

Cooking and Handling Venison

Venison is an excellent source of protein. However, proper preparation and handling of venison is very important to ensure that the venison is safe. By following the precautions listed below, you can maximize the safety and quality of the venison you receive.

Storage and Thawing:

- Venison should be stored frozen until preparation for cooking.
- Properly wrapped or packaged venison will store in a freezer for 9-12 months.
- To avoid quality deterioration, never refreeze thawed venison.
- Always thaw venison properly in a refrigerator (at or below 40 degrees) or in a microwave, do not leave it out at room temperature to thaw.
 - Venison thawed in the microwave should be for immediate use.
 - Venison thawed under refrigeration can be stored for 2-3 days prior to cooking and consuming.
- Store unfrozen venison under refrigeration (40°F or less) and prepare within 2-3 days.
- Keep raw venison separate in the refrigerator to avoid cross-contamination with other ready to eat foods or ingredients. Store raw meat on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator so juices do not drip onto other foods.

Handling and Meal Preparation:

- Wash your hands well with soapy water before and after handling venison.
- Wash all cutting boards, utensils, and counter tops that you used in hot, soapy water.
- A solution of one tablespoon of bleach in a quart of water can be used to sanitize washed surfaces and utensils; wipe on and let air dry.
- Marinate venison under refrigeration (40°F or less). Do not reuse marinades.
- Avoid cross-contamination by thoroughly washing and rinsing all surfaces or utensils used for raw meat preparation prior to use on cooked or ready to eat foods.
- Cook all venison thoroughly and serve hot or very cold.
- Venison should be cooked to at least 165°F to ensure harmful bacteria are killed. The color of the meat is not a reliable indicator of when the venison is fully cooked.
- Use an accurate, calibrated thermometer for monitoring the cooking temperature of the venison.
- Venison is a dry meat. You can keep it tender by cooking it with liquid or by soaking it in a marinade before cooking.
- The distinctive wild taste of game animals, including venison, is often associated with the fat in the animal. Trim visible fat to reduce the "gamey" flavor and add alternative sources for moisture and flavor while cooking (butter, bacon, beef fat, sweet or sour cream, cooking oils, water, or marinades).

Sources:

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Marinades can be purchased or made from the following:

- 2 cups vinegar, 2 cups water, ½ cup sugar
- French dressing or Italian dressing
- Tomato sauce, undiluted tomato soup, or tomato juice
- Fruit juice such as lemon, pineapple or a mixture of many juices
- ¼ cup vinegar, ½ cup cooking oil, ½ tsp. allspice, 3 medium sliced onions
- 2 tbsp. vinegar, 1 ½ ground ginger, 1 clove minced garlic, 2 tbsp. brown sugar, ½ cup soy sauce, ¾ cup vegetable oil

Drain the marinade and discard it before broiling, roasting or braising the meat.

To braise a roast, season with salt, pepper or favorite seasoning. Rub with flour and brown all sides in hot fat (or oil). Add a cup of water and cover the roast tightly. Cook slowly on a burner set between low and medium low until tender (2-3 hours). Turn the meat occasionally, adding water if necessary. Cook until food thermometer reaches 165 degrees.

To make a stew from roasts or steaks cut the meat into one-inch cubes. Season with salt, pepper, and sprinkle with flour. Brown on all sides in medium hot fat (or oil). Cover the meat with boiling water. Cover the kettle tightly and simmer on low heat until tender (2-3 hours). Do not boil. Add vegetables 30 minutes before serving time so they will be tender. Cook until food thermometer reaches 165 degrees.

If you have leftovers, refrigerate or freeze them right away. Cooked meat left out at room temperature over an hour should be thrown away. To reheat, cook leftover venison to an internal temperature of 165 degrees or higher. Bring stews and soups to a boil. Do not put leftover venison into a slow cooker like a crock-pot. If you use a microwave to reheat, stir, cover and rotate food often.

Here are some recipes you may want to try.

Broiled Venison Steak

Preheat broiler. Trim fat from steaks. Rub meat with butter, bacon fat or oil and add seasonings you like. Place steaks on broiler rack 3-5 inches below the heat source. Cook 5 to 7 minutes per side until the internal temperature is 165 degrees. Baste with butter, barbeque sauce, Worcestershire sauce or steak sauce while cooking. Serve while hot.

Venison Stew with Mushroom Gravy

Cut roast into one-inch cubes. Put into large frying pan and brown on all sides in small amount of fat or oil. Mix one can of cream of mushroom soup with one can of water. Pour this mixture over meat and stir. Cover and simmer on low heat two hours and to a temperature of at least 165 degrees. Add more water if needed. Variations on this stew are

- for a large roast, or two smaller roasts, put cubed meat into roaster pan, double the amount of cream of mushroom soup, and cook in 325 degree oven for 2-3 hours, stirring occasionally and adding more water if needed
- use low-sodium or low-fat cream of mushroom soup for a healthier stew
- use steaks in the place of cubed meat

For more information on the safe cooking and handling of venison along with many good recipes, contact your local Extension Agent or log onto their web site www.extension.umn.edu

Prepared from University of Minnesota Extension Service materials by the Hunters Against Hunger program of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association.