

Cookbook shows versatility of venison

For many hunters, killing a deer is the culmination of their season – a climactic cap to months of scouting, preparation and hours in the field. It doesn't have to be that way, though, especially when it comes time to enjoy the bounty returned from the meat processor or prepared by their own hand.

Too many hunters decide to fire up their dehydrator and simply make jerky out of the allotment of meat gained from their animal. Or they will just add ground venison to standard meat sauces, hamburgers or sloppy joes. That can get boring quickly, but finding alternatives to old standards like these isn't difficult.

A perfect place to start is “Quality Venison Cookbook: Great Recipes from the Kitchen of Steve and Gale Loder” published by Stackpole Books. The Loders published three volumes of their original “Quality Venison Cookbook” and have about 64,000 copies in circulation across the country. With those successful volumes out of print, the Loders were looking at producing a fourth edition for the series.

Along came Stackpole Books, a well-known press in the outdoor publishing community. The Loders, who live in Cranberry Township, combined the best of their first three books for this fourth volume.

The Loders begin their latest “Quality Venison” with a review of venison care and preparation, and follow with a tutorial on deer processing and tips on using the meat. The book follows with more than 350 homemade recipes. It features collections of marinades and sauces, methods of cooking ground venison, steaks, chops and tenderloins, and cooking in traditional, Italian and southern styles. Each recipe contains a list of ingredients, instructions on how to prepare the meat and even helpful hints to make the most of each meal. There are also some hunting tales sprinkled in, and insight into how and why a certain cut of meat was used in that recipe.

I'm not one to spend a lot of time in the kitchen, but not too long ago I had a few friends over for a small dinner party. I knew they would be up for trying a healthy serving of venison steaks taken from a doe I shot last fall. I poured over a number of the Loders' recipes and finally settled on their “Venison Tenderloin Special.” It featured a sauce of olive oil, red wine, bourbon, spicy mustard and heavy cream, and a preparation time of about 45 minutes. I paired it with a side of warm new potato salad with taleggio and arugula.

Venison is a tricky meat to cook because it is best when served medium-rare. Over-cooking can be easy to do, but this night the meal went off perfectly. The meat, prepared in black pepper and

garlic salt, and then covered in the sauce was tender, juicy and flavorful. It wasn't surprising that the Loders call this recipe "a family favorite." Nor was it surprising that there were no leftovers.

A few weeks later, I was invited to a summer picnic and decided once again to search for something in the Loders' book. After looking at a number of options, I settled on "The Best Steak Marinade" knowing I would have the chance to grill the meat. The marinade consisted of 12 ingredients, including pepper, soy sauce, dry mustard, lemon juice and minced garlic.

I cut the steaks into small slices, intending to serve them as an appetizer, and marinated them in the refrigerator for about four hours as required. At the party, it was just a matter of putting the strips on the grill and turning once until each side was slightly brown. Again, a pink medium-rare middle to the meat proved perfect and juicy, and the spicy marinade was succulent and mouth-watering. Their presentation on a cracker and bit of goat cheese was a hit.

With this year's hunting season just around the corner, there's no doubt that this cookbook will get plenty more use. I have already marked a dozen other recipes I hope to try, including a first attempt at stew, a few crock-pot creations and a couple of new takes on standard ground meat sauces. Any of these recipes would be just as good with standard cuts of beef, but the versatility of venison shines through.

The "Quality Venison Cookbook" is available from Stackpole Books in bound hardcover. The cost is \$24.95 plus \$5 for shipping and handling, and \$1.86 in sales tax – a total of \$31.81. Call the Loders at 724-824-2501 to order, or visit their web site at www.qualityvenisoncookbooks.com.