

Whiskey Blackened Elk Roast

By Ben Long | Preparation time: 1 hour | Cooking time: 6 hours | Resting time: 10 minutes



Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday because I believe gratitude, which this day celebrates, is something to be cultivated, like a tree in an orchard. Some years when the frost is deadly, when the rains are sparse, and when the soil seems depleted, it pays to foster a bit of gratitude. To remember the blessings that come despite all our bad luck and poor choices. To give thanks for our good fortune.

The holiday season reminds me of all the rare things we have to be grateful for here in Montana. It comes at an opportune time: the tail end of general big game season, for which I am grateful. I am grateful also to live in a place and time when we have the freedom to roam the wilds and enjoy abundant fish, wildlife, and their habitats. And I am grateful to have friends to share it all with, friends who happen to be better elk hunters than I am, and who are generous enough to share when my luck runs out.

Food, friendship, and time outdoors are all meant to be savored. To rush any of it is to miss the point. Food—especially when gathered by your own hand from the natural world—is more than fuel for the body. It's nourishment for the soul and is well worth taking your time to savor and enjoy.

By far, my favorite “slow food” recipe is this Whiskey Blackened Elk Roast, which I learned to prepare from my dear friend, retired Whitefish schoolteacher Mary Sloan. Her late husband Gary was one of those old-timers who filled an elk tag nearly every year for decades. Just the thought of how this elk roast turns out—the feast of aroma, flavor, and texture—makes me grateful that Gary and Mary have been a part of my life. And of course, grateful for the elk, both in the freezer and roaming the wild.

—Ben Long is a writer in Kalispell.

Note: For this recipe, you'll need a heavy roasting pan with a lid.

INGREDIENTS

- 3–5 lb. elk roast
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled and cut into slivers
- 1 large yellow onion, cut lengthwise into slivers (optional)
- 1 c. vinegar (any type)
- 5 T. vegetable oil
- 2 c. strong brewed coffee
- 2 c. water
- ½ c. whiskey*
- Salt and pepper

**Don't worry about the alcohol. It evaporates, but the whiskey flavor continues to enhance the meat.*

DIRECTIONS

With a knife, cut two dozen or so slits halfway into the meat. Insert slivers of garlic (and onion, if you like).

Put the roast in a glass or ceramic bowl. Pour vinegar over the top and into the slits, turning for full coverage. Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours.

The next day, discard the vinegar solution and pat the meat dry with paper towels. Over medium-high heat, heat the oil in a heavy roasting pan. Add the roast and brown until nearly burned on all sides.

Reduce heat and pour coffee over the roast, being careful of hot oil splatters. Add water and whiskey, cover, and simmer for about 6 hours atop the stove. (Alternatively, roast the meat, after browning and adding the liquids, in an oven preheated to 285 degrees.)

Twenty minutes before serving, season with salt and pepper.

Remove the roast and let it rest 10 minutes before carving and serving. Meanwhile, heat the pan until the remaining liquid begins to bubble. Use a wooden spoon to scrape up any brown bits. Serve this as a sauce atop the roast or over potatoes, or thicken it into a gravy with flour or cornstarch, whisking briskly to blend, then heat until bubbling. ■