COOKING VENISON 101
Congratulations! You harvested your game. Now what?

There’s no doubt that you’ve spent months preparing for this very moment. You’ve harvested a Pennsylvania whitetail deer. All of the hours preparing, early mornings in the woods, strategy, and dedication have paid off. Now that you have this beautiful animal... what do you do with it?

**RESPECT YOUR HARVEST**
With wildlife conservation and participating in Pennsylvania’s hunting heritage at the forefront of all of our minds when we enter the woods each year, it is important to take these conscientious behaviors to the next level and respectfully consume as much of our deer as possible.

But what do you do if you don’t like venison? Or, you’re tired of the same old recipes - how much chili, sticks and sausages can one person really eat?

**IT’S NOT JUST FOR THE CHEFS AND PROFESSIONALS**
What you need are a few great tips, tricks and some refreshed recipes to help you make the most of your harvest. Allow me, Allie Doran, author of bestseller *Venison Every Day* and accidental hunter’s wife, to completely change the way you look at cooking wild game so you can create delicious meals, save money on groceries, and support Pennsylvania conservation efforts.

**DON’T COOK IT LIKE YOU COOK BEEF**
One of the very first mistakes I see people make, and one that I made early on, is directly substituting venison for beef. Because so many of us are used to the taste of commercially available meat, working with a protein that has a much different flavor profile can leave some with a metallic or heavy taste in the mouth, often described as “gamey.”

Deer meat has a different flavor profile and also a totally different fat composition than beef. That’s why it’s best to follow recipes written for venison (you’ll find several included here) and implement the tips and tricks below for really delicious dishes.
Important Tips & Tricks for Working with Venison

PREPERATION OF THE MEAT
Properly killing, gutting, quartering, and processing an animal is crucial. A clean, swift kill, cuts down on the amount of stress hormones an animal releases. There can be many hormones in a deer’s blood that can affect the taste. This is also why a lot of bucks harvested by trophy hunters, or hunters who harvest mature, large bucks during the rut, have meat that can taste a bit stronger than, say, a young deer. There are more hormones present in the bloodstream during the time of harvest.

When field dressing a deer it is very important to have someone who is knowledgeable present. Improperly doing this step in your harvest can significantly alter the flavor to something that no amount of good cooking can fix.

Venison shouldn’t be smelly or outright offensive to the tastebuds if cooked to a medium-rare. Check-in with yourself or whoever is harvesting your meat. If you/they need help learning to properly field dress a deer, call in someone with the right skill set and spend some time doing research. There is a wealth of resources available from the Pennsylvania Game Commission’s website.

After harvesting, you’ll want to break down or have your deer broken down into certain cuts. I always say it’s best to go with cuts of meat that you buy from the store frequently. For example, if you like to make roasts on Sunday in the winter, make sure to freeze some whole roasts!

When thawing, I like to lay the meat on a paper towel to absorb some of the old blood. This helps to create a really clean flavor when you’re finished cooking. The first hard and fast rule is that if you’re complaining about an offensive taste from your meat, it’s probably because it was mishandled either in the field or the kitchen.
DON’T OVERCOOK STEAKS, LOINS AND TENDERLOINS
A rule of thumb when it comes to cooking with cuts of venison such as steaks and chops is - do not overcook the meat. When cooking venison steaks, tenderloin, backstrap, chops, and even some leg roasts, you want a medium-rare to rare internal temperature. This is between 120F-130F. Getting a really good internal read thermometer is crucial here.

When people talk about that iron-like “gamey” flavor, it’s most likely because the meat is overcooked. I know many people like their meat cooked to at least medium, but I strongly recommend trying your venison (and other wild game meat) at medium-rare.

REST YOUR MEAT
On another note, when your food comes to about 120F-125F, remove it from the heat, and cover it with foil to rest for about 10 minutes before serving. Resting is very important when cooking any meat because it draws the juices back into the meat.
LOW AND SLOW FOR TENDER BIG CUTS

When cooking large cuts of meat with a lot of connective tissue, such as neck or shoulder roasts, low and slow is the way to go. If you just can’t seem to get a fall-apart tender roast it’s likely because you’re cooking at too high of a temperature for too short of a time period.

If you’re braising something (cooking it covered in a bit of liquid) the best thing to do if the meat isn’t falling off the bone is to drop the oven temperature a bit (I like 300F-325F) and cook until it does start to fall apart.

This method makes sure to melt the connective tissue, which gives you both a tender and juicy piece of roasted meat. Voila!
**ADD ACID**
This is my favorite tip for combatting that rich flavor that many mature bucks carry with them. I add acid to almost everything I cook with venison. This is as simple as adding cider or balsamic vinegar to chili, meatballs, marinades - everything!

This is also a great tip for altering a family favorite recipe you usually make with beef - just add a tablespoon or two of citrus juice, balsamic, apple cider, white or red wine vinegar to whatever you’re making.

Acid also helps break down connective tissue, giving you more tender meat. If I had to pick the most valuable tip, this would be it.

