

Grilled Venison with Coffee Rub

By Tom Dickson

Preparation time: 10 minutes | Cooking time: 6 minutes | Serves 4



STEAK INGREDIENTS

- 4 1-lb. venison steaks or loin portions
- 2 T. tomato paste
- 1 T. kosher salt

COFFEE RUB INGREDIENTS

- 2 T. ancho chile powder
- 2 T. finely ground coffee
- 2 T. dark brown sugar
- 1 T. paprika
- 1½ t. dried oregano
- 1½ t. freshly ground black pepper
- 1½ t. ground coriander
- 1½ t. mustard powder
- 1 T. kosher salt
- Vegetable oil spray

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the grill. Pat steaks dry with a paper towel. With a sharp knife, cut shallow ¼-inch-deep slits on both sides of the steaks, spaced ½-inch apart, in a crosshatch pattern. Combine tomato paste and 1 T. salt. Rub the salt-paste mixture into the slits.*

Mix remaining ingredients in a small bowl.

Coat one side of each steak with roughly 2 T. spice rub, pressing the mixture into the paste. Lightly spray with vegetable oil. Flip steaks and repeat.

Grill steaks until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part registers 120° for medium-rare, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer steaks to a cutting board and let rest for 10 minutes. Slice ½ inch thick. ■

*If you have time, create a richer flavor by letting the steaks rest at room temperature for 1 hour at this point.

This past May, my friend Rob drove down from Calgary to visit me and my wife and fish the Missouri for a few days. I wanted to impress him with a great meal, so I fixed up a classic taste of summer: bruschetta served with grilled venison loin in a coffee-brown sugar rub.

Rob's eaten a lot of great venison over the years, but he said my grilled loin was some of the best he'd ever tasted. Much of the credit goes to the deer—a Meagher County whitetail doe fattened all summer and fall on alfalfa. But part was due to the rub.

Some venison purists turn their nose up at rubs, saying the meat is too delicious on its own to need enhancement. True enough, when you dine on venison occasionally. A loin steak cooked in a hot cast-iron skillet or over a grill, liberally seasoned with only salt and pepper, is near perfection. But if you're lucky enough to kill an elk or a couple of deer and a pronghorn, you'll plow through a lot of meat over the year. A rub lets you change things up and can turn a plain dinner into a special occasion for even the most discerning guests.

Rubs are mixtures of spices sprinkled or rubbed onto meat before cooking. Some commercial varieties available online and in stores work well, but most are loaded with salt, which is cheaper than the other ingredients. Rubs are easy enough to make yourself. I favor this one that mixes coffee, chile powder, and brown sugar, among other ingredients. It combines several recipes, including one from Mesa Grill in Las Vegas. The coffee provides earthy tones, the chile brings out the venison's natural sweetness, and the sugar caramelizes from the heat and helps form a light crust. Not everyone got a deer or elk last year. The rub works well with beef, too.

The tomato paste, slits, and spray-on oil are tips from *Cooks Illustrated* that help the rub adhere to the meat. The tomato paste also enhances the venison's meaty flavor. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

