

November • December 2015

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Take food further.

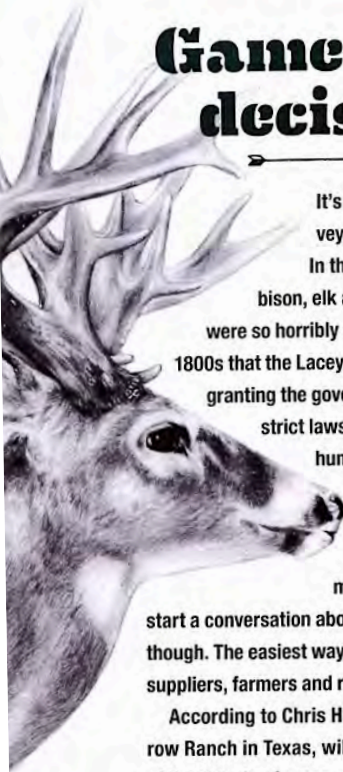
TM

Gammellen

PIGEON AND PIG'S TROTTER PIE WITH SUET CRUST
Fergus Henderson, St. John, London

small plates

Game-time decision



It's not easy for meat purveyors to sell wild game. In the U.S., populations of bison, elk and white-tailed deer were so horribly decimated by the late 1800s that the Lacey Act was established, granting the government power to enact strict laws over what could be hunted and sold. Today, the majority of wild game served in the U.S. is imported. That doesn't mean chefs shouldn't start a conversation about domestic wild game, though. The easiest way to do it? Talk to your suppliers, farmers and ranchers about wild deer.

According to Chris Hughes of Broken Arrow Ranch in Texas, wild deer roam for tens of thousands of acres, making them hard to "raise." So potential wild game ranchers should approach neighboring farmers about hunting and harvesting deer on their property for a fee. Make sure they're aware of which breeds are legal to hunt in the first place, though; nilgai antelope and axis deer are both legal to hunt and are extremely mild in flavor, Hughes says. To slowly ease your customers into the idea of eating venison, grind the meat into sausage or slowly braise the softer cuts in hearty winter stews. "Chefs should be encouraged to develop relationships with their farmers and producers, and to just ask if wild game is something they can do," he says. "Food is entertainment, and venison and game meats really fit that bill."

— Jacqueline Raposo



All it took was one bite of bear *ragù* to convince Iliana Regan that the animal would make an appearance on the tasting menu at her Chicago restaurant, Elizabeth. Once she got her hands on bear meat, she cured it and turned it into a memorable amuse. We chatted with Regan about how she got her hands on bear meat, how to cook it and what you can learn about the animal from its aftertaste.

What got you interested in cooking bear?

My friend is from Alaska; her dad still lives there. About four years ago, he sent her some and she invited me over for pasta and bear *ragù*. She minced the bear and cooked it in a roux with chicken stock, mushrooms and herbs. It was delicious. She had a couple of pieces of the leg still frozen and gave me some. I wanted to use it for my underground dinners, but wanted to make it last. I cured it and dried it and sliced it thin over

puffed wild rice mixed with a curry marshmallow for a small, single bite.

Describe the flavor.

The flavor is like beef, but a bit more gamey. There's a slight aftertaste of salmon, largely because that's what the bears are likely eating.

Do you receive bear in various cuts or do you do any breaking down yourself?

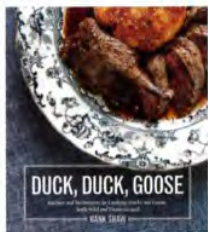
Leg cuts are what we get, and it's all I've ever cooked. It's large and has very soft, greasy fat, but once you get down to the meat, it's super-lean. We cut it into strips and again, cure it and dry it.

How else have you prepared bear?

Aside from my friend's *ragù*, I've cured and dried it, and once made a bear sausage for staff meal. We ground the meat and mixed it with the fat and seasonings. It tasted good, but strong—like eating venison sausage, but stronger. — Matt Kirouac

food facts & other tidbits

BOOKED UP



Hunter, angler, gardener and cook Hank Shaw has cookbooks devoted to ducks, geese, fish and a soon-to-be-released homage to all things antlered in his forthcoming book, *Buck, Buck, Moose*. Shaw takes readers from marsh, field and forest to table with tips on everything from dressing to cooking game, no matter the beast. Check out his book and the rest on our list to bring the game feast front and center.

Game, A Cookbook, Tom Norrington-Davies and Trish Hilferty (Absolute Press, 2009)

Duck, Duck, Goose: The Ultimate Guide to Cooking Waterfowl, Both Farmed and Wild, Hank Shaw (Ten Speed Press, 2013)

Afield: A Chef's Guide to Preparing and Cooking Wild Game and Fish, Jesse Griffiths (Welcome Books, 2012)

Wild About Game: 150 Recipes for Farm-Raised and Wild Game, Janie Hibler (WestWinds Press, 2009)

SEE YOU LATER, ALLIGATOR

Besides being lean, alligator is also blank-canvas protein that can hold up to anything from frying to grilling. At Chicago's Elle on the River, Tim Graham marinates gator in a pineapple piri-piri sauce. "We call it 'piri-pasto,' a mashup of *al pastor* and piri-piri flavors," he explains. "We grill the marinated gators whole, until the meat begins to flake. We then mix the meat with more of the sauce before serving." The gator is then served with green muhum-mara, grilled limes and onions in chickpea tortillas.

Gator is king at New Orleans' Kingfish, where Nathan Richard hunts for the animals himself. "I look at the alligator like a whole pig; every part of the animal is being used," he says. Going beyond tail meat, Richard cooks the tenderloin, ribs and feet, which he uses to make alligator wings. He cooks the feet sous vide before deep-frying and tossing them in a Buffalo-style sauce. He also makes jerky out of the tail and serves chicken-fried alligator over grits. "Everybody says it tastes like chicken. If that's true, you're eating it wrong," says Richard. "I think it tastes like the swamps; it's supposed to taste muddy and gamey."

At Post 390 in Boston, Eric Brennan channels the South with his "Louisiana reptile duo" featuring alligator and snapping turtle. Using ground turtle, dark roux, Cajun seasoning, sherry and grated egg, he outfits it with corn-meal alligator fritters with house tasso. Since gator can be tough, he stresses the importance of marinating the meat beforehand (in this case, with beer) and pounding it with a mallet. — M.K.



EXOTIC FLAVORS

Once you get your fill of the venison, boar and bison recipes from this issue, infuse a bit of the exotic into your menu with bear, moose, beaver and more.

"When I think about cooking black bear, I know the meat is very lean and must be cooked through," says Robert Sisca of Boston's Bistro du Midi. "It's important to marinate it and slowly cook it."

Everything from dove to bear makes the menu at Kettner Exchange in San Diego. For Brian Redzikowski, it's about keeping things natural. "I like to use oak wood to smoke and roast the meats and use branches, leaves and pine to create a natural smoke flavor," he explains.

At The 404 Kitchen in Nashville, Matt Bolus prepares beaver legs in traditional osso buco preparation, and serves the back strap like a pan-seared steak. "The meat falls from the bone in large chunks, succulent and tender," Bolus says of the legs. Seasoned with salt and pepper, the loin is seared in a cast-iron pan and basted with butter and thyme. "It has the flavor of dry-aged beef, with no gaminess and without being the slightest bit greasy," he says. — M.K.