

# Braised Portuguese Venison Shanks

**Serves 8**

Prep Time: **45 minutes**

Cook Time: **3 to 5 hours**

**TRY THIS SIMPLE RECIPE** and you'll never throw away a venison shank again. What's more, I think you'll end up agreeing with me that shanks are among the best-tasting cuts of your deer and elk. Sound crazy?

I thought so at first. Shanks were the least-favorite part of my big game harvest—long, dense hunks of meat sheathed in tissue tough enough to dull a knife blade. After cutting the meat off the bone, I'd then have to fillet a half-dozen tissue-encased meat tubes. Sometimes, with a whitetail doe, I'd end up with no more than a cup of meat for the sausage pile. Hardly worth the effort.

Then I learned about braising, how cooking tough cuts for a long time with moist, low heat will break down the tough tissue and turn it into velvety gelatin. That luscious goo melds with what magically, after several hours, has become moist, fork-tender meat infused with spices and braising liquid.

Nowadays I find myself wishing for eight-legged deer. Twice as many shanks.

This may be the best shank recipe out there. I found it on Hank Shaw's award-winning food blog, "Hunter, Angler, Gardener, Cook" (which I recommend to anyone interested in learning how to make delicious game dishes). It's a twist on a recipe in David Leite's *The New Portuguese Table*. The version here is Shaw's, though I've simplified it to use only spices and herbs found in any Montana grocery store. It's delicious.

—Tom Dickson



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## INGREDIENTS

4 deer or 2 elk shanks\*  
Salt  
1 t. black peppercorns or  
½ t. black pepper  
½ t. powdered allspice  
1 t. juniper berries (or 1 t. gin)  
8 whole cloves  
1 cinnamon stick  
1 t. chile powder  
2 bay leaves  
1 t. olive oil

## PREPARATION

Salt shanks and set aside.

In a large pot with a lid (a Dutch oven or French oven is best), put spices and herbs in with the wine and molasses. Turn the heat to medium-low.

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.

Pour olive oil into another large pan set over medium heat. Fry the bacon slowly, turning all sides to get crispy. As each piece crispifies, toss it into the pot containing the wine. Do not let the wine go past a gentle simmer.

Add the shanks to the leftover bacon grease and brown on all sides except the one with the bone; this helps the shank stay together after long cooking. Take your time with this step, and do it over medium heat. It could take 20 minutes.

Move the shanks to the wine pot, bone side sticking up.

Put the onions in the bacon grease pan and turn the heat up to high. Toss to combine. The onions will deglaze the pan. After about 5 minutes, add the garlic and

6 oz. thick-cut bacon, cut into chunks  
2 yellow onions, minced  
8 garlic cloves, peeled and roughly chopped  
1 bottle red wine  
2 t. molasses  
2 C. beef stock or venison stock

\*If the shanks are too long for the pot, cut to fit with a clean-bladed hacksaw. Be sure to remove all bone dust from the meat. This recipe also works well for a neck roast.

toss to combine. Continue cooking until you hear the sound change: That's the onions losing enough moisture to begin browning. Cook another minute or two.

Pour in the stock and mix it well with the onions. Bring to a furious boil and make sure you scrape everything off the bottom of the pan.

Add to the wine pot, mixing in with all the other ingredients. Make sure the shanks are still bone side up.

Cover and cook in the oven for 3 to 5 hours (less time for a younger deer, more for an older one).

When the meat is almost falling off the bone, remove it gently and tent with foil.

Fish out the bay leaves, cinnamon stick, and as many cloves, peppercorns, and juniper berries (if used) as you can. It's okay if you don't get them all.

Puree the sauce in a blender or pass it through a food mill set on a medium setting. It should be thick. Pour over the shanks and serve at once with mashed root vegetables and something green.