

Bringing Home Your Bear

WITH PROPER CARE AND HANDLING, BEAR MEAT IS A DELICIOUS TASTE OF THE WILD

BY
LORELIE SCORZAFAVA

You sit down to enjoy the rewards of your bear hunt, but long before your bear roast leaves the kitchen and graces the dining room table, many factors have influenced the flavor of the meat. The taste of bear meat is affected by time, handling, and the diet of the individual bear.

In most cases, time is the factor that a bear hunter has the most control over. Not only does the time of year have an influence on the meat, but the amount of time you take to properly handle and care for the meat is crucial. Once that bear is down, the clock starts ticking, and the time to properly handle your trophy and the meat is *immediately*.

Keep the words “clean, cool and dry” in mind. You need to get the carcass cooled as soon as possible; depending upon the outdoor temperature, this can make a world of difference in the taste of your meat. If you are not able to leave the woods right away, it is imperative to immediately remove the skin, which retains heat, and gut the animal, so the meat can cool quickly.

Many bear hunters pay closer attention to the hide than the actual meat. Then when they sit down to eat the meat, they think they don't like the taste or find it “gamey.” In fact, what they may be experiencing is spoilage. The number one cause of spoiled bear meat is body heat.

When you're gutting your bear, don't be alarmed if you see roundworms. According to New Hampshire Bear Biologist Andrew Timmins, “Hunters should expect to see parasites like roundworms in the intestinal tract. This is not a reason to discard the meat.” Timmins explains that finding roundworms is not a great concern, as these parasites are confined to the intestines and do not invade the meat. Most birds and animals that a hunter will harvest contain intestinal parasites. It is a common part of nature and has no human impact. So, do bring your bear meat home to enjoy.

Once you have begun the cooling process, left the field, and taken the precautions to ensure keeping your meat clean and dry, chill the meat for 24 hours and then have it processed. It is not good to let it “age” in coolers or outside, even in cool temperatures. Bear meat spoils more quickly than other game meat because of its higher fat content. Aging may actually dry out and toughen your meat.

Burgers and Steaks

There are several tips you can use when cooking bear meat to ensure a delicious and safe meal. First, when you think of cooking bear meat, think PORK. Bear meat has been known to contain trichinosis, a disease found in some bears and pigs. The rate of this infection in bears is very low in North America (less than 2%) and quite rare in New Hampshire. This parasite can cause serious

health issues in humans, though, so bear meat must be thoroughly cooked. The parasites need to be destroyed by cooking to 170°. This can be a problem for people who enjoy rare meat and want their burgers or steak red inside. If you are unsure, use a meat thermometer to reach the safe temperature and not overcook.

Try cooking bear meat with a braising liquid. Bear does especially well in Dutch ovens and slow cookers, where liquid keeps the meat moist and flavorful. If the cut of meat you are cooking is tender, like a steak or rib roast, you can dry season and grill or roast. If you are planning on grilling less tender cuts, marinate them in an acidic marinade and let the wine, fruit juice or vinegar help tenderize the meat.

When cooking bear burgers, a handy tip is to form your patties and poke a hole in the center with the end of a wooden spoon or your finger. This will let heat reach the center and allows more even cooking. Do not press the juices out of your bear burgers. Cook them on a flat surface instead of a grill grate, at a medium temperature, and let the juices stay inside the burger. You may add ground pork when the burger is first ground, or later when you are actually using the bear hamburger.

For steak, use the thermometer to ensure it is cooked to a well-done temperature. Let the bear steaks rest for 5-10 minutes to allow juices to redistribute. Your meat will continue to cook for a few minutes, especially if you tent with tinfoil.

Other factors that determine how your bear meat will taste are the season the bear was taken, and the area, both of which affect the diet of the individual bear. We are what we eat, and so are game animals. If your bear is eating agricultural crops, and mast crops like acorns have been plentiful, the meat will taste much different than that of a bear forced to eat less desirable foods because of location or poor food sources.



© ROBERT ANDERSEN



Bell Peppers
Stuffed with Bear Burger
and Rice

Bell Peppers

Stuffed with Bear Burger and Rice

Nothing says comfort food better than a stuffed pepper swimming in rich tomato sauce. This recipe makes a large amount (16 peppers); I always make a big batch, because they are great reheated and also freeze well.



