

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1996

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Mountain man shares secrets for cooking venison

With hunting season upon us, thousands of people will be heading out, or up, to deer camp. I polled some deer hunters and was surprised to learn that while most of them know good hunting and safety techniques, less than 20 percent know how to cook venison properly.

When I say properly, I mean to be able to make it taste good. So delicious that your entire family (and guests) are willing to eat it. Just about everyone I talked to said they know how to pan fry a venison tenderloin in bacon grease with onions; bake a venison roast with potatoes, carrots and onions; or make venison burger stew. Only two hunters (out of 14 polled) really knew how to properly cook venison.

My best friend Mick Livernois, a financial consultant for Merrill Lynch, has probably discovered the best-kept secret to cooking great venison. He's not an avid hunter, but he gets venison from friends, family members and clients. Mick has never turned down an offer of venison meat. Upon receipt of the meat, he heads to the party store for some Miller Lite Beer, and calls me.

Mountain Man advice

Another good source for information on cooking venison is the "Mountain Man Cookbook" by Thomas Canino, (copyright 1989, TLC Books, \$8.95). I contacted Canino at his residence just outside Littleton, Colo. When queried about venison cooking, here's what the Mountain Man had to say.

"The primary intention of the book is to introduce as many people as possible to the pleasure of venison cooking," he said. When asked for advice about cooking venison, Canino said to "remove as much of the bone, fat and sinew from all cuts before cooking to achieve success."

Canino's book is one of the few books on the market that offers recipes for just about every part of the deer (and if deer isn't your bag, Canino claims you can substitute elk, buffalo and even beef). His recipes feature venison cooked in butter, with cheese, spices, and on occasion, wine and sherry.

Cooking secrets

Now with all due respect to Mountain Man Canino, any inebriated hunter can make a tenderloin taste good. What I've discovered, in addition to the Mountain Man's recipes, is that when cooking venison, the tougher the cut, the longer the cooking time.

Roasts, ribs, chops and loins can be cooked like most cuts of beef, possibly requiring a bit more fat to keep them tender. Since venison fat (tallow) and sinew, which holds the various muscle sections together, are the nemesis of a good cook, I agree with the Mountain Man that they should be removed.

When roasting, I utilize strips of bacon secured over the well-trimmed cuts with toothpicks to ensure a good basting during cooking.

When cooking tougher cuts (such as hams, shoulder roasts and blade steaks), I prefer to cook the venison slow with lots of liquid. If the cut is small enough, I might dredge it in flour and then pan fry in a little grease to begin browning, only then to muster up a good marinade or baste made with wine, apple juice or broth and herbs.

Large hind quarters (my friend Mick says I excel at this) usually get slow roasted and basted over a low-heated grill or barbecue. (Of course, this prevails and only heralds the need for additional liquid refreshment for the chef.) If you're looking to enjoy the great taste of venison (cooked right it really does taste good) and aren't heading for the fields or know someone like Mick, you can buy farm-raised venison at The Butcher Boy, 13869 Herbert, Warren (810) 779-0600. Prices are comparable to that of aged beef.

Interested in locating Canino's book? Send \$9.95 (\$8.95 plus \$1 shipping) to TLC Enterprises, P.O. Box 3372, Englewood, Colo., 80155.

Chef Larry Janes is a free-lance writer. He welcomes your calls and comments. To leave a message for him, dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1886. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Tips for preparing the best Thanksgiving turkey.
- Laura's Fat-Free Kitchen



POMEGRANATE COGNAC

Seedy pomegranate: FRUIT WITH A PAST

BY CORINNE ABATT • SPECIAL WRITER

Like pumpkins, winter squash and homegrown apples, the truly remarkable pomegranate makes its appearance in produce departments in the fall.

Yet, even though it's been around for thousands of years and is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, many questions surround this ruddy-red fruit. How do you peel it? How are you supposed to eat it? What about all those seeds?

Do you crunch them up and swallow or spit them out? How do you use a pomegranate? "Europeans often buy them by the case," said Harvey Freedman, one of the managers at Joe's Produce in Livonia. "They like to spit them and eat them. Americans like to use the seeds as a garnish. Pomegranates are at their peak here between Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Julia Najor of West Bloomfield, who collects recipes from Middle Eastern cultures in anticipation of publishing a cookbook, said, "My recipes that call for pomegranate seeds or juice are from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and such. But, the most popular thing is just to eat the seeds."

To sample these, you immediately realize that nobody packages like Mother Nature. The pomegranate, a marvel of ingenuity, comes with a leathery outer covering that firmly protects an inner honeycomb of crimson seeds clustered in sections separated by papery membranes.

Lucky for us, because that means this flat-size, tree-grown berry, native to warmer climates, was designed for long-distance travel. It made its way to America aboard the sailing ships of Spanish conquistadors.

Imagine what a treat those slightly tart, nutritious pomegranates must have been for 15th-century sailors. Pomegranates are high in potassium, and contain a modest amount of vitamin C. The pomegranate was one of the wondrous things left behind when the last of the Moors fled Spain in 1492. It is still the emblem of the city of Granada, Spain.

But, pomegranates are as much fun to eat as they are to talk about.

Peeling method

To peel a pomegranate, cut off the blossom end and remove some of the white pithy membrane with it. Then score the rind in quarters working from where you cut the top to the bottom. Be careful not to penetrate beyond the rind or you may get sprayed with the red juice, which happens to be the base for grenadine syrup and fabric dyes.

Then break apart along the cuts, first in halves, then in quarters. Pull back the rind from each quarter and pull out the seeds. Be careful, or you'll understand in a hurry why the word grenade comes from pomegranate. With a less-than-delicate touch, the clumps will explode and seeds fly in all directions.

