

Perfect Braised Venison

By Tom Dickson

Preparation time: 15 minutes | Cooking time: 2 to 3 hours | Serves 6



I never thought I'd have to bring out the big gun, but I was wrong.

Anyone reading *Montana Outdoors* over the past several years who is interested in cooking game knows that I'm all about braising. This time-honored method of slowly cooking meat in moisture at low temperature transforms the toughest cuts (shanks, shoulders, necks) into delicious dishes you'd be proud to serve the King and Queen of Sweden.

I praise braising so regularly because it breaks my heart to think that each year tens of thousands of elk and deer shanks are tossed in the trash—wanton waste—or turned into sausage meat. Nothing wrong with sausage, but that's by no means the best use of a good shank.

I thought I was making some headway until a few weeks ago when I read a game cooking blog in which the author had this to say about venison shanks: "The best use for this inedible chunk of lower leg is to feed it to the dog." Sigh.

So in the interest of once again giving shanks their due, I offer this recipe for the best braised venison dish I've ever tasted. It's a variation of one by award-winning New Orleans chef and restaurateur John Besh that was reprinted in *Field & Stream* a few years ago. The vegetables, herbs, and mushrooms ground the dish in earthy flavors. The apple and wine add fruity tones that balance the tomato's acidity while giving the dish a holiday flare. Ladle over polenta or mashed potatoes and serve with crusty bread to sop up every last drop.

Follow Besh's easy recipe this Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Year's Eve. I promise it will be one of the best—if not *the* best—venison dishes you and your guests have ever tasted. You'll never look at shanks the same again. 🐾

Chef John Besh's cookbook, My New Orleans (\$45; Andrews McMeel Publishing), features more than 200 of his best dishes, including many delicious game dishes.

—Tom Dickson is editor of *Montana Outdoors*.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds venison shoulder meat, shank, or neck roast
- 3 T. bacon drippings or duck fat
- 1 onion, diced small
- 1 carrot, peeled and diced small
- 1 celery stalk, diced small
- 3 T. flour
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 c. canned diced tomatoes
- 1 apple, any type, cored and diced
- 1 oz. dried porcini, morel, chanterelle, or other mushrooms (or 8 oz. fresh)
- ½ c. beef broth
- 1 c. apple juice
- 1 c. red wine
- 1 small sprig fresh thyme (or ½ t. dried)
- 1 small sprig rosemary (or ½ t. dried)
- 1 bay leaf
- Dash of sugar
- Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

Season venison with salt and pepper. Over high heat, add bacon drippings or duck fat to a pot, then brown venison on both sides.

Remove venison, then add onion, carrot, and celery. Reduce heat to medium and stir while cooking, until vegetables turn a rich brown. Stir in flour. When flour has been well incorporated, add garlic, tomatoes, apple, and mushrooms.

Stir in beef broth, apple juice, and red wine. Raise heat to high and bring to a boil. Add thyme, rosemary, bay leaf, sugar, and venison.

Remove pot from stove, cover, place in oven, and cook for 2 to 3 hours, or until you can easily pull the meat from the bone with a fork. Taste sauce and season with salt and pepper as needed.

Remove from oven. Take out venison and carefully pull meat from the bone (or serve on the bone if you prefer). Return meat to the cooking liquid until ready to serve.

Place a large spoonful of polenta or mashed potatoes on a plate. Top with a generous spoonful or two of the venison with sauce. ■