

Shredded Venison Barbacoa Tacos

By David Schmetterling | Preparation time: 30 minutes | Cooking time: 3-10 hours | Serves 12-20



INGREDIENTS

5 lb. boneless rolled venison roast
or rolled beef chuck roast

RUB

1 T. salt
1 T. chili powder
2 t. oregano
2 t. onion powder
1 T. cumin
1 T. garlic powder

COOKER

16 oz. salsa verde (homemade or canned)
7 oz. can chipotle in adobo sauce
1½ T. cumin
1 T. oregano
¼ t. ground cloves
2 T. minced garlic
¼ c. lime juice
Salt and pepper to taste
Water

SALSA

½ c. chopped cilantro leaves
1 c. diced white onion
¼ c. lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Mix the rub ingredients and massage the mixture onto the roast. Smoke for 3 hours at 225 degrees.

Remove roast from the smoker and place in a slow cooker or Dutch oven. Add the cooker ingredients and enough water to just cover the roast. For a slow cooker, cook on low for 10 hours. For an oven, cook at 285 degrees for three hours.

Remove roast from the cooker or oven, let cool 10 minutes, then shred the meat with your fingers or a large fork. Remove any chunks of cartilage that didn't melt.

Make the salsa by combining the cilantro, onion, and lemon juice in a small bowl

Serve the shredded meat in warmed corn or flour tortillas topped with sliced radish, queso fresco (a delicious crumbly, salty cheese available in many grocery stores), and the salsa.

Barbaroa is a technique of Caribbean origin for cooking large cuts of meat over a fire or pit of coals. It's also the origin of "barbecue," and has been adapted into northern Mexican and southwestern United States cuisine. For this recipe, barbacoa refers to the Caribbean ingredients used in the meat rub and braising process. No fire or pit required.

Traditional barbacoa uses goat or pork. I like the sinewy neck meat from a pronghorn or deer that has been braised "barbacoa style" for making tacos. Tough cuts from the shoulder work well too, as does a beef chuck roast or tougher cuts of elk.

A tip for those who have never bothered to save the neck meat of a deer or pronghorn: Fillet it right off the vertebrae in several large slabs. Once home, layer the slabs and truss them into a boneless rolled roast (see YouTube videos for tips on tying a rolled roast). There's no need to trim off connective tissue or fat. During the slow-cooking process, it will melt away into a flavorful goo that moistens the meat.

The dish takes some time to plan and prepare, but the taste more than makes up for the effort. Also, once you finish with the barbacoa, you'll have several pounds of delicious shredded meat to freeze for camping overnights or making quick tacos after work.

If you don't have a smoker, find a friend who does. Otherwise, skip the smoking step (though still make and apply the rub).

To find an authentic recipe for these tacos, my wife, who's from a small agricultural town with a strong Mexican American community, contacted an old high school friend who loves food. He was delighted to help.

While the meat for these barbacoa tacos is delicious, the salsa, queso fresco, and other accompaniments are equally so. When added to the smoky shredded venison, they create a unique combination of flavors and textures unlike anything you've ever tasted. 🐾

—David Schmetterling coordinates the FWP Fisheries Research Program.