

GAME MEAT — ‘YOU SHOT IT, YOU EAT IT’



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Someone once said, “Everything improves with age.” Obviously that person was not referring to leftovers. As a kid growing up with my grandparents, we never had leftovers. I always assumed it was because my grandfather refused to eat them. In later years, I once asked my surly old grandmother why we never had leftovers.

“Land sakes boy, we never had leftovers with you around. You put away food like a sanitary landfill, and I am not so sure about the sanitary part,” and she cackled evilly as she walked away. So much for pleasant childhood memories.

I will come home from work, in my usual jovial mood, and ask my wife of many years what is for dinner? Her response is, “Leftovers. Roast elk surprise. I am cleaning out the fridge from everything you didn’t finish up.”

“Aaaaaacccckk,” I say, “I’m sick of elk. How about a pizza instead?”

“You shot it, you eat it,” is her response.

Game meat improves with age while it is hanging in a cooler, just before processing. It does not age so well when it is in the freezer, especially along about June, when you have been eating it for the past 6 months, 15 times a week.

In the old days, we did not have the choices we have now. You butchered your game into steaks, roasts, and the left over was ground into burger. There were always the brave souls who ate heart and liver, but I am not amongst that crowd, and yes, before you ask, I have tried it “that way.”

I never cared much for roasts either. We usually made most of the roasts into jerky. While good jerky is always a favorite around our house, it is very time consuming to make.

There are many myths about game meat, all comparing it to



Enjoying the bounty of your hunt is one of the major reasons we go in the first place. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

store-bought meats, and reasons why folks don’t like game. One is that cooking wild game is difficult.

Cooking game meats is much easier than store-bought meats. For starters, don’t cook it to death. Everyone treats game like it is unclean or inferior. Truth is, game is much healthier for you, less fat, no added chemicals. Game is usually handled better, especially since you, the hunter, are the one who handles it and gets it to the processor.

Getting the hide off and the carcass chilled down as fast as possible is the big secret to fine tasting game meat. Then taking it to a reputable processor, where it can be properly aged, processed, and packaged properly for long term storage in the freezer, is the next step. This way, when you prepare it, you can just about use any recipe you have for beef, and the same spices, just don’t overcook the meat.

The next big complaint I most often hear is that it tastes “gamey.” This generic term is thrown around to describe any meat that is not mild in flavor. Wild meats always have more flavor than farm-raised meats. We are so used to eating grain-fed meats that are so mild, anything else is unpleasant.

Whenever game meat smells “gamey” or tastes bad, it is

usually because it was handled improperly or cooked the wrong way. Again, take care of your animal properly when it is in the field.

The most important factor when considering wild game versus store-bought beef boils down to fat content. Face it, fat is flavor. It is a necessary part of our diet, in moderation, although it is unhealthy when abused.

Wild animals are always moving about in the wild, from food source to running away from predators. If you have ever seen how fast an elk can run up a mountain, you understand what I mean. Game will never build up the unhealthy levels of intramuscular fat that domestic animals have in abundance.

Because wild game is so lean, it is less forgiving when overcooked. People always complain the game is dry. The best advice is to never over cook it. You can’t un-cook a steak, but you can cook it a little bit longer.

To counter the leanness, some processors add a little bit of fat to the burger when processing. This helps hold burger patties together better when cooking and adds a bit more flavor. You need to experiment around for your own tastes with this. Adding domestic fat to game seems to be the opposite of why

you choose wild game in the first place.

The leanness of wild game also may make it seem tougher than its domestic counterpart. My grandmother solved that problem by always marinating the cut, roast or steak, overnight, before cooking it. We use a variety of marinades, always with a little bit of cooking oils.

One of the best ways to marinate game is in milk or buttermilk overnight. A steak that marinates in an acidic liquid too long, such as citrus juice or cola, becomes tough or mushy. The acid in milk is so mild that you can soak game in it long enough to tenderize it effectively, without damaging the surface proteins.

One of the best reasons to use a processor is the variety you can put into your game animal cuts. No longer are we stuck with the burgers, roasts and chops choice. You can have some of your burger made into sausage with a variety of seasonings, from breakfast, German and Italian, to chorizo and extra spicy. Many of the processors will also make link sausages for breakfast, and brat sized with the same variety of seasonings.

Our favorite is to order a bunch of the hunter sticks and jerky. These are available in teriyaki, mild and hot. Our favorite hunter sticks are the jalapeno-cheese.

You will also have a wide variety of choices regarding the other cuts of meat. You can choose the thickness of the steaks, how many to a package, and what cuts you want. Any unwanted cuts can be made into burger. The secret is to get a wide variety, so you never tire of eating the wild game. It may cost a little extra up front, but it pays back later in the year when you have a freezer full of choices.

I have learned through the years that one of the secrets to marital bliss is to never anger the person who handles your food. My wife does a great job of keeping me well fed, and I offer my bursting waistline as exhibit “A.” I guess I need to eat more at dinner so there are no leftovers.

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The Gunnison Gorge NCA is home to the Peach Valley OHV Staging Area, which boasts miles of trail for bikers, hikers and motorized recreators. (Courtesy photo/BLM)

NCA

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“We’re doing a lot with a little bit of staff,” he said.

A birthday party for a gorge

While the official birthday falls mid week, the BLM will hold three events this weekend to celebrate the NCA’s silver anniversary.

Two will center around Eagle Rock Shelter, a unique site within the NCA that archaeologists discovered has been

inhabited for over 12,000 years.

Glade Hadden, one of the original archaeologists to explore the site, will lead a lecture Oct. 18 about the discoveries and a hike Oct. 19 to the shelter itself.

“There’s only a handful of sites like that in all of the new world,” Franz said.

The presentation will take place at Deta’s Bill Heddles Recreation Center from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Friday evening, and the 1.5 mile hike from the Eagle Rock Shelter trail-

head parking will have two sections at 9 a.m. and 10:15 a.m.

Later on Saturday, there will be a catered birthday celebration at the Gunnison Gorge Pleasure Park, which will include a few speeches and, of course, a birthday cake.

All events are open to the public, but attendees must RSVP as the hike and presentation are space-limited and head counts are needed for the catered event.

“It should be a fun celebration,” Franz said.

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