

MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1994

TASTE

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TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Don't 'stew' over what to cook tonight

When daylight savings time ends, and the clocks fall back an hour, my internal clock begins craving for stew. Rich, thick and hearty, stew is a one pot meal that sticks to the ribs.

On a blustery day a good pot of stew will steam the windows of the kitchen and the soul. Served with some bread or a quick Johnny-cake to soak up all the juices, stew can be as exotic as a beef bourguignone, as French as a pot au feu, as British as Shepherd's Pie, or as American as meat and potatoes. And you don't need the skills of a rocket scientist to pull it off.

Cooking method

To "stew" is to cook less tender cuts of beef such as the chuck, shoulder, round or brisket using a moist heat method. These methods help cook the meat in varying amounts of liquid in a closed pot or casserole for relatively long periods of time, therefore rendering a tender meat by-product.

Any type of meat is perfectly acceptable to make a good stew. Beef, lamb and venison offer the perfect tougher cuts that can slowly tenderize in their own cooking liquid, but pork, chicken and small game are also acceptable alternatives.

The liquid medium that surrounds the meat can be as plain as water or as delicate as wine. Personally, I favor a mixture of V-8 vegetable juice cocktail and a few hearty gulps of cheap dry red wine (i.e. Gallo Hearty Burgundy is a James Gang favorite). This mix assures a tasty sauce or gravy.

Proper pot

Before you begin a stew, choose an appropriate cooking vessel. A crock pot works wonders for those who work all day, but a heavy saucepan on the stove top may tempt to be stirred every now and then, but a Dutch oven or deep casserole nestled gently in the oven is just what this doctor of cuisine prefers to utilize.

A pressure cooker is nice, but for the most part, stew is one of those dishes that begs to be made on a frosty day to help warm the house and diners inside.

Since stews beg to be cooked slowly, it's not one of those meals the beef industry wants you to start at 5:15 p.m. and have ready for a 5:45 p.m. meal. Bigger chunks of meat means longer cooking times. If the clock matters, choose a more tender cut of beef, and cut the meat into small cubes or thin slices against the grain.

The procedure for preparing a great stew is one of those no-brainers that even a beginner can accomplish with minimal fuss. The most difficult task in making stew is to cut the meat into uniform cubes or strips.

Simply cover the cubed meats in a little flour and shaking off the excess, brown the meat in a pan just barely covered with sizzling fat. After the meat is browned over medium high heat, remove the meat and splash a good cup of the cooking liquid over the bottom of the fry pan to loosen any bits of meat and flavors that might have adhered. It's even OK to stir and prod the pieces with a wooden spoon. Look at it this way - by loosening all that stuff off the bottom of the fry pan, it's a cinch to wash!

Experience has taught me to cook the browned meat for an hour or two before adding in the vegetables but either method can be used.

Next, wash, trim, pare and dice the vegetables and toss them in with the meat. Pour on your liquid and sprinkle with salt and pepper. You can get fancy with herbs and spices and add everything from juniper berries to Hungarian sweet paprika, but you'll want to rely on the flavor of the vegetables for a real stew.

Speaking of the vegetables, most stews contain all of your basic vegetables. Carrots, celery, onions and potatoes are the average stewing vegetables but again, you can get as exotic as you wish with the addition of turnips, parsnips, rutabagas, fancy potatoes, peppers, leeks and squash.

Shortcuts

In the produce sections of some grocery stores you'll find a package of vegetables that contains just enough redskin potatoes, onions, celery, carrots and parsley to help stew up a one pound package of chuck complete with a basic recipe.

In the frozen food section, convenience seekers will find a bag filled with frozen vegetables and potatoes that can be "dumped in" with nary the need to scrub a potato or pare a carrot.

Experienced cooks know the benefits of a "bouquet garni" or a blend of fresh parsley, garlic, bay leaf and a few peppercorns tied together in cheesecloth that helps accentuate the flavor and turn a basic stew into a gourmet meal.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Interest in bagels is rising rapidly.
- New wines from Napa Valley.

HUNTERS ARE WILD ABOUT VENISON

Some people enjoy the thrill of the hunt, others prefer the spoils. Hunters talk about their favorite ways to prepare venison.



BY LARRY JONES
SPECIAL WRITER

Let's make one thing perfectly clear: I'm a lover, not a hunter. I have, on numerous occasions, hunted, yet when it came time to night in the six-point buck that was no less than 20 yards away - a clear shot - I raised my rifle, but my heart wouldn't let me pull the trigger.

As a matter of fact, when I saw my first buck, it was all I could do to just stand there, my heart beating what seemed like 200 times a minute. I lowered my rifle and grabbed the binoculars but couldn't hold them steady. I'd prefer to cook venison than to kill it.

But it's evident that I'm in the minority when it comes to hunting. With bow and arrow season well under way, and firearm season beginning Nov. 17, Michigan's 250,000 hunters will pump more than \$40 million into our state economy before the season ends. Matt Richards of Troy will be one of those hunters. If early results are any indication of his luck (Richards bagged a six pointer just

before dawn Oct. 9 with a bow) the season looks to be prosperous.

