

Venison Crêpinettes with Pistachios and Apricots

By David Schmetterling | Preparation time: 45 minutes | Cooking time: 20 minutes | Serves 4-6



Unlike that of pork and beef, most venison fat is inedible. But venison caul fat (also called crêpine or fat netting) is the exception. This is the beautiful, lacy, delicate fat that surrounds the organs of ungulates like deer, pronghorn, and elk. It's delicious.

Caul fat is such a succulent delicacy that it's worth taking a few extra minutes to harvest it from the carcass in the field. Here's how:

1. After cutting through the hide and body wall from the sternum to the pelvis, look for the white, lacy caul fat surrounding the stomach and other organs.

2. Using your rubber-gloved hands (no knife needed), carefully pull the delicate membrane away from the innards, trying to keep it in one piece (though ending up with a few large pieces is fine).

3. Try not to get blood on the caul fat.

4. Once the caul fat is removed from the animal, it will still be very warm. Hold it up in both hands for a few minutes to cool in the air.

5. Finally, ball up the caul fat and put it into a game bag, separate from any meat or blood.

Once home, soak the caul fat in a bowl of cool water to get rid of any blood, grass, or pine needles. Then pat it dry, vacuum seal, and freeze. To thaw, put it in a bowl of cool water and it comes back to life. Pat dry again before using.

To cook with caul fat, wrap it around a roast or tenderloin, or even burgers destined for the grill. It adds taste and texture to all cuts. The fat gradually melts as it cooks and makes the meat beneath tender and juicy. It's the same concept as "barding" meat by wrapping it in bacon.

You can also use caul fat like casing to wrap around ground sausage. This makes what's known as a "crêpinette," which is the recipe at right, adapted from one on allrecipes.com. ■

—David Schmetterling is FWP's statewide fisheries research coordinator.



The author's wife and hunting partner with caul fat from a whitetail buck.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb. coarsely ground venison (pronghorn, deer, or elk)

½ lb. pork fat

2 t. kosher salt

1 t. black pepper

Pinch of cayenne pepper

1 t. very finely sliced fresh sage leaves
or ½ t. dried, crumbled leaves

¼ c. chopped pistachio nuts

2 T. diced dried apricots

½ lb. caul fat

White wine

Vegetable oil for frying

2-3 T. butter for sauce

DIRECTIONS

Gently mix salt, pepper, cayenne pepper, sage, pistachios, and apricots together in a mixing bowl with a fork until just combined. Add the dry ingredients to coarsely ground venison and pork fat. Mix gently to evenly distribute ingredients.

Divide into 4 portions and shape into patties about ¾ inch thick.

Lay patties on the large sheet of caul fat, trimming the fat into pieces about 2 or 3 inches larger than each crêpinette patty. Wrap each patty in the caul fat with the ends tucked underneath so that the patty is completely covered.

Place patties on a plate and cover with plastic wrap; refrigerate overnight.

Heat 2 T. vegetable oil in a skillet over medium heat. Place crêpinettes in pan, smooth side down. Let brown 3 or 4 minutes on each side (they should develop a beautiful, caramelized glaze). Blot some of the rendered fat with a wadded-up paper towel. Pour in a splash of white wine and cover.

Cook covered until the patty interiors reach 145 degrees F., or another 5 minutes. Uncover and flip crêpinettes to coat with the pan brownings, then cook another minute to reduce the wine.

Turn off heat, remove crêpinettes, and add butter to the pan. Mix the butter and pan drippings and spoon the sauce over the crêpinettes. ■