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SPORTS

Try 'corning' some venison

By Luke Clayton

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When most of we deer hunters refer to “corning” deer, we’re talking about putting corn out along a trail or road to attract them. In this week’s column, “corning venison” takes on a whole different meaning!

Do you enjoy eating Ruben sandwiches made from corned beef? How about a hot pastrami sandwich on rye bread with a generous application of hot mustard? Go to a Deli and you will pay dearly for these specialty sandwich meats but, did you know that you can make great tasting corned venison and pastrami at home, and with no special equipment, just a bit of information and an inexpensive seasoning/curing kit. Chances are pretty good that you have a venison back strap or two in the freezer. Chicken fried “strap” is mighty tasty but you might want to devote a back strap or two to another recipe.

First, corned beef is in essence cured beef that is cured first and then slow simmered in water with spices. The same with venison, corned venison must first be cured in a brine solution for a few days in order to become “corned” or cured. I learned a long time ago that it’s much more convenient and usually cheaper to purchase kits that contain all the spices and cures when making sausage, ham, etc.

The same holds true when making corned venison. I ordered the kit I used for this recipe from www.butcher-packer.com. This company has everything for the outdoor cook and a complete line of pre mixed seasonings/spices for making everything from jerky to ham.

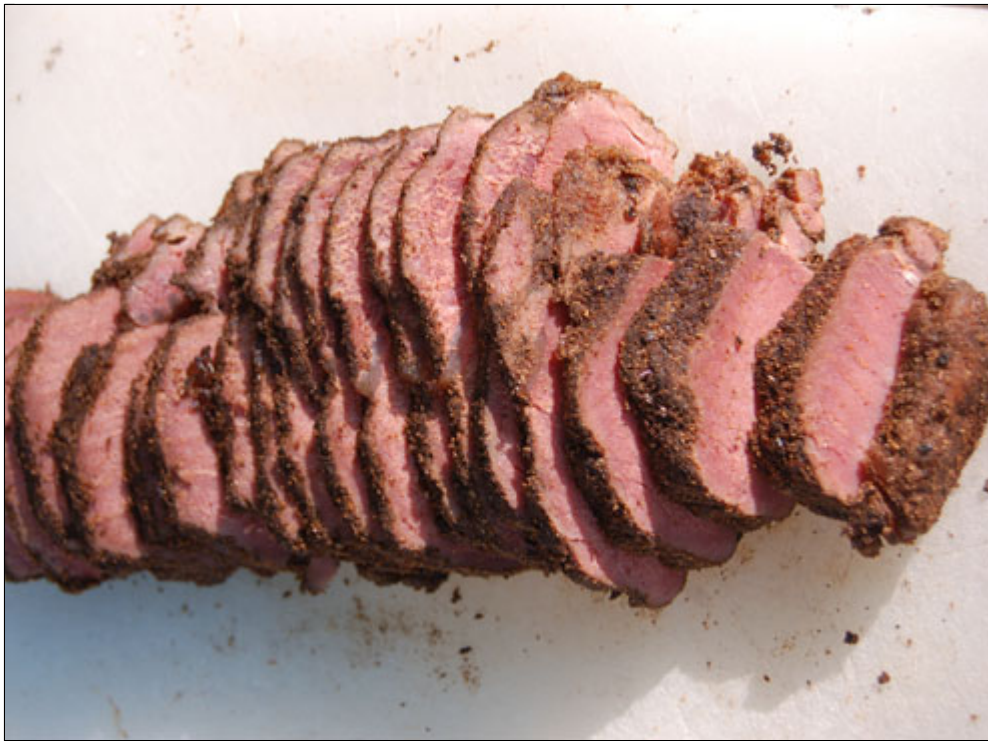
If you’re been reading my outdoor columns for very long, you are aware that for the past few years, I’ve been experimenting with different ways to put fish and game to use and, occasionally share my results right here. So... get that venison back strap or roast out of the freezer and let’s make some corned venison.

Begin by mixing the spices/cure in a large plastic container. The kit I used contained the spices for 2.5 gallons of brine but because I was curing only about 6 pounds of meat, I decided to use half the seasonings and half the cure. The instructions come with the kit and are very easy to follow.

Begin with the appropriate amount of water and stir in your spices/cure until well blended. Then, simply add the meat and place the container in the refrigerator with a temperature of around 38 degrees. About once each day, whenever you think of it, swish the brine around in the container so that it remains evenly distributed throughout the curing process. The spices and cure will work their magic on the meat and you will soon have cured or corned venison. The cure caused the meat to take on a deep red color when cooked, just like cured ham.

Remove the pieces of venison from the cure and rinse them well under the faucet.

Now, you can make either corned venison or pastrami. For corned venison, simply put the pieces of meat in a pot with spices and simmer for about 3 hours. Remove the meat, allow to cool and enjoy right away or place back in the refrigerator for a few more days. If you’re like me, you’ll probably be anxious to enjoy a homemade Ruben sandwich from the fruits of your labor!



This sliced venison pastrami is ready for some rye bread and hot mustard! *photo by Luke Clayton*

Rubens are easy to make, you will need some dark rye bread, spicy mustard or Thousand Islands dressing, a good cheese and sauerkraut. Heat the meat and pile all the ingredients on while you are toasting the rye bread. Slice and devour! I think you will find this to be the very best Ruben you're eaten!



Is there anything tastier than a well made Ruben sandwich? Luke made this one from corned venison back strap. It tastes as good as it looks! *photo by Luke Clayton*

Now, let's go back to when you first took the cured venison out of the simmering pot of water/spices. Let's make Pastrami. The seasonings for pastrami come with the kit. Rub the pieces of cured venison with a liberal amount of the Pastrami spices. Pastrami can be either baked in the oven or smoked.

I put my seasoned venison in a shallow aluminum pan and placed it in my Smokin Tex www.smokintex.com electric smoker set at 225 degrees for about 4 hours. I checked the internal temperature and when it reached 180 degrees, removed the meat from the smoker and placed it in the refrigerator for another day to allow the seasonings to add even more flavor to the meat.

My favorite way to eat Pastrami is on a hot Pastrami sandwich. I sliced the venison very thin and vacuum sealed several packages. Pastrami is very tight textured meat and although it is tasty right off the smoker, it's best to simmer the slices in a little beef stock when making hot pastrami sandwiches.

Expect more "from the field and water" columns in upcoming weeks. I always seem to devote the period after the close of deer season and before the turkey season opener to learning new ways to prepare game.

I'll be out on the water this week, hopefully adding a few crappie fillets to the freezer. My friend guide Seth Vanover at Lake Fork says the crappie are moving into shallow water and the action should only get better the next couple weeks. Turkey decoys are cleaned; the box and slate calls are chalked and sounding good. I even found my misplaced face mask for upcoming turkey hunts. By the way, why are face masks so difficult to keep up with? I seem to go through three or four each year!

Listen to Outdoors with Luke Clayton and Friends on radio stations from Nebraska to Texas each weekend or online anytime at www.catfishradio.com.

Luke's book, *Kill to Grill, The Complete Guide to Wild Hog Hunting and... Cooking* is available via the web site.

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