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SPORTS

Make tasty snack sticks from your game meats

By Luke Clayton

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It's been a busy week in the outdoors for me. Last Monday, I headed up to northern Kansas with my hunting buddy Larry Large to show a farm we are bowhunting this coming October to another longtime friend, Mike Ford. Many of you might remember Mike's football career as star quarterback for SMU and later his stint in the NFL with Tampa Bay. It appeared Mike liked what he saw up in this big-buck country and I look forward to hunting with he and his group of friends this coming fall. The trip was somewhat business, but, when spending time with guys like Ford and Large, there is always time for fun, especially when scouting for fall hunting trips.

While making the long 9-hour drive, Large and I obviously had plenty of time to visit. It's not uncommon when spending a lot of one-on-one time with me to discuss not only hunting and fishing, but also ways to cook the fruits of our outings. Large is not an outdoor cook, but he does like to enjoy eating game.

Somewhere near Salina, KS., the talk went to making sausage at home. It went about like this:

"Larry, I ordered enough spices/cure and casings to make 30 pounds of meat snacks from the Butcher & Packer Company up in Michigan (www.butcher-packer.com) . I also have finally purchased a quality sausage stuffer which will make my sausage making much easier. No more stuffing sausage casings with my meat grinder! This stuffer has a handle that when cranked pushes a piston down, which causes the meat to flow smoothly into the casings."

"Well, Luke, tell me more. What kind of sausages will you be making (knowing he would be the recipient of some tasty eating when my work was done)!"

"Well, I order a kit that contains 30 pounds of seasonings for snack sticks in three flavors. One is the basic "deer hunter" flavor, the others salami and teriyaki. The kit comes with everything needed to make these snacks including seasoning, cure and edible casings. The seasonings will be waiting for me when we get back to Texas, then I will defrost some ground venison and wild pork. Give me a day to rest up from the trip and allow the meat to defrost and I'm going to work!"

During the remainder of our trip, I was eagerly anticipating putting the seasonings to work with some ground meat I had in the freezer. I was also anxious to finally be able to make sausages with a real sausage stuffer, opposed to my old, arduous method of using my sausage grinder.

Back at home, I noticed my wife had stacked the boxes containing the seasonings and my new stuffer on my workbench on the porch of my little cabin behind the house. Tired as I was from the drive, I promptly pulled five pounds of ground venison and 5 pounds of wild pork from the freezer and mounted my stuffer on the table. The next morning I was up early, ready to go to work.

I decided to try the “deer hunter” blend of snack sticks first. I placed the defrosted ground meat in a stainless steel pan and mixed the seasoning packet and cure with the appropriate amount of water and by hand, and incorporated it well into the ground meat. I could tell by the smell of the blend of seasoning that this was going to be good!

Next, I placed the small stuffing tube on the sausage stuffed, loaded it with seasoned ground meat, threaded several feet of the edible casing on the tube and began cranking the handle. Why had I waited so long to buy a real stuffer? The meat flowed smoothly through the stuffing tube into the casing and in no time, I had ten pounds of meat ready for my smoker.

Smokin Tex Electric Smokers come in several sizes. I have used the 1400 model for about eight years. There is no telling how many pounds of meat I have smoked on it nor, how much money I’ve saved by making my own BBQ, sausages and cured ham. My trusty old smoker works just as well today as it did eight years ago when it was brand new!



Luke's well-used Smokin Tex Electric Smoker loaded with tasty meat snacks made from game meat. When finished smoking, these are reduced in size by about one-third. *photo by Luke Clayton*

I placed a few sticks of wild plum wood in the smoke box, maybe six ounces, placed the snack sticks on the grills and set the thermostat at 140 degrees for one hour. Remember, when using a cure, it's safe to smoke/cook at low temperatures. After an hour, I increased the temperature to 150 degrees for 2 hours and then increased the heat to 160 for an hour. My goal was to heat the snacks to 160 degrees. With the thermostat at 180, the meat came up to temperature in another hour or so and my snack sticks were ready. I immediately tested one and found them to be very tasty with just the right amount of spice and smoke. These would be very well recieved on upcoming summer fishing trips, especially with some

rat trap cheese and crackers! I allowed the snacks to cool overnight in the refrigerator and then vacuum sealed them and placed them in the freezer. Mission accomplished!

Next, I will crank out a batch of salami snack sticks and then the teriyaki blend. I'll be heading down near the Mexican border to Campwood later this week to join my friend Larry Weishuhn for a hunt on Wayne Hays ranch for axis deer and hogs. I need some more fresh game meat to put all these seasonings to work!

Listen to Outdoors with Luke Clayton and friends on radio stations from Nebraska to Texas on weekends or anytime at www.catfishradio.com. Luke's book, *Kill to Grill, the Ultimate Guide to Wild Hog Hunting.... and Cooking* is available through the web site.

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