

# Great Game Gumbo

By Tom Dickson

Preparation time: 45 minutes | Cooking time: 1 to 3 hours | Serves 12–16



**T**hough technically it's still summer, hunting season is well under way in much of Montana. Many archery pronghorn and shoulder season elk hunters have already notched their tags, and grouse hunters will be on the prairies and in the mountains within the next few weeks. Waterfowl opener is only a month away.

It's time for hunters to use up any game remaining in their freezer to make room for this year's harvest. One way is with a big pot of fragrant, savory gumbo.

Gumbo is a thick stew combining meat, shrimp, a flavored stock, and the Cajun “holy trinity” of vegetables: celery, bell peppers, and onions. Developed in southern Louisiana during the 18th century, gumbo is thickened by a delicious “roux” (rue)—flour and fat (usually vegetable oil) cooked together slowly—as well as filé (fee-lay) powder (ground, dried sassafras leaves), found in most Montana grocery stores.

This basic-but-delicious recipe is for not-so-tough game meat, like duck or goose breasts or venison rump (the sweet, tender loin is best used for sautéing and grilling, not stewing). If using tough game cuts like venison shoulder, shanks, or neck meat or duck or goose thighs, you'll need to simmer the gumbo for about two additional hours to break down the strong connective tissue.

Game isn't the only meat in my gumbo. I also throw in chicken, spicy andouille sausage, and shrimp. I also add a can of clams, with juice, to give it a stronger seafood taste, and occasionally a can or two of corn for sweetness and color.

Gumbo freezes well. This recipe makes six quarts. My wife and I eat one quart the first night and freeze the rest in one-quart containers for later in the year when the temperature drops and we start to crave this meat-rich southern stew. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 c. plus 3 T. vegetable oil
- 1¼ c. flour
- 2 lbs. chicken breasts or thighs, cut up
- 1–2 lbs. duck or goose breast meat or venison rump, cut into chunks
- Creole seasoning
- 1 lb. andouille sausage
- 2 yellow onions, chopped
- 3 green bell peppers, chopped
- 5 ribs celery, chopped
- 3 T. minced garlic
- 3 bay leaves
- 8 c. chicken stock
- 2 lbs. frozen shrimp, thawed and shelled
- 1 can clams with juice (optional)
- 2 cans corn (optional)
- ¼ c. filé powder

## DIRECTIONS

**ROUX:** Heat 1 cup of oil in a large pot over medium heat for 10 minutes. Stir in flour and stir for another 15 minutes or so until it turns the color of dark peanut butter. Keep stirring the entire time; otherwise the roux will burn—as indicated by black specks—and you'll have to start over. Note that the roux continues cooking for several minutes off the heat.

**GUMBO:** Liberally sprinkle chicken and game with Creole seasoning. In a large skillet, heat 3 T. oil over medium-high heat. Sauté meat in batches, then brown the sausage. Remove.

Sauté vegetables in remaining fat, scraping the pan bottom to loosen the delicious fond (brown bits). Add meat, bay leaves, and another 1 T. of Creole seasoning. If using tender game meat (venison loin or rump or game bird or waterfowl breasts), add mixture along with chicken stock to the large roux pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 45 minutes.\* Skim off fat and add shrimp, clams, and corn. Cook another 10 minutes. Stir in filé powder to thicken. Serve in bowls over rice.

\*If using tough game meat (venison shank, shoulder, or neck or game bird thighs), simmer for a total of about 3 hours. ■