

# Game and fish prep begins in the field

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THE JOURNAL

**M**ost sportsmen inevitably become at least proficient in preparing wild game and fish entrées for the simple fact that spending so much time hunting and collecting it makes you want to eat it.

While wild game and fish recipes run the gamut from no preparation at all to extravagant marinades and cooking that requires several days, there are a few common denominators that can spell the difference between a meal fit for a king and one that makes the dog sick.

Without going into great detail about recipes and methods of preparation, here are a few key tips and pointers that can help you make the most of the meal that you collected from the great outdoors.

## DRESSING THE ANIMAL IN THE FIELD

Whether the entrée in question is fish, fowl, mammal or some other form of protein, getting the best flavor out of the animal starts the moment you get your hands on it. While some fish or other seafood might be transported alive, it is generally best to cool the game immediately so that the meat does not begin to spoil.

## METHODS FOR COOLING

Adding ice or moving the meat to a cold area, where practical, will facilitate meat preservation and reduce spoilage. Cooling often begins with removing the entrails, which heated the animal while it was alive. Doing so will allow the meat to cool naturally, and dis-



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carding the entrails from the rest of the carcass will prevent waste from getting to the meat.

In the case of some fish and fowl, also allowing the carcass to bleed out after harvest will both cool it and remove potential contamination, as some species have strong bloodlines that can taint the meat.

## REFRIGERATING AND FREEZING

Wild game and fish have no preservatives inherent to them. This is one reason why this type of meat is desired by naturalists and health-conscious consumers. Accordingly, fish and wild game tend to not keep under refrigeration or while frozen for as long as other processed meats. When thawing frozen fish or game, allow the meat to thaw completely without the aid of water, ambient heat or, heaven forbid, a microwave oven.

## COOKING

The number-one mistake most preparers make when cooking any kind of wild fish or game is cooking it too long or too fast.

The mistake comes in thinking the “wild” meat needs to be more thoroughly cooked to reduce chances of bacteria or other contamination. The truth is that wild game, duly tended, has a much less chance of contamination than meats processed in bulk in large plants. Cooking wild meat slowly until just done will result in better table fare.

## METHODS OF PREPARATION

Grilling is probably the number-one method of preparation, but only if you follow the reasoning that the majority of hunters/anglers are male, and most males are more comfortable with a grill than any other cooking appliance.

Again, slow and thorough is generally the best method. Another note is that since wild game and fish tend to have lesser fat content than other meats, you can preserve the fat content by searing, covering in foil or other containment, or combining wild meat with other ingredients that will preserve moisture.

## INGREDIENTS

It simply does not make sense to combine wild-caught or killed meats with processed or preserved ingredients. With an abundance of fresh-grown and whole foods available in supermarkets, farmer's outlets and other natural food venues, using fresh ingredients in wild game and fish recipes will allow a unique meal to be even better. When planning an outing, make sure you have good ingredients needed on hand to prepare a fresh meal as soon as possible.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is the host of “Upstate Outdoors” from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week, Upstate Outdoors will be broadcasting live from the Cabela's in Greenville.