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TASTE



Rose Baca/Staff Photographer

Achiotte-Glazed Broken Arrow Ranch Nilgai Antelope is served over mole rojo with braised rabbit enchilada, salsa verde crema and heirloom squash at Fearing's Restaurant in Dallas. "It's the mildest of wild game, and the most expensive," chef Dean Fearing says.

GAME NIGHT

By TINA DANZE
Special Contributor

You don't have to be a hunter or chef to get wild game in your kitchen. Some ranches that supply chefs with game meats also sell to the public.

With restaurants such as Bullion, Gemma, Fearing's and Lonesome Dove Bistro leading the way, boar, bison, antelope, quail and pheasant are finding enthusiastic — and wider — audiences.

"If I took [antelope] off the menu, people would be really upset," says Dean Fearing, chef-owner of Fearing's Restaurant at the Ritz-Carlton. Recognizing home cooks' interest in game, chef Tim Love of Lonesome Dove sells a spice rub for game on his website, along with game-based smoked sausages, including one called rabbit-rattlesnake sausage.

Like many difficult-to-source ingredients, game doesn't come cheap, so it pays to learn proper cooking techniques. We got pointers from four local chefs who excel at wild game. Read on for their cooking tips and product sources.

Antelope

The dish: Achiotte-Glazed Broken Arrow Ranch Nilgai Antelope

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Local chefs lead the way for preparing bison, quail, boar and nilgai at home



Tom Fox/Staff Photographer

Pan-Seared, Oven-Roasted Stuffed Quail is prepared with a rabbit and rattlesnake sausage. "Quail is a very forgiving meat. It's fine if undercooked slightly, and if overcooked, it doesn't toughen as much compared with other meats," says chef Tim Love.

Here's how local chefs go wild with game

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Chef: Dean Fearing, Fearing's at the Ritz-Carlton

Why nilgai antelope: "It's the mildest of wild game, and the most expensive," Fearing says. "There's lots of variation within venison. The only one I use is nilgai, from South Texas. It's a mulelike animal that migrated from India to Central Africa. They started to bring nilgai to Texas in the 1880s, and it adapted to the terrain because it's so similar to Central Africa. Nilgai doesn't have a gamey flavor. But redbtail, whitetail and blacktail [venison] — they have a game flavor that a lot of people don't have a taste for."



DEAN FEARING

Source: Broken Arrow Ranch in Ingram. "I've been buying from them for 35 years. [The antelope] is as wild as wild can be," Fearing says, "because it's truly a foraging animal, living off the land." You can buy South Texas antelope (sirloin, boneless loin, chops, hamburger patties) for \$26 to \$124 at brokenarrowranch.com.

How to cook it: "You have to season wild game heavily because there's not a lot of fat," Fearing says. "We use the sirloin of nilgai, cut into 1 1/2-inch-thick, 6-ounce portions. We marinate it overnight with achiote paste mixed with orange juice, lime juice, onions, garlic and cilantro."

"Just before cooking, season the meat generously with salt and pepper, on both sides: It really needs it," he adds. "Cook it like a steak, searing it over a hot, smoky mesquite fire, for about 4 minutes on each side. Medium-rare is the perfect temperature for wild game, because it's charred on the outside — with the taste of mesquite and smoke — but you get that beautiful rosy center that holds all the juices, which is so delicious."

"Let it rest for 5 minutes before serving to guests. That tenderizes the meat more, because as it cools down, all the blood is going to the outside, and when you let it rest the blood goes back to the center."

To cook indoors, "You can sear the meat in a heavy skillet on the stove and transfer the skillet to a 425 to 450 F oven," Fearing says. "But keep an eye on it: One minute past medium-rare and it goes past medium."

Serving it: At Fearing's, it's served over a mole rojo (red mole sauce). Fearing says it also goes well with a port wine sauce or a fruit-based barbecue sauce, such as the different berry- and stone-fruit sauces in his cookbook, *The Texas Food Bible* (\$32, Grand Central Life & Style).

Boar

The dish: Boar Ragù with Casarecce Pasta

The chef: Stephen Rogers, Gemma and Sachet



STEPHEN ROGERS

Why boar: "The quality [from Texas suppliers] is amazing. It's not gamey," Rogers says. "The flavor is like pork, but milder in some ways. If it's hunted in the wild, it will have a stronger flavor."

The boar we get are free-range — not farm-raised with antibiotics or hormones — and the flavor is more consistent [than that of hunted wild boar]. In Texas, boar is a nuisance animal, so we should be using it as a food source, since people are hunting to get it off of properties."

Source: Several Texas suppliers, including Broken Arrow Ranch, in the Hill Country.

How to cook it: You can substitute ground boar for beef in your favorite Bolognese recipe, and serve it over rigatoni, Rogers says. Or, you can use any cut of boar to make a ragù.