**ADD FAT**
Most people add bacon or pork fat to ground meat during processing, which in my opinion, is always a great idea. When working with larger cuts of meat or steaks, I always recommend a marinade with plenty of fat.

It doesn’t have to be pounds and pounds of butter in a recipe making it unhealthy, you can choose high-quality fat to add to marinades or while cooking dishes. I usually opt for olive oil, avocado oil, grass-fed butter, or duck fat.
To the Kitchen!

Now that you have these tips, tricks and recipes up your sleeve, it’s time to take what you’ve learned to the kitchen. In no time, you’ll be a wild game cooking pro creating delicious meals. Check out the recipes below to get started.

Allie Doran is an author, TV personality, wild game recipe developer and photographer residing in Pottsville, PA. She is the author of the bestseller, Venison Every Day and she is also the creator and creative director behind the popular food blog “Miss Allie’s Kitchen,” which focuses on publishing updated comfort food recipes and inspiring others to live happy and healthy outdoor lifestyles. She is the proud wife of an avid outdoorsman and embraces her role as “mom” with the utmost gratitude & enthusiasm.

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All Purpose Marinade

YIELD — about ½ cup
(makes enough to marinate 1-2 lbs. of meat)

PREP TIME — 5 minutes

Ingredients

¼ cup olive oil
2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
½ lemon, juiced
3 garlic cloves, minced and smashed
1 tsp. Italian seasoning
⅛ tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper

Directions

Add all of the ingredients to a jar with a lid or a bowl and shake or whisk together vigorously. Add the meat you want to marinate to a bowl or zip-top bag and pour the marinade all over it. Let it sit in the fridge for at least 1 hour, but up to overnight before cooking.
Roast with Garlic and Herbs

YIELD — about 6 (maybe 8) servings
PREP TIME — 15 minutes
COOK TIME — 2 ½ hours

Ingredients

3 lb. roast (if your roast is smaller or larger, you may need to adjust the cooking time)
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper
2 Tbsp. oil
4 garlic cloves, minced
½ tsp. lemon zest
2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
2 tsp. chopped, fresh rosemary
1 cup beef or venison stock
¼ cup dry red wine (omit if you don’t like cooking with wine and use stock)
2 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
3 Tbsp. tomato paste

Directions

Begin by preheating the oven to 350°F and heating a Dutch oven or large pan over medium-high heat. I prefer to use a Dutch oven because I can cook the roast in it the entire time, but if you don’t have one, use a large pan to sear the meat and cook it in a covered roasting dish.
Rub the roast all over with the salt and pepper and add the oil to the pan. Sear the venison on each side to create a nice, brown crust all over the meat.
Once the venison is seared, remove it from the heat. If you’re not using a Dutch oven, transfer the roast to a roasting pan.
Mix together the remaining ingredients and pour all over the roast, making sure every bit of it has been touched by the liquid.
Cover the roast either with a lid or foil and slide it in the oven. Roast for about 2 ½ hours, or until the roast is very tender. If you want, reserve the pan juices for serving.
Ground Venison Tacos

YIELD — about 6 servings
PREP TIME — 10 minutes
COOK TIME — 15 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 Tbsp. olive or avocado oil
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 lb. ground venison
- 4-5 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 Tbsp. chili powder
- 1 Tbsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. pepper
- 1 orange, juiced
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1 Tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup water

Directions

Begin by heating a large pan over medium heat on the stove. Add the oil to the pan and when the oil is hot, add the onion and sauté until translucent, about 3-4 minutes. Then, add the ground venison and cook until browned, about 6-8 minutes.

Next, add the garlic, chili powder, cumin, salt and pepper. Cook for an additional 2 minutes before deglazing the pan with the orange juice, lime juice and apple cider vinegar.

Then, add the water and turn the heat to medium-low. Allow the meat to simmer for 5-10 minutes until the desired texture and moisture level are reached.

Serve in taco shells, lettuce wraps, burritos, quesadillas, nachos - however you like!
Italian Sausage

YIELD — 1 ½ lbs. (about 6 servings)

PREP TIME — 1 minute

COOK TIME (if desired) — 10 minutes

Ingredients

1 lb. ground venison
½ lb. ground pork
1 Tbsp. fresh parsley
2 tsp. coconut or brown sugar
¾ tsp. salt
¾ tsp. pepper
1 tsp. garlic powder
1 tsp. onion powder
1 tsp. paprika
½ tsp. crushed red pepper
¼ tsp. dried thyme
¼ tsp. dried oregano

Directions

Add all of the ingredients to a large bowl. Using your hands or a spoon (I recommend your hands) mix everything together well so that the venison, pork, spices, and seasonings are all incorporated. If you want to cook up the ground Italian sausage, simply add the mixture to a saucepan with 1 tablespoon of oil and brown for 10 minutes. Once cooled, store in the fridge for up to 2 days or in the freezer for up to 3 months in an airtight container or freezer bag.