

# Keeping it wild: Outdoor food and forays

WHEN MAKING THE PERFECT VENISON ROAST, WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART.

John Motoviloff



KERRY MOTVILOFF

As readers crack the pages of this issue, there's a good chance freezers are flush with venison. Most hunters know the drill for steaks and burger — keep them moist and watch the heat. But those big chunks from the rear haunches are a high-stakes game. When they're good, they fill the house with the rich, dark smell of Sunday dinner. They're comfort food of the best sort. Cooked too fast or too dry, however, they're tough and livery — a waste of hours of cooking and 5 pounds of meat.

How do you cook a venison roast fork-tender? It's best done as a weekend kind of thing. It takes time — and lots of it. Of course, thyme is good, too, but that goes in later. Even thawing should be done slowly, in the refrigerator, over a period of several days. Meat thawed on the counter in a few hours tastes soggy, bloody and a little off.

Once your roast is thawed, begin by trimming away all visible fat, sinew and silverskin. You don't need to tear the roast apart and cut between layers, but you do want to get off as much as you can while leaving the roast intact. Dredging in flour and searing in hot grease are the next steps. Season the flour with salt, pepper and herbs of your choice, such as thyme or rosemary. Sear the roast on all sides in a clear, light oil such as peanut or sunflower. Bacon grease or butter will also work. Searing locks in the juices. The resulting crusty flour coating does double duty: it keeps the meat moist and also provides a built-in thickening agent. Gravy with no extra work!

As the roast browns, preheat the oven.

Don't crank it to 400, 350 or even 300 degrees. Go for 250 degrees if you plan on allowing 3 or 4 hours. If you've got the time, allow 4 to 6 hours at 225 degrees. Best of all, cook it all day at 200 degrees. If you're struggling with what to put in the roasting pan, don't fret. My research over the last two decades shows that a glass of red wine helps cooks think more clearly.

You've got red wine, right? So deglaze the roaster with a cup and throw in a chopped onion and some chopped mushrooms. If fruit's your thing, go with a cup of cider or white wine and some sliced apples or dried fruit such as cherries or cranberries. If you lean sour, pour in a can of beer and a cup or two of sauerkraut. Root vegetables — such as carrots, turnips and parsnips — add depth of flavor.

Tom Petty says, "Waiting is the hardest part." What's true of love is apparently also true of venison roasts, because it can certainly seem like an eternity while they slowly and tantalizingly cook. Your stomach growls, you salivate. This is the time to relax. Put a log in the woodstove.

Write someone a letter.

Better yet, use the time to figure out what your side dishes are: mashed potatoes, egg noodles, spaetzli, or maybe rice pilaf or wild rice. You'll also want to include a green salad or other crispy vegetable. While you're at it, you can also stew up a bag of cranberries or a few pounds of apples. A loaf of rye or sourdough bread is a must for sopping up the delicious juices.

At some point in the cooking process, you will take a peek. That's OK. You can see whether more liquid is needed. If so, go ahead and add a cup of wine, water or broth. If there's too much liquid, consider stirring in a tablespoon of sifted flour and mixing it into the juice. If the roast is already fork-tender, you are set to serve it. If not, give it another hour.

When you actually sit down to eat, think about punching up some classic Petty...*Oh, baby, don't it feel like heaven right now? Don't it feel like something from a dream? Yeah, I've never known nothing quite like this. Don't it feel like tonight might never be again ...*



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

## "SUNDAY DINNER" VENISON ROAST

- 1 4- or 5-pound venison roast, trimmed of fat, sinew and silverskin
- 1 cup flour seasoned with salt, pepper, thyme or other herbs
- ½ cup peanut oil
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 1 onion, chopped
- 8 ounces mushrooms, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 225 degrees.
2. Dredge roast in seasoned flour.
3. In a roasting pan or Dutch oven, heat oil and brown roast on all sides.
4. Remove roast to clean platter; brown mushroom, onion and optional garlic in pan drippings.
5. Return roast to pan, add wine and cover.
6. Check roast after four hours. If not fork-tender, cook another hour and check again.
7. Serve with green salad, mashed potatoes and rye bread.

Note: If liquid evaporates during cooking, add another cup broth, wine or water. To make gravy from pan drippings, remove roast and whisk in sifted flour, 1 tablespoon at a time, until desired consistency is reached.

PIXABAY