

Venison Carbonnade

Preparation time: 20 minutes | Cooking time: 3 hours | Serves 8



March can be bleak. Spring—with its sunny days, rising trout, and snow-free hiking and mountain biking trails—feels so close. But in Montana, March can be as cold, gray, and snowy as December. That's fine if you ski or snowmobile. For the rest of us, this is heartbreak season.

You have two choices: Stare out the window while cursing Montana's latitude, or fortify yourself against the ongoing cold and snow with a dinner so rich, savory, and luscious you forget about the drifts still piling up outside.

This rib-sticking venison stew is such a dish. It's based on one by Jonathan Miles, *Field & Stream* food columnist and author of the essential game cookbook, *Wild Chef*. In addition to venison, the recipe calls for butter, bacon, onions, brown sugar, and dark beer. You could cook a catcher's mitt with these tasty ingredients and the dish would still come out guest-worthy.

The recipe calls for venison stew meat, which comes from the shoulder, neck, or flanks. You can also make it with cubed hindquarter roast or steaks, but you'll need to greatly reduce the cooking time for those cuts—from 2 hours down to just 20 minutes. 🐾

—Tom Dickson is editor of Montana Outdoors.

Dim the lights

Darker beers are made with more heavily roasted barley than found in lighter lagers, pale ales, and pilsners. The darker roasts add chocolate, toffee, and coffee flavors that pair well with roast venison. What's considered a dark beer starts with the red ales and becomes increasingly darker as you get into the brown ales, bocks, porters, and stouts (Guinness being the most famous).



INGREDIENTS

3 lb. venison stew meat (elk, deer, moose, or pronghorn), cut into 2-inch cubes.
Beef stew meat works, too.

2 T. butter

4 slices bacon, chopped

1-2 T. vegetable oil

3 yellow onions, chopped

3 T. dark brown sugar

4 cloves garlic, minced

16 oz. dark beer (see sidebar below left)

1 c. chicken stock

1 bay leaf

1 t. dried thyme

1 t. apple cider vinegar (or lemon juice)

¼ c. chopped parsley

Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Heat a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Add butter and bacon and cook until bacon is crispy. Remove bacon and set aside.

Dry venison cubes with paper towels then salt and pepper generously. Add 1 T. vegetable oil to pan. Add one-third of the meat, to avoid overcrowding (which causes the meat to steam rather than brown). Raise temperature to high and brown on all sides. Remove to a plate. Repeat twice for the remaining meat.

Add onions and brown sugar to the pan, reduce heat to medium-low, stirring occasionally, and cook for 20 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook 2 more minutes.

Raise heat to medium-high. Add beer and scrape the bottom to dislodge the tasty brown bits, known as fond. Pour mixture from the pan into a large pot or Dutch oven (which you could use, with the frying pan, to brown the three batches of venison, to save time).

Bring to a boil and add reserved bacon, venison, and accumulated juices. Add chicken stock, bay leaf, and thyme. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 2 hours, stirring occasionally.

Before serving, remove cover and raise heat to medium. Simmer 10–30 minutes until liquid reaches a saucelike consistency. Stir in vinegar and parsley. Serve over dumplings, mashed potatoes, or egg noodles.