MAINE FOOD PAIRING GUIDE

Wild Game Recipe Cards

Four recipes from a Maine hunting family, each with the wine to pour and what to ask for at the shop.

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Venison backstrap in cast iron

Serves 4

- 1½ to 2 pounds venison backstrap, silver skin trimmed off
- Salt and plenty of black pepper
- 2 tablespoons bacon fat or vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed
- A few sprigs of fresh thyme

Take the meat out of the refrigerator half an hour before you cook it. Pat it dry and season it hard with salt and pepper. Get a cast iron skillet hot enough that the fat shimmers, then lay the backstrap in and leave it alone for 3 or 4 minutes. Turn it and brown each side. When it reads 125°F in the thickest part, it's rare. Drop in the butter, garlic and thyme for the last minute and spoon the butter over the meat. Let it rest 10 minutes on a board, then slice it across the grain.

> *My first deer was a doe on my grandfather's back pasture in West Gardiner. Dad said three words: take the shot.*

POUR **Northern Rhône Syrah** · Crozes-Hermitage or Saint-Joseph

AT THE SHOP Ask for a northern Rhône Syrah with a peppery side.

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Moose pot roast

Serves 6 to 8

- A 3 to 4 pound moose roast, chuck or round
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 3 tablespoons bacon fat or vegetable oil
- 2 onions, quartered
- 2 cups beef broth
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 carrots, 4 potatoes and half a small turnip, cut in big chunks

Heat the oven to 300°F. Season the roast, dust it with the flour, and brown it on every side in the fat in a Dutch oven. Add the onions, broth, wine and bay leaves, cover, and put it in the oven for 2 hours. Add the vegetables around the meat and cook another hour, until a fork slides into the roast without pushing back. Lift out the meat and vegetables, simmer the juices on the stove until they thicken a little, and pour them over everything.

> *I went on moose hunts and never saw a moose. This one is for whoever had better luck.*

POUR **Saint-Émilion** · Malbec from Mendoza if it's on the grill

AT THE SHOP Ask for a Right Bank Bordeaux, mostly Merlot, nothing too tannic.

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Braised bear with cider and onions

Serves 6

- A 3 pound bear roast or shoulder, fat trimmed off
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 onions, sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 cup apple cider
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme and a bay leaf

Heat the oven to 300°F. Trim off as much fat as you can, since bear fat can taste strong. Season the meat and brown it all over in the oil in a Dutch oven. Take it out, soften the onions and garlic in the same pot, then put the meat back with the cider, broth, vinegar, thyme and bay leaf. Cover it and braise 3½ to 4 hours, until the meat falls apart. Check that the thickest part reads at least 160°F. Serve it sliced with the onions and juices, or shred it with barbecue sauce for pulled bear.

> *My father and his Uncle Wendell let a mother bear and her cubs go near Rangeley. Later that season they brought home a 300-pound bruin.*

POUR **Barbera** · Old-vine Zinfandel for pulled bear

AT THE SHOP Ask for a Barbera d'Alba or d'Asti.

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Hare stew with bacon and onions

Serves 4

- 1 snowshoe hare (or 2 rabbits), cut into pieces
- 4 thick slices of bacon, cut into strips
- ¼ cup flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 cups dry red wine
- 1 cup chicken broth
- A bay leaf and a pinch of dried thyme

Fry the bacon in a heavy pot until it's crisp, then lift it out and leave the fat. Roll the hare pieces in the seasoned flour and brown them in the bacon fat, a few at a time. Add the onions, carrots and garlic and cook them a few minutes. Pour in the wine and broth, add the bay leaf, thyme and bacon, and bring it to a simmer. Cover and keep it at a low simmer for 2 to 2½ hours, until the meat pulls easily off the bone. Serve it with boiled potatoes or bread to soak up the gravy.

> *Rabbit hunting meant the gully below my parents' house. Hare stew was on our table at least once a month all winter.*

POUR **Chianti Classico** · Cru Beaujolais or Côtes du Rhône

AT THE SHOP Look for the black rooster on the neck of the bottle.