care when cooking



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## RENDERING FAT

Collect all fat from the carcass, especially that near the backbone and ribs of the animal. It is okay if the fat has small amounts of meat still attached.

- (1) Place the fat in a large sauté pan and add just enough water to cover the bottom of the fat. This will protect the fat from sticking and burning to the bottom.
- (2) Over medium-low heat, warm the fat and liquefy its delicious contents. Be careful not to use too much heat as this will scald and potentially burn the fat.
- (3) The large pieces of fat will shrink as they liquefy.
- (4) Stop once the pieces have turned crisp and golden brown. To finish, filter the hot fat through a cheesecloth (opposite top)

and serving wild game, so it is necessary to understand them before processing your game. Using this information, we can better cut and package meat in a manner that will produce the best quality cuts that you are confident in using.

The high quality fat with which our culinary world is so familiar only exists because centuries of domestication have selected for it. We have fats and oils uniquely favored for every sumptuous quality this delicious ingredient has to offer. Because all fats are not created equal, each has its own particular qualities which will dictate its best use.

The first quality of fat

I look for is its melting point. The higher the melting point, the higher the amount of heat the fat is capable of withstanding. However, these high melting-point fats, particularly with wild game, will remain thick and solid at

room temperature. When these fats are served in your game dishes, the liquid fat will congeal in the mouth and leave a heavy, gamey, fatty taste which can ruin the whole meal. Lower melting-point fats cannot withstand high heat, but are generally light and soft on the palate at room temperature.

High-temperature cooking fats, like venison, are best suited for frying and searing. Using these fats at the right time and temperature can add an incredibly deep savory flavor to your favorite dish. I love to use two parts vegetable oil and one part venison fat for frying French fries. I also keep a solid block of venison or bear fat in the freezer and use it

to slick the grates on a searing hot grill. Lower-temperature fats, like those from the non-diving duck, goose, squirrel, rabbit, young female bear, and wild boar are perfect for adding the wet, juicy qualities back into any game dish. The best fats from duck and goose can even be used for cold cooking applications like salad dressings.

Fat, regardless if it is high or low temperature, is extremely useful in the kitchen and should never be discarded. I am always amazed by the number of duck hunters who simply remove the breasts and discard the rest of their hard-fought harvest. Not only is there a tremendous abundance of delicious meat being wasted, it is also a great deal of the best cooking fat you can find. Fat can be rendered very easily and can be stored in the freezer for up to 6 months. Small amounts can be broken off the frozen block of rendered fat for use in recipes.

Next issue we will discuss the best cooking temperatures for wild game. ■



Filter the hot fat through a cheesecloth and store in an airtight container and freeze until needed.

