

Keeping it wild: Outdoor food and forays

THE BIRDS OF SUMMER.

John Motoviloff



A tender early season goose supper with all the trimmings.



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The recent early teal, goose and dove seasons have opened up a window of opportunity for eager bird hunters. Whether it's a dove shoot over mowed sunflowers, a mild evening waiting for that choppy line of big honkers to materialize over the treeline, or a morning spent nestled among wild rice in anticipation of fast-flying teal, wingshooters now have another month to practice their favorite sport. And while this writer craves time in the blind as much as the next hunter, there's another benefit here that often goes overlooked: the chance to eat these tasty birds while Wisconsin produce is at its height.

On the way to hunting my favorite dove roost, I always take a detour to the wild plum grove where I fill my satchel with the makings for first-rate jam. In wet years, I look for oyster mushrooms growing on downed logs and patches of wild blackberries growing in the shade. But what's most striking is the bounty available from our gardens and orchards — tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, green beans, herbs, apples and raspberries — and the many ways they can be paired with game.

With all this fresh produce, there's room for all tastes. Savory and sweet. Side dishes and a main course. Instead of opening a can of tomatoes, which always taste to me like tin, just walk out to your garden or pay a visit to your local farmers market. These veggies are bursting with sun-ripened flavor.

Think spicy gumbos and creoles. Tangy burgoo and piquant paprikás — that east European favorite also known as paprikash, so dependent upon blood-ripe tomatoes and just-picked peppers.

What's more, the acid in fresh veggies works as a tenderizer, making your game dinner all the more succulent.

If the sharp taste of fresh vegetables tenderizes and tames wild game, fruit brings out its bright flavors. While apples are often thought of as fall fruit, in truth many varieties ripen in late summer. Paula red, Gala and Macintosh are all ready by the time the early bird season gets underway. Wisconsin apple orchards are concentrated in the Bayfield and Door County peninsulas — as well as in the southwest and other hilly areas. Find one near you at waga.org.

What's a hunter to do with apples and game? While a cookbook chapter could be written here, I'll stick to some basics. First and foremost — and easiest — is homemade applesauce. This is my go-to side dish for wild game, and is especially good with fresh game birds. All you need to do is wash the apples, peel them (or don't according to your preference), chop them and stew them with a bit of water. Add cinnamon if you like and a few tablespoons of sugar if you want it sweet. Kick things up a notch by adding a shot of bourbon during the last 5 minutes. Simmer long for a smooth sauce, shorter for chunky.

If you're roasting wildfowl, add some sliced apples to the bottom of the pan. You can also place apple slices inside the cavity of game birds. This adds moisture and flavor. For a sweet-leaning main dish, try cooking breast fillets with apples. Use whole breasts for doves and teal and breasts cut into strips for goose. Sear them quickly in bacon drippings or butter, then remove them to a warm platter. Saute a sliced apple or two in the

pan drippings (adding more butter if necessary). Replace the breasts and cook briefly with the apples, being careful not to overcook the meat. 

John Motoviloff is a hunter, fisher and forager. He also wrote *Wild Rice Goose and Other Dishes of the Upper Midwest*.

EARLY MIGRATORY BIRD SEASONS AT A GLANCE

- **Early teal season: Sept. 1-7**
(Daily bag limit six blue-winged or green-winged teal)
- **Early Canada goose season: Sept. 1-15**
(Daily bag limit five Canada geese)
- **Dove season: Sept. 1-Nov. 29**
(Daily bag limit 15 mourning doves)
- **See 2016 Migratory Bird Regulations for shooting hours and additional details.**

EARLY SEASON GUMBO

- 3 plucked teal, 8 plucked doves or 1 skinned Canada goose
- 2 quarts chicken stock
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 1 pound smoked sausage or ham
- 1 pound fresh tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme or 1 teaspoon fresh
- Salt, pepper and hot sauce

- For roux
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 4 tablespoons peanut oil

Simmer game birds in chicken broth until tender; keep broth hot on stovetop. Remove birds from broth and allow birds to cool. Meanwhile, in a large, heavy-bottom kettle make roux by slowly heating and whisking together the oil and flour until it turns golden brown. Add celery, onion, garlic and bell pepper and cook until vegetables are wilted. Add hot broth, then tomatoes and ham or sausage. Simmer one hour. As the gumbo simmers, separate game bird meat from bones and discard bones. Shred or cut meat into small pieces. Add salt, pepper and hot sauce to taste. Add the deboned game birds to the gumbo and cook an additional 10 minutes. Serve over hot white rice with French bread and a green salad on the side.