

# Pan-Seared Venison Steaks with Caramelized Onions and Mushrooms

By Tom Dickson

Preparation time: 10 minutes | Cooking time: 45 minutes | Serves 4



## INGREDIENTS

- 5 T. unsalted butter, divided
- 3 large yellow onions, peeled and sliced
- Salt
- 1 t. dried thyme flakes
- 2 t. honey (optional)
- 1 lb. venison (elk, deer, or pronghorn) backstrap, preferably in one piece
- ½ lb. fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 3 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- Dandelion leaves or arugula, for garnish (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

Start by caramelizing the onions. Heat 2 T. of the butter in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. When it's hot, add the onions and toss to coat. Cover the onions, turn the heat down, and cook slowly, stirring once in a while. After 10 minutes, they'll start to soften. Sprinkle salt over the onions and continue cooking. When they are just starting to brown, add the thyme and honey. Cook until they are a nice brown. Remove and set aside. The onions take about 20 minutes and can be made in advance.

When the onions are done, wipe out the pan and add 2 T. butter. Pat the venison dry with a paper towel and sear it over medium-high heat, turning to make sure all sides are well browned. For medium-rare steaks, cook a few minutes on each side, until a meat thermometer registers 140 degrees. Remove the meat from the pan and let rest for five minutes on a cutting board.

While the venison rests, put the mushrooms in the pan and turn the heat to high. Sear the mushrooms until they release their water (this might not happen with hen-of-the-woods). When the water has almost boiled away or when the mushrooms begin to darken, add the remaining 1 T. of butter and sauté until they are nicely browned. Salt them as they cook.

Once the mushrooms are ready, add the caramelized onions and the parsley and toss to combine. Heat through and divide among four plates. Add the dandelion leaves or arugula if you are using them. Slice the venison into medallions and serve immediately. ■

**B**y midsummer my wife and I have devoured most of the venison in our freezer, but fortunately we still have a dozen or so packages labeled “steaks.” There’s only one problem: Steaks, while delicious, become a bit tiresome eaten week after week. That’s where caramelized onions come in. They have a sweetness that elevates venison steak to a higher plane. Add sautéed mushrooms for earthiness and a bitter green like arugula for balance and the dish is complete.

The recipe here is by Hank Shaw, author of the game cooking blog *Hunter Angler Gardener Cook*. He recommends hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, also known as maitake, found in some western Montana forests. Since they don’t grow in the dry, flinty foothills where I live, I use fresh morels from the farmer’s market or the oyster or even button mushrooms found in grocery stores.

For a bitter green to balance the caramelly onions, Shaw suggests adding freshly picked young dandelion greens. It’s too late for those (April and May are the best months), so I suggest a few arugula leaves.

Serve with buttered boiled potatoes and corn on the cob. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of *Montana Outdoors*.