Eating pomegranates

To swallow or spit out the seeds is an individual matter. Sucking the seeds and spitting appears to be too much trouble for most pomegranate aficionados. Besides, there's a charming precedent for swallowing the seeds. In Greek mythology, after Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of agriculture, was kidnapped and taken to Hades, she disobeyed her mother and swallowed four or five pomegranate seeds.

As punishment, she was condemned to spend that many months in the underworld away from the warmth of the sun. In short, that sweet kid who couldn't resist pomegranate seeds is responsible for our long winters—at least in mythology. Thank goodness, she didn't swallow a dozen.

Nathaniel Hawthorne used this myth as the basis of one of his Tanglewood Tales, "The Pomegranate Seeds." A contemporary version for children, "Persephone and the Pomegranate" by writer/illustrator Kris Waldherr was published by Dial Books in 1993.

Maybe, this tale is why it sounded so appropriate for Guy Wolf, produce manager of Vic's Quality Fruit Market in Beverly Hills, to say, "pomegranates are a winter fruit. They will be around until January. Ours come from California. When they start losing their color and look a little brownish, that's when they're at their sweetest."

"Many of our customers buy pomegranates to make juice," said Tim Coward, produce manager at Nino Salvaggio's International Marketplace of Farmington Hills. To make juice, place 1-1/2 to 2 cups seeds in a blender or food processor; blend until liquefied. Pour through a cheesecloth-lined strainer.

The pomegranate's area of origin is elusive—Persia, Afghanistan, India and the Himalayan region are among those mentioned in various sources. Moses assured the Israelites that when they made it to the Promised Land there would be pomegranates.

In architecture, design, literature and as a food, the pomegranate links us with early civilization.

See recipes inside.

Colorful salad: Pomegranate, Orange and Kiwi Salad combines sweet seasonal fruit with spicy vinaigrette. Serve it with or without salad greens.

SOME USES FOR POMEGRANATES

Brightly-colored, juicy pomegranate seeds can dress up many dishes:

- Add them to fresh fruit salads. For a festive starter for a holiday breakfast or brunch, top slices of kiwi and oranges with pomegranate seeds.
- Drizzle them over Middle Eastern appetizers such as *baba ghanoush*.
- Add them to mixed green salads with a lemon and oil dressing or tossed salads such as the popular Middle Eastern salad, *fattoush*.
- If you make pomegranate juice and freeze it, add a bit to iced summer drinks for extra flavor.
- Use whole pomegranates in fruit and flower arrangements before you peel and eat them.
- Give youngsters a treat. Read them the book, "Persephone and the Pomegranate," by Kris Waldherr, then open and peel a pomegranate so they can see and taste it.

BUYING & STORAGE TIPS

- Choose pomegranates heavy for their size. The skin varies from bright to deep red with a fresh leather-like appearance, without cracks or splits.
- One medium pomegranate yields about 3/4 cup seeds and 1/2 cup juice.
- Whole pomegranates keep well at room temperature for several days, away from sunlight. They'll last up to three months stored in the refrigerator.
- Refrigerate seeds up to 3 days. Freeze in single layers, on trays; then up to 6 months in airtight containers. Remove only the seeds you plan to use.
- Refrigerate juice up to 3 days. Freeze up to 6 months in airtight containers.

Go portside with 1994 Vintage Ports

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

There's been significant press surrounding 1994 Vintage Ports. Many are available now. Are these majestic, vintage-dated fortified wines with an extraordinarily long life span as good as many have said? Based on cask samples we began tasting in spring 1995, an unqualified yes.

Nearly all major Port houses declared the 1994 vintage. Adrian Bridge, marketing director for Taylor Fladgate and Fonseca Ports, explained the vintage greatness.

"Exceptional high quality of 1994 Ports is due to a number of climatic conditions that came together to yield grapes of extraordinary ripeness," he said. "In May, 1994 rain at flowering reduced the crop about 40 percent. From then on the weather was very good. Summer was a little cooler than

normal. Grapes ripened slowly and harvest conditions were ideal. Cool nights engineered long fermentations. Early tastings reveal Ports with great fruit intensity."

If you buy 1994 Vintage Ports (they would make a superior holiday gift), be prepared to age them at least 15 to 20 years before beginning to drink them or your money will be wasted. These wines will age up to 50 years from vintage quite easily.

"Ports go through what is called a dumb stage; approximately between years seven and 10 from vintage," Bridge cautioned. "The patient will be rewarded for cellaring these wines."

About 10,000 cases of 1994 Fonseca Port \$51 per bottle were produced. A recent sampling showed a big, powerful red fruit melange in both aroma and flavor profile. Its incredible density is

See PORTS, 2B

- 1995 Vin du Mistral Grenache Rose \$12 — rose wines are making a comeback; they don't get better than this.
- Cool weather reds to serve with grilled sausages and potatoes or grilled vegetable fajitas:
- 1993 Geoff Merrill Shiraz (Australia) \$14
- 1993 Vin du Mistral Syrah \$24
- 1994 Murphy Goode Merlot \$18
- 1994 Canoe Ridge Merlot (Washington state) \$22
- 1994 Nunda Century Vines Zinfandel \$15
- 1994 Bonister Zinfandel \$14
- 1994 Murphy Goode Zinfandel \$10
- 1994 Franciscan Zinfandel \$15
- 1994 Morgan Zinfandel \$15

- As worthy:
- 1993 Joseph Phelps Insignia \$60 — fabulously rich
- Best buys at \$10 and under:
- 1995 Hogan Chardonnay \$9.50
- 1995 Montheau Sauvignon Blanc \$7
- 1995 Felzer Echo Ridge Fume Blanc \$7
- 1994 Ruffino Orvieto Classico \$9
- 1995 Ruffino Chianti \$9.50
- 1994 Bodega Norton Malbec (Argentina) \$9