Richards has been hunting since he was 9, and has a deep freeze purchased solely for venison hidden in the corner of his Troy rec room.

Richards and two friends bought 40 acres just north of Owosso. They have been lucky enough to have bagged at least two deer every year for the past five years.

An auto worker who turned down a weekend of overtime to begin hunting, Richards agrees with Chef Milos Cihelka (see related story) about the importance of proper field dressing to ensure good tasting venison.

"I know of guys who bagged a deer and properly field dressed it only to strap it onto the front hood of their car, and by the time they returned home, the meat was almost rancid from the heat transfer," Richards said.

He attended Chef Milos' class on butchering last year at the Kitchen Glamor store in Rochester, and now prefers to butcher his own deer.

"About 5 years ago I sent my

deer to a local processor and it was evident they didn't know what they were doing. I ended up with two roasts and 125 pounds of venison burger.

"After observing the ease of technique offered by Chef Milos, butchering my own deer not only saved money, but the results were far superior to the processing plant."

In addition to luscious tenderloins, Richards' favorite style of venison preparation is a dish called "onion roasted venison" that cooks all day in a crock pot.

Don Marshall of Canton enjoys the thrill of the hunt for other reasons.

"I never even held a rifle until three years ago when I suffered a major heart attack and underwent triple bypass surgery," Marshall said.

Having always been a fan of red meat, Marshall was told by his doctor to lay off beef.

When a fellow retiree introduced him to the joys of eating venison, which is low in fat and cholesterol, he decided to join a few friends at a hunting camp near Gaylord.

On the first day out, Marshall bagged a 10 pointer and has been a lover of venison ever since then. Having worked at a butcher shop many years ago, Marshall enjoys butchering his own deer.

"I enjoy making low-fat stews and roasts and frequently entertain and grill venison tenderloins and serve them with roasted vegetables and Yukon Gold potatoes," he said. "It's a hearty dinner any lover of red meat can really sink their teeth into."

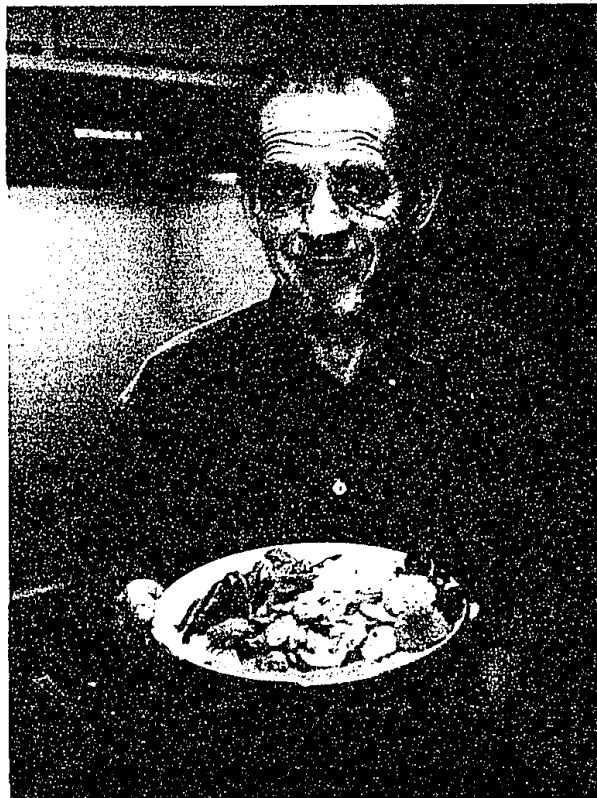
Marshall's wife Carol, who started hunting last year, supervises the wrapping of the meat and enjoys bringing homemade venison sausage to co-workers at a local medical office.

Her co-workers first thought venison was gamey and tough, but Marshall's recipes quickly changed their minds and their appetites.

"Now they ask me when I'm bringing it in," said Carol.

Carol and Don belong to a loosely organized gourmet group and

See VENISON, 2B



DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chef's favorite: Chef Milos Cihelka presents venison with a medley of fall vegetables.

Chef Milos shares secrets in video series



BY LARRY JONES
SPECIAL WRITER

The Wildlife Management Institute reports America's 20 million hunters kill about 4.6 million deer annually.

Hunters add \$14 billion to the economy, making those millions of pounds of venison very valuable meat. Valuable, that is, if properly field dressed and prepared or so says Chef Milos Cihelka (Michigan's first certified Master Chef, who, with noted Michigan outdoorsman Jerry Chispetta, has produced a three-part video series on the subject).

Co-sponsored by weapons manufacturer Browning and Jeep, this series of videos, its accompanying instructions and recipes, are a must for anyone contemplating "the thrill of the hunt."

Interviewed at his cozy, contemporary Bloomfield Hills home, Chef Milos, semi-retired from the famed Golden Mushroom restaurant in Southfield, was between free-lance duties.

He's an independent contracting chef at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, and Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, guest instructor at Kitchen Glamor stores and an official judge for the American Culinary Federation culinary contests. Chef Milos has been experiencing the joys of food, cooking and wild game for more

Hunter's video: Chef Milos Cihelka offers tips for cooking wild game.

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