

World's Best Venison Stew

By Tom Dickson | Cook Time: 90 min. | Serves: 8

INGREDIENTS

- 3 lb. venison stew meat (or other venison¹), cut into 1-inch cubes
- 3 T. vegetable oil
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 T. curry powder, divided
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 juniper berries²
- 3 c. water
- 2 c. chicken stock
- 1 c. cream
- ½ c. cider vinegar
- 1 c. ruby port or red wine³
 - 1 carrot, cut into ½-inch pieces
 - 1 parsnip, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 c. frozen pearl onions
- 2 T. cream cheese
- 6 bacon slices, finely diced
- 2 T. roughly chopped peanuts
- 1 T. honey
- 2 Granny Smith apples, cored and cut into ½-inch slice
- 1 bag fresh spinach
- Mashed potatoes
- 1 T. grated fresh or bottled horseradish
- 1 T. coarsely chopped parsley

PREPARATION

Heat oil in a Dutch oven or large stew pot. Season venison with salt and pepper. Sauté meat, onion, and ½ T. curry powder 8 minutes. Add bay leaves, juniper berries, and 2 c. water. Bring to a simmer and cook for 40 minutes.

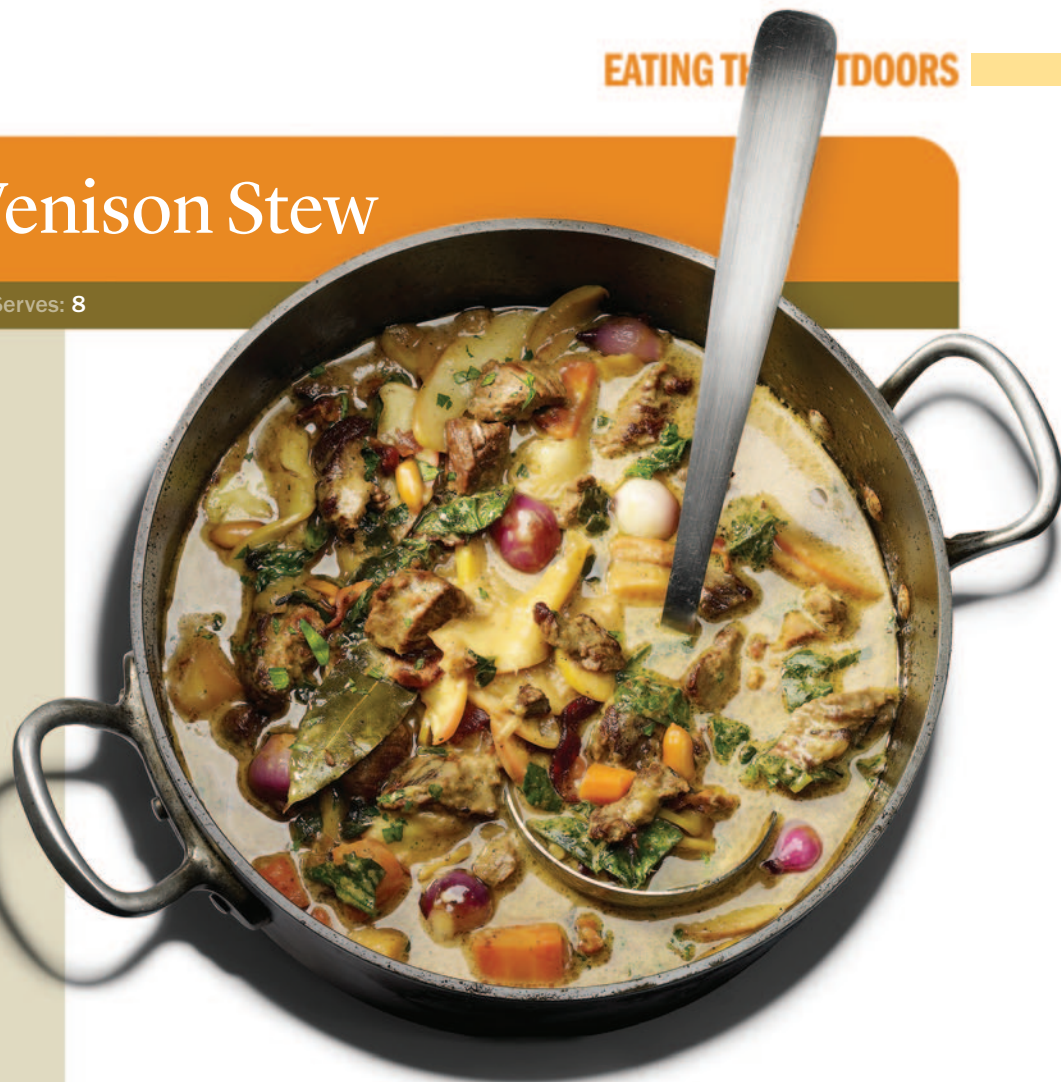
Pour in stock, cream, vinegar, port or wine, and 1 c. water. Simmer 20 minutes. Add carrot, parsnip, and pearl onions and simmer 20 minutes more. Stir in cream cheese.

While stew is cooking, heat a large fry pan over low heat and cook bacon until crispy, about 10 minutes. Drain grease, leaving 2 T. in pan. Add peanuts and remaining ½ T. curry powder and sauté 2 minutes. Add honey and apples and stir to coat. Add spinach and cook 2 minutes. Stir mixture into stew just before serving over mashed potatoes, garnishing with horseradish and parsley. ■

¹ If you use standard venison roast or steak meat from the upper hindquarters, reduce total cooking time by about half to prevent the meat from drying out.

² Pick ripe (purple) berries off juniper bushes found in most Montana neighborhoods. Or substitute 1 t. gin.

³ Australian Shiraz or California Merlot or Cabernet.



This recipe has an international pedigree, but its luscious mix of down-home flavors will be familiar to any Montana family at dinner time.

The dish comes from Marcus Samuelsson, a chef and restaurateur who now lives in New York City. Samuelsson was born in Ethiopia but grew up in Sweden, where moose and deer are mainstays. His worldly background influenced this stew recipe, which incorporates a wide range of sweet, tart, and savory flavors.

The recipe first appeared last year in *Field & Stream*. Since then I've made it half a dozen times, always to rave reviews. The stew's wonderful flavor comes from the many diverse, though common, ingredients. (The version here omits or substitutes for a few ingredients in the original recipe that I found hard to locate or unnecessarily fussy.)

As with any stew, try to use meat from the shoulder. Generally too tough to roast because it's laced with connective tissue, shoulder meat is ideal for stewing

or braising. These common cooking methods use low temperature, moist heat, and longer cooking time to transform tough tissue into a savory goo that infuses the juicy, fork-tender meat with flavor.

Second best for stews are cut-up bottom round roasts, from the lower part of the hindquarters just above the shanks. Try not to use loin or sirloin for stews or braising, because the meat, lacking collagen, can dry out (even though it's cooked in liquid).

If you don't know what part of the animal your frozen venison packets came from, look the meat over once it's thawed. Lots of internal tissue means shoulder meat. Clean red meat with little white inside is probably from the upper hindquarters and would be best roasted or grilled. If you must use loin, sirloin, or other tender cuts for this recipe, cut the cooking time in half.

—Tom Dickson is the editor of Montana Outdoors.