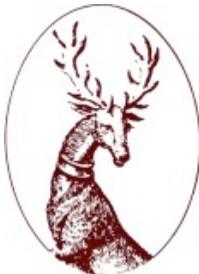


## ***SERIOUSLY GOOD VENISON LIMITED*** **HINTS & TIPS FOR COOKING STEAKS**



Cooking venison steaks is perfectly straightforward as long as you cook them *less*, rather than more. The best way to keep venison steaks juicy is to slightly undercook them and then allow them to rest to finish their cooking while you get everything else on the table. A moist, pink venison steak from young deer is a pathway to heaven. Venison is more tender than beef, i.e. topside is as tender as beef sirloin, and so on. Bear in mind is that, because it is so lean, venison is at its best when not cooked fiercely past the medium rare stage; if you do, it becomes dull and rather dry. If you really don't like pink meat, choose cuts from the saddle such as filet mignon or loin.

### **Rare and medium rare steaks:**

Suitable cuts are from the saddle (fillet or loin), the haunch (topside or silverside), and shoulder. My preference is for frying them, as some domestic grills won't brown them before they are overcooked. A mixture of butter and oil gives the right combination of flavours. Start off exactly as you would a beefsteak, but just draw them off the heat before they are quite done. Very thin steaks really need to be served immediately. Very thick steaks benefit from being left to rest for a little longer, to ensure the pinkness is evenly spread.

### **Whole fillets (filet mignon), and haunch fillets.**

Because they are small, and round rather than flat, fillets are best cooked whole and then sliced afterwards. Heat your pan till very hot, with a mixture of butter & oil and brown the fillet on both sides, allowing it to almost become crisp. Then turn the heat down and continue to cook the fillet for about 5 minutes\*, turning from time to time. Then rest for a minute or two. If you are not sure if it is done enough, simply slice the centre and have a look. Some people like to cook it in the oven after browning it. If so, roast for no more than 5 minutes before resting it.

\*These times are just a guideline, as clearly a plumper fillet will take longer and a very slim one will cook quicker.

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### **Cooking venison steaks to well-done.**

If you don't like your steaks at all pink, then a little care must be taken so that they remain moist. Grill or pan-fry them till they are medium rare. Then remove them to a warm oven (a plate warming drawer is ideal) and allow them to rest for 5-10 mins depending on their thickness. This diffuses the pinkness and leaves the steaks juicy. Cuts from the saddle (fillets or loin steaks) remain more tender when cooked past pink than do haunch steaks.

**Suitable sauces.** For a creamy type of sauce, Hollandaise and Béarnaise sauces are excellent with venison, using red wine vinegar instead of lemon juice. Or you can cheat and buy ready-made Hollandaise sauce. When you have fried your steaks, use a tiny drop of water or wine to deglaze the pan. Boil this down to almost nothing and, once cooled a little, add this 'mini stock' to the sauce.

**Nichola Fletcher's Rowan and red wine sauce.** (for 2) Have ready about 8 juniper berries which you have crushed. When you have lifted out the steaks to rest, add the juniper berries and allow them to fry gently in the pan. Add a tablespoon of rowan jelly (make sure it is nice and tart) and a large glass of red wine. Dissolve the jelly and the brownings from the pan. Boil this down until nice and syrupy, and season with salt and pepper. If you happen to have some concentrated venison stock as well, add this too and it lends the final rich gloss to the sauce.

**Francatelli's Venison Sauce** is a traditional favourite: Bruise a small cinnamon stick and put it in a pan with half a glass of port, 225ml (8oz) redcurrant or rowan jelly and the thinly pared rind of a lemon. Warm through till the jelly has dissolved, then simmer for 5 mins. Strain into a hot sauceboat.

**Another Red Wine Sauce:** Boil together 150ml (1/4 pint) red wine with 450ml (3/4 pint) game stock (a tin of game consommé will do if you're stuck). Reduce them to 150ml (1/4 pint). Add 1 tablespoon of rowan jelly and stir until melted. Then whisk in 2 tablespoons French or wholegrain mustard and 4 tablespoons of brandy. Add a dessertspoon of lemon juice and taste. Adjust the seasoning, adding more lemon juice if necessary.

## **QUICK RECIPE**

**Venison Steaks with Blue Cheese Sauce** is a simple but good combination. For every 4 x 225gm steaks you need 100g (4oz) Stilton or other blue cheese, and a medium carton of cream. Sauté the steaks quickly in hot butter till nicely browned but still pink. Rest as required. In the meantime beat together the Stilton and cream and stir into the pan, scraping up all the brown juices. Gently warm it through, season to taste and serve with brown rice, pasta or new potatoes. It's very rich indeed, so choose a light moist vegetable or have a salad with it.

**Read Nichola Fletcher's ULTIMATE VENISON BOOK - published in June 2007**

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