"We braise bone-in cuts of boar to make our ragù," Rogers says. Cook 6 to 8 pounds of boar meat (any bone-in cut) in 1 quart of chicken or vegetable stock — or even water — along with some celery, carrots, onions, garlic, 2 to 4 tablespoons of tomato paste and a bouquet of herbs (like thyme, rosemary, and bay leaf). Cook at a low simmer, covered, for a couple of hours, or until the meat is very tender. Remove and shred the meat, and strain the remaining solids through a sieve,



Rose Baca/Staff Photographer

"You have to season wild game heavily because there's not a lot of fat," chef Dean Fearing says. He buys nilgai from Broken Arrow Ranch in Ingram.



Rose Baca/Staff Photographer

Chef Bruno Davailon pours sauce on Bison Steak au Poivre.



Shaban Athuman/Staff Photographer

Boar Ragù with Casarecce Pasta is made with boar from a Texas supplier. "The flavor is like pork, but milder in some ways," says chef Stephen Rogers.

pressing to extract any mushy vegetables. This will add flavor to the broth. Simmer the strained broth until reduced by 50 percent.

In a separate pan, sweat some finely chopped onions, carrots and celery, and add them to the reduced stock along with the shredded meat. Cook over low heat for 30 minutes. Add 1 1/2 to 2 cups whole milk to the ragù and cook for another 15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. This makes enough for a crowd or your freezer (10 to 12 servings).

Another boar favorite: Roast a rack of ribs that are cut from a small boar to ensure that the ribs will be tender. Put a basic rib rub on them (Sachet uses salt, Aleppo pepper and brown sugar) then place them in foil with a few tablespoons of chicken stock. Wrap the ribs tightly in foil and put it in a roasting pan. Roast at about 300 F until the meat is tender (about 1 1/2 hours). You could also prepare boar ribs in a slow cooker.

Quail

The dish: Pan-Seared, Oven-Roasted Stuffed Quail

The chef: Tim Love of Lonesome Dove Bistro, Woodshed Smokehouse



TIM LOVE

and Queenie's Steakhouse

Why quail: "It's a nice dark-meat bird and has richer flavor than chicken or pheasant," Love says. "True game birds have that cool flavor. I get it semi-boneless so the breast bone is removed and the leg and wing are intact; that's generally how it's sold."

"It's easier to cook than chicken breast, because chicken is thicker on one end of the breast," he adds. "Quail is a very forgiving meat. It's fine if undercooked slightly, and if overcooked, it doesn't toughen as much compared with other meats."

Source: D'Artagnan Foods (d'artagnan.com)

Preparation: Heat the oven to 350 F. Season the quail with a salt and pepper rub (or other rub). Heat some oil in a skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers — an indication that it's at 320 F. Put the quail in the skillet, breast side down and cook for 2 to 3 minutes (don't move it). Flip it and immediately put the pan in the oven. Cook for another 4 to 5 minutes, depending on thickness.

"If you stuff the [seared] quail, it's really delicious," Love says. "But sear the quail for a little less time — only 2 minutes — because it's going to cook for 10 to 12 minutes in the oven. Whatever stuffing you make, have it fully cooked before you stuff the quail. You can make a Spanish-chorizo-and-bread stuffing using Stovetop cornbread stuffing mix and chopped chorizo."

"Stuff the quail from the top, where the wings are. Criss-cross the legs and fold the wings back. When stuffed, it will be shaped like a baseball. Finish cooking the stuffed quail in a 350 F oven, checking for doneness after about 10 minutes."

Bison

The dish: Bison Steak au Poivre. The bison strip loin stands in for beef steak in this brasserie-style pepper steak.



BRUNO DAVAILLON

and lean."

Source: North American Bison in Fargo, N.D. (tenderbison.com). Davailon has been using them for years, since he was in Las Vegas.

How to cook it: Pan-seared and finished in the oven, like a beef steak. Heat oven to 350 F. Season a 1 1/2-inch thick bison steak with salt on both sides. Crush black peppercorns and coat the steak with peppercorns on one side. Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in a heavy skillet (cast iron is good) over high heat. Pan-sear the peppercorn side until browned, without moving it, about 2 minutes. Flip with tongs and sear the other side. Transfer skillet to oven and cook until an instant-read thermometer registers 130 F to 135 F for medium rare. (Depending on size of steak and oven, this could be 6 to 8 minutes.)

"Because there's no fat, if you cook it past medium it's going to be very dry. I would not encourage anyone to cook it well-done. You should use a different meat if you want well-done," Davailon says.

Serving it: Serve with an au poivre sauce — a cognac-kissed cream sauce. "There's a good balance between the lean meat and the rich sauce. It works really well," he says.

Another game favorite: Pheasant breast (from D'Artagnan Foods). Season it with salt and pepper and roast it in the oven, skin side down, just like roasting a chicken breast, Davailon says. "You don't want to cook it too long, but the internal temperature should be 160 F."

Tina Danze is a Dallas freelance writer.