Sportsmen can prepare venison many ways

With the holidays coming and hunting seasons in full swing, sportsmen might want to cook some of that wild game they brought home, particularly venison.

People can cook venison many different ways, but preparing it starts in the field. Clean and cool the deer as quickly as possible to preserve the meat and its succulent flavor. Then, remove every bit of the “silverskin,” a hard, inedible whitish membrane attached to the meat. Without removing the silverskin, meat will become too tough to eat.

“Venison is completely different from beef or pork,” explained Chris Sherrill, an Orange Beach chef and avid outdoorsman. “Venison is much leaner than what is grown for restaurants or grocery stores, although it does have a beefy flavor and is often treated like beef. The biggest mistake people make with venison is overcooking it. Venison does so much better when cooked rare to medium.”

Many people marinate venison before cooking it. Marination allows juices and spices to permeate the meat, making it more tender and juicier. People could buy marinade or make their own pungent concoctions. Let the meat marinate for at least 12 to 24 hours. Because venison contains so little fat, some people add some pork fat to the meat before cooking it.

“There’s a lot of flavor and tenderness in fat, so I inject venison with bacon fat and let it sit a while,” Sherrill advised. “I like to sear or grill venison on very high heat, but for much less time than a beef steak of similar size.”

Use the front quarters for jerky or ground meat. To make jerky, cut meat into strips and marinate. Then, drain the meat. Some people use a dehydrator to dry the meat. Others remove the small lightbulbs from their ovens and replace them with 110-watt bulbs and dry them in their ovens over low heat. Stick toothpicks through meat strips so they don’t fall through the racks. Cook the hind quarters slowly in a crockpot to make roasts.

“I like to roll the hindquarters out and add a mixture of fresh herbs, garlic and bacon,” Sherrill described. “Then, I roll it up tight and retie it in the shape that I want. I roast that in the oven or over charcoal on a lower heat or indirect heat for a long time. I want the internal temperature at about 140 to 145 degrees. That way, all those flavors melt into the roast. I want the meat to have a little red tint to it so it’s still juicy.”

Cube steaks go into a variety of dishes including country fried steak. Cut off 4- to 6-ounce pieces of meat from the hindquarters and run them through a “cuber.” Blades slice into the meat to tenderize it, but don’t cut all the way through it.

At the deer camp, many people can’t wait to sample their fresh kills and cut off the backstraps. Among the most tender and flavorful venison cuts, the backstrap runs along the top of the shoulders down the back. Some people think of it as the fillet mignon of deer.

“There’s also the inner loin or tenderloin on deer that’s super tender,” Sherrill detailed. “I cut backstrap into