

Fancy Smashed Venison Burgers

By Tom Dickson

Preparation time: 10 minutes | Cooking time: 3–5 minutes | Serves 4



INGREDIENTS

- 12 slices crisp cooked bacon (optional)
- 1½ lbs. ground venison* or hamburger
- 2 t. Tabasco sauce
- 1 T. Worcestershire sauce
- Kosher salt and pepper
- Cooking spray or a drizzle of oil
- Grated cheddar cheese (optional)
- 4 Thomas' English Muffins, split and toasted
- 3 T. butter
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped or grated
- Pepper jelly (found in most grocery stores)

DIRECTIONS

In a bowl, add Tabasco and Worcestershire to the meat. Combine with your hands and form four 2-inch-thick patties about the size of a thick hockey puck. Season with salt and pepper.

Spray a stainless steel or cast-iron skillet with cooking spray or drizzle with oil and wipe with a paper towel. Heat on medium for 5 minutes. During this time, put a leather glove or oven mitt on your working hand to protect it from the heat. Increase heat until skillet is smoking.

Quickly add burgers to skillet and immediately press down hard on each one for 5–10 seconds with a stiff metal spatula until all are about 4 inches wide and ½ inch thick. Use a second spatula in your other hand if you can't create enough pressure. Cook without moving until a mahogany-brown crust develops, about 1½ minutes. Turn the spatula over and carefully scrape hard along the pan bottom to keep the browned crust intact while turning over each patty. If using, sprinkle cheese on patties.

Turn heat to medium. Cook—without smashing—until patties reach desired doneness: 1 minute for medium rare, 3 minutes for medium well. Remove burgers to a plate, cover loosely with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

In a small skillet or saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Add garlic, swirl a minute, then brush the toasted muffins with the garlic butter.

Spread a heaping 1 t. of pepper jelly on each muffin top and another on each bottom. Place a burger patty and three bacon slices between the muffin halves. ■

* I think the best venison burger has 20 percent pork fat.

Can a hamburger be fancy? Rachael Ray thinks so. The celebrity chef and TV personality has developed more than a dozen recipes to turn plain hamburgers into gourmet fare.

The recipe here is my take, using venison burger, on one of her more popular versions. It's definitely a burger, but unusual ingredients, like a toasted English muffin for a bun, turn it into something special enough for guests.

If it's still hot outside, grill these for a last taste of summer. If it's chilly, consider pan frying the ground meat to develop the delicious crust you only get using a skillet. I've added this "smashburger" technique after seeing it on the informative food website "Serious Eats" and trying it myself a few times. The crust is formed by pressing down on the burger with a spatula as soon as the meat hits a smoking hot pan, and holding it there for several seconds. This creates what's known as the Maillard ("May-yarl") reaction, or browning effect. Named for a French chemist, the Maillard reaction is a series of chemical processes that create the browned crust on meat and baked goods. Be sure to follow instructions exactly.

And don't forget a glove or oven mitt. 🐻

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.



Note: A few readers wrote to tell us they loved the coffee venison steak rub featured in the July-August issue but didn't think the tomato paste was necessary. After further experimentation, I agree. Also, if you use the much hotter chipotle chile powder rather than the ancho chile powder in the recipe, decrease the amount from 2 T. to 1 t.