Ingredients

- 2 lbs. ground bear burger
- ½-1 lbs. ground pork
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 8 large green peppers
- 1 14.5 oz. can stewed tomatoes
- 2 29 oz. cans tomato sauce
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup milk
- 4 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. garlic, finely minced
- salt and pepper to taste
- bacon strips cut in half
- ketchup or barbecue sauce

Oven 350°

Preparation

Cook rice according to package directions. Set aside. Prepare peppers, cut in half, top to bottom, remove and discard seeds and membranes. Arrange peppers in a baking dish, hollowed sides facing up. Mix the ground bear burger, ground pork, cooked rice, eggs, milk, 1½ cups tomato sauce (reserving the rest), Worcestershire sauce, onion, shallot, garlic, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Mix well; hands work best! Fill each pepper with the meat mixture. Puree the remaining tomato sauce and stewed tomatoes in a blender and pour over the stuffed peppers. Arrange a half strip of bacon over each pepper, add a drizzle of ketchup or barbecue sauce and cover with foil. Bake for 90 minutes until completely cooked. Uncover for last 30 minutes to crisp bacon.

Sliders are a fun way to introduce ground bear meat to your family. They also stretch your bear burger, because they are a smaller size. Just make sure you cook them thoroughly. Serve with your favorite fixings; the mayonnaise will keep them moist.

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. ground bear burger
- 1 envelope dry onion soup mix
- 2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tbsp. mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp. Gravy Master browning seasoning
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 12 small dinner size rolls

Preparation

Mix bear burger and remaining ingredients together. Divide the meat mixture into 12 portions, press into patties. Preheat grill. Cook burgers until no pink remains. Heat rolls and serve with your favorite toppings.

Bear Sliders



Bear Steaks Asada

For a Mexican twist, this recipe provides a citrus marinade to tenderize a chewier cut of bear steak. Let the marinade imbue its flavors in the meat before grilling. Then slice thinly and serve with warm flour tortillas.

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. bear skirt or flank steak
- ½ c. red wine
- ¼ cup each of lime, lemon, and orange juice
- 5-6 small cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 small onion, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste

Optional: prepared salsa, guacamole and sour cream

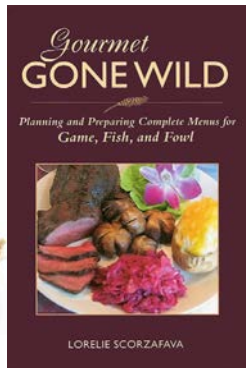
Preparation

Mix all marinade ingredients in a non-reactive bowl or zip bag. Add bear meat and mix to cover both sides. Marinate for 6-8 hours. Preheat grill. Wrap tortillas in a damp paper towel, then in foil and let heat in a warm part of the grill, turning several times. Remove meat from marinade, reserving marinade. Place on grill and cook until no pink shows, turning steaks and brushing with remaining marinade while grilling. Cut into thin slices. Serve with warmed tortillas and top with salsa, guacamole, and/or sour cream.

BEAR Cooking Tips

Bear meat can make a delicious meal, but it also requires special care in cooking. Here are some helpful tips to follow when cooking your bear meat:

- To check for doneness, use a meat thermometer to 170°, no pink remaining.
- Cook roasts and larger cuts of meat with braising liquids to moisten and tenderize.
- For burgers:
 - Cook burgers on a flat surface, not a grill grate;
 - Do not press juices from the burger;
 - Poke a hole in the center of each patty with end of a wooden spoon for even cooking;
 - Cook burgers slowly over medium heat.




Many hunters and game cooks try to mask “gamey” taste with highly seasoned flavorings and recipes. If you have taken proper care of your bear from the moment it hit the ground, kept it clean and cool and dry, and frozen it properly, then chances are you can enjoy your bear steak or bear burger with complementary flavors imbued, so you can savor its delicious essence and not completely mask its taste.

An outdoor writer for over 20 years, Lorelie Scorzafava is the culinary editor for Bear Hunter magazine. Her game cookbook *Gourmet Gone Wild*, inspired by her husband’s Dick’s hunting adventures, is available at Radicalbowhunter.com. She has also written columns for children in the outdoors.

New Hampshire Wildlife Journal is your best source for fishing, hunting, wildlife and conservation information in the state.

DID YOU ENJOY READING THIS ARTICLE?

Every issue of N.H. Wildlife Journal includes stunning wildlife photography, in-depth features and "how-to" articles – plus Naturalist's Notebook, Warden's Watch and no advertising.



So what are you
waiting for?
Subscribe today!

www.wildnh.com/pubs/wj-magazine.html