

Combining thrill of the hunt, cooking

[Deborah Weisberg](#)

When Albert Wutsch sets his sights on a deer, he sees pepper pot stew, venison Marsala or venison medallions in a Kahlua rum sauce.

“Other hunters are counting antlers, but I'm looking at my best shot placement because I'm thinking what I'll do with the animal when I cook it,” says Wutsch, a chef and cookbook author who has forged a career out of two passions: game-hunting and gastronomy.

Now living in Missoula, Mont., Wutsch retired last year as department chairman of the Academy of Culinary Arts at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and now spends much of his time traveling the country wearing his chef's toque while talking turkey with sportsmen.

He is one of the featured speakers slated for the 32nd annual Allegheny Outdoor, Sport & Travel Show Feb. 17 to 19 at the Monroeville Convention Center.

“I cook just about everything I hunt, unless it's a predator like a wolf or coyote,” says Wutsch, who hunted extensively in Western Pennsylvania during the 25 years he worked at IUP. Today, he hunts mostly in Montana and Wyoming.

“I've even cooked mountain lion and bighorn sheep,” he says. “You just have to apply the right cooking methods.”

Creating a tasty game meal boils down to preparation, beginning with how an animal is dressed in the field, he says. “A lot of people won't eat wild game because they say it tastes gamey. Wild game should have earthy notes — a duck should taste like duck — but you don't want a strong gaminess, either, and there are ways to prevent that.”

For instance, removing the fascia — the layer of fibrous tissue that surrounds muscles and organs— can minimize a gamey taste as well as a chewy texture, he says. “You don't need to take off the fascia when you're butchering the deer. You can freeze the muscle whole and remove the fascia when the meat is still frozen.”

After touching the tarsal glands, which are located in the hind legs, change gloves or wash hands before handling other meat, he advises. “Those glands have such a strong scent, it would be like giving the meat a nasty-tasting rub.”

It's important to remove the hide as soon as possible and to cut out the blood-shot area, the windpipe and esophagus, all of which can ruin taste, he says, reminding hunters that keeping knives sharp will make their job much easier.

Allowing meat to age can enhance tenderness and flavor, but only under the right conditions, Wutsch says. “If you think it's too warm, it probably is. Fabricate your deer into quarters and age in the refrigerator.”

When dealing with a large-muscled animal like a bear, it's important to get the body temperature down as quickly as possible; otherwise, the blood and meat will sour, which could happen overnight, he says.

When it comes to cooking, the general rule is that tender cuts such as the loin should be dry-cooked, as in stir-fried, sauteed, deep-fried, broiled, roasted or grilled, while tough cuts like the neck should be slow cooked with moisture, Wutsch says.

“Some of the toughest cuts on an animal are the most flavorful, like the shanks way down on the bottom of the legs,” says Wutsch, who often uses a pressure cooker. “If you eat in a really good restaurant, you'll often find veal shanks on the menu as osso buco. They're also used to make elegant consommés.”

The 61-year-old Wutsch aspired to work in wildlife management and studied

it in college, but figured the job market in that field was going to be tough. Having worked in restaurants since he was a teenager, he pursued a career in culinary arts, eventually attending the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., he says.

He gravitated toward specializing in wild game. Through his business, Cache Creek Enterprises, Wutsch has cooked for professional outfitters in Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness, Scapegoat Wilderness and Spotted Bear Wilderness, as well as celebrity sportsmen like Terry and Mark Drury of Drury Outdoors. He has been a featured speaker at conventions of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and other such organizations.

He's produced the DVD, "The Art of Backyard Butchering," and authored "The Art of Cooking Venison" and "The Art of Barbecuing and Cooking Game."

Deborah Weisberg is a Tribune-Review contributing writer.

Venison Pepper Pot Stew

Chef Wutsch says the recipe will feed "four really hungry hunters or six to eight."

1½-2 pounds venison shoulder cubed

1 cup onions, large dice

2 cups potatoes, large dice

2 cups red peppers, diced in 1-inch squares

1 can enchilada sauce, (10 oz) mild or hot

1 can diced tomatoes (14.5 oz)

2 cups beef broth

Spice mixture

3 tablespoons cornstarch

1 tablespoon paprika (smoked)

1 tablespoon chili powder

2 teaspoons ground cumin

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon garlic powder

Combine spices to make spice blend. Cube meat, dust/dredge in spice blend. In a pressure cooker add onion, potatoes, peppers and dusted meat (all spices). Add sauce, tomatoes, and broth. Cover, cook in pressure cooker no more than one hour. Serve with cornbread or dumplings.