

So... You

EAT



Gonna TV That?



**Surprisingly Good
Table Fare from
Unlikely Sources**

STORY BY **DUSTIN VAUGHN WARNCKE**

IN OUR HOUSE, WE LIKE TO EAT FROM THE FIELD. THE ONE EXCEPTION for eating primarily wild meat might be chicken, but if I could find a feral group of chickens that strayed off a farm somewhere, I am sure I would find a way to hunt them. I grew up eating wild game meat and fish all my life so I have always enjoyed turning what I catch or kill into something tasty when possible.

A question I often encounter when I talk with new hunters, non-hunters, and sometimes even veteran outdoorsmen about eating some of the things I have in my freezer is usually, “You can eat that? Really? How?”

Oh yes...You can! You can usually make most things you catch or kill taste great. Now that I am married, my in-laws especially have given me a hard time about bringing home raccoons, carp, gars, wild hogs, deer and other wildlife from our local area and elsewhere. They always kid me in a playful and joking fashion, of course.

My mother-in-law’s favorite line when she comes over for family or holiday events is usually, “What kind of road kill are you cooking for us today, Dustin?”

My father-in-law often reminds me that everything is edible, but you don’t HAVE to eat it all!

True. But I enjoy eating what I kill or catch. It is part of the hunting or fishing experience, and my adventures would not be complete without this process. I have cooked raccoon, rabbit, and squirrel in the crockpot and pressure cooked carp to make what resemble salmon patties. Many people do. Current reality TV shows and “field-to-table” outdoor shows help further the education on making some lesser known wildlife a tasty table fare.

I am a member and webmaster of a Christian-based wounded warriors charity named Crosswater Outfitters, based in the North Central Texas area. We host jug fishing events on Texas lakes for wounded soldiers and their families.

At one of our last events, the fishing was tough. We had more than 70 people to feed and were pulling up only one or two fish per 10 jugs in the morning and evening. With about eight boats having this kind of catch rate, I was getting concerned.

On the day of the fish fry, which was planned later that evening, we pulled in two

long-nose gar. In fact, that was all we pulled in that morning on my boat.

I decided to keep them. Another boat mentioned they had thrown back a large gar they had caught the previous day, thinking that it was unfit to eat or serve to our guests. I told all the boat captains to keep all of the gar they caught for the rest of the trip, if any more came in.

With the rest of the day’s catch, which improved as the day went on and boats went out and came back, it miraculously appeared we would have enough fish.

About that time, one of soldiers visited my cleaning station and commented, “Are you going to

clean those two gar? Can you even eat them?”

I assured him that I was about to prove a point. All I needed to get the job done was a pair of tin snips to cut into the armor plating of the gar. By a stroke of luck, the leader of our boat crew had an old pair of them in his truck. It only took a minute to penetrate the armor of the two Gar and get down to the boneless strips of white meat inside.

I trimmed out the meat and cut away all the undesirable areas and tendons. Then I cut up the remaining clean pieces into chunks for the deep fryer. To keep things separate, I put all of the gar into a second batch, to be cooked

Venison heart, sauteed in onion.



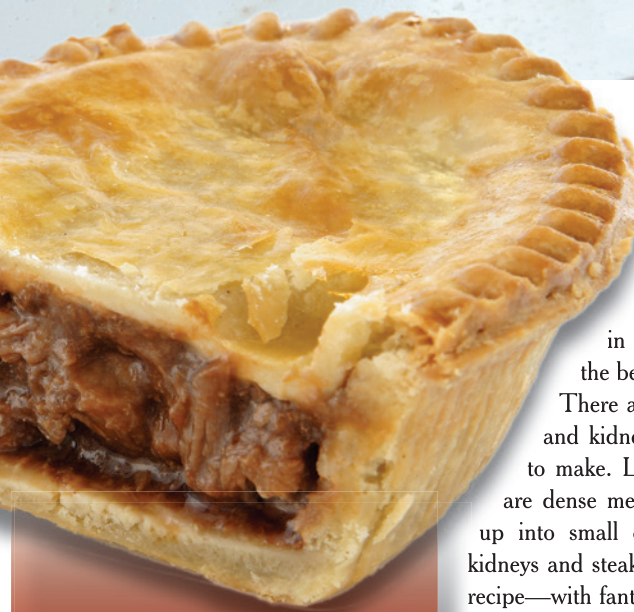


after the fry crew finished frying all the catfish first.

At dinner, I marked which tray was catfish and which tray was gar. There was nothing left but crumbs in the gar tray, while plenty of catfish was left over at the end of the meal. Several of the soldiers and members of their families, as well as the Crosswater staff, came up to me and remarked things such as, “I never knew a fish that ugly could taste that good!” and “How did you get that nasty fish to come out looking that nice? It didn’t even taste like fish!” I was thrilled.

ASIDE FROM THE REGULAR CUTS

of meat on deer and feral hogs, I love to keep the wild game hearts and kidneys when possible, as these “variety meats” can be really tasty if prepared right. Obviously, you want to inspect these organs to make sure they are clean and healthy. On a hunting show I watched a couple of years ago, the host kept the heart of his deer after the hunt, sliced it



Basic ingredients for steak and venison kidney pie.

into thin strips, and sautéed the meat, making delicious tacos with peppers and onions. It reminded me of fajitas. Heart meat has a similar consistency to a thick, dense steak. It may be different from what you have tried before, but it is certainly a way to broaden your culinary horizons.

As for kidneys, I have a special fondness

for steak and kidney pie for some reason. This is a savory meat pie, similar to a beef pot pie.

I picked up on this recipe from the British culture as I took a trip in the summer of 2011 to the beautiful island of Bermuda.

There are several recipes for steak and kidney pie, but it is fairly easy to make. Like the heart, the kidneys are dense meat that needs to be cubed up into small chunks. I use wild game kidneys and steak for my version of this old recipe—with fantastic results! Kidneys have a hearty flavor and are really tasty in a dish such as a meat pie.

My rule is to try everything once, no matter how strange it may sound at first. If other people like it, you might like it too. Hunt hard, stay safe, and have fun out there!



Check out Dustin’s hunting videos, articles, blog and more at www.dustinsprojects.com.