

# Venison Burgers

By Tom Dickson | Preparation time: 5 minutes | Cooking time: 6-10 minutes | Resting time: 5-10 minutes



I'm surprised how many friends and colleagues convert large amounts of their deer or elk—shanks, shoulder meat, and bottom round—into burger. Some may not know how to cook those tough cuts (though regular readers of this column know braising or stewing is the key). But they tell me the main reason is that they simply like burger—and all the various dishes that include ground venison.

“Minced” meat is a staple around the world. In the Middle East, ground lamb is pressed around metal skewers and grilled as kebabs. North Africans serve ground meat in pastry known as sambosas. Muslim Indians enjoy keema, spiced ground beef. Cubans are famous for picadillo, a fragrant stew of ground beef, tomatoes, raisins, and olives. Greek moussaka, Italian bolognese sauce, and English shepherd's pie all contain ground meat. The Cornish invented pasties—ground meat with onions and potatoes baked in dough—that they introduced to Butte, Montana, when they arrived to mine copper in the late 19th century.

Here in the United States, ground meat is used in meatballs, chili, tacos, meat loaf, stuffed peppers, calzones, lasagna, and, that upper Midwest church basement mainstay, hotdish.

Then there's the all-American hamburger. The beloved burger has countless variations based on individual preference. Some like their burgers plain, or with ketchup only. Others want lettuce, tomato slices, mayo, mustard, fried onions, bacon, and/or any number of other toppings. Some burger fans insist that only charcoal produces the ideal burger. Others maintain that a gas grill or even a frying pan works fine.

These two recipes are my favorites. Ketchup only, by the way.

—Tom Dickson is the editor of Montana Outdoors.

## BACON VENISON BURGER

This recipe is from the indispensable *Buck, Buck, Moose* cookbook written by San Francisco game chef extraordinaire Hank Shaw. Shaw insists that burger meat needs fat: 80 percent venison, 20 percent pork fat. Some hunters make burger meat with 100 percent venison. How the meat holds together or isn't inedibly dry when cooked is beyond me.

For fat, Shaw came up with the brilliant idea of using partially frozen bacon ends ground with very cold venison chunks. This gives the burger a smoky, bacony flavor without needing to add bacon slices on top.

To make the burgers, gently form ½ pound (5 to 6 ounces) of ground bacon-venison into patties about 1 inch thick. Press your thumb into the center of each patty to help it cook evenly and prevent it from bulging while cooking.

Heat the grill on high, scrape and clean the grates with a wire brush, and salt the burgers right before cooking.

Cook without disturbing (to create a crust) for 3 to 5 minutes, depending on your doneness preference. Flip and repeat. Grind a little pepper on each patty then remove and let rest, loosely covered in foil, for 5 minutes. Serve on a plain or toasted bun with whatever condiments and additions you prefer.

## JUCY LUCY VENISON BURGER

Also spelled Juicy Lucy, this is a cheeseburger with the cheese in the middle rather than on top. I had my first one years ago at Matt's Bar in Minneapolis, which claims to have invented it (and spells juicy without the “i”). Minneapolis's 5-8 Club also makes the claim.

To make a Jucy Lucy, form two thin 3-ounce ground venison patties. Sandwich two thin slices of cheese between them. American cheese is traditional, but sliced Swiss or pepper jack works well, too. Pinch the edges to hide the cheese. Salt the meat and grill or fry as usual. Caution: Do not eat right away. If you bite into the burger while it's piping hot, the molten cheese will squirt out onto your chin and chest. Rest these edible volcanoes for 10 full minutes, covered in foil, before serving. ■