Canning Venison

Deer hunting is a passion for many South Carolina residents and the season is here! Taking care to properly handle a freshly killed deer is crucial to the quality and safety of venison. And, following proper preservation methods will allow you to safely use and maintain the best quality of meat throughout the year. Freezing is a common method of preserving venison and widely used because it is a relatively simple process. Canning, however, is a great option too. Canning produces a final product that is shelf stable and can be stored without refrigeration or freezing for up to one year. This can be particularly advantageous when freezer storage is limited. It can also be comforting to know that if a power outage occurs during the year you don’t have to worry about losing large quantities of meat. Regardless of the preservation method that you choose, taking the time to review up-to-date, research-based methods will help you maintain safety and best quality. For detailed information on freezing meats see HGIC 3064, Freezing Meats & Seafood. If you are interested in canning venison, the following information will help you understand the importance of safe handling and provide the general instructions for the canning process.

Venison Must be Pressure Canned
Meats, poultry and seafood are low acid foods (pH above 4.6) that provide a good environment for the growth of Clostridium botulinum, the bacterial cause of botulism. These foods must be pressure canned for safety. A story recently shared on the Carolina Canning Facebook page and the Cooperative Extension Los Angeles Facebook page details the medical calamity (botulism) that can result when a canner does not follow proven, science-based directions for canning meats (http://www.kplu.org/post/home-canning-hobby-leads-near-fatal-medical-emergency#.UfFpK49SZV8.facebook). The University of Georgia’s National Center for Home Food Preservation includes approved, science-based methods for canning red meats (including venison), poultry or seafood (http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can5_meat.html).

In The Field
Producing canned venison of high quality begins in the field. When the animal is dead, intestines, lungs, liver and heart should be removed as soon as possible. The carcass should be kept clean by getting it off the ground as quickly as possible and by using clean utensils during dressing. The carcass should be cooled quickly and kept cool during processing and transport. Warm temperatures are meat's worst enemy. The carcass surface contains bacteria that will spoil the meat unless their growth is slowed by chilling. During warm hunting seasons special care should be taken to keep the carcass cool. It should be kept in the shade and allowed as much air circulation as possible. Recommendations on cooling, transporting, aging and cutting carcasses are provided in HGIC 3516, Safe Handling of Wild Game Meats.

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Fresh venison should be canned immediately or refrigerated or frozen. Venison refrigerated in moisture-proof plastic wrap or in clean plastic storage bags should be canned within 2 or 3 days.

Wild meat is highly perishable, so care is needed to maintain its quality. In the kitchen, raw meat and cooked meat should be kept separate to prevent cross-contamination. Knife, hands and cutting board should be washed often with warm, soapy water. Fat and inedible parts should be trimmed from the carcass.
Preparation for Canning: Choose high-quality, chilled venison. If frozen, thaw completely in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave. Remove excess fat. Soak strong-flavored wild meats for 1 hour in brine water containing 1 tablespoon of salt per quart. Rinse venison. Remove large bones. Cut into 1-inch wide strips, cubes or chunks.

- **Hot pack** – Precook meat until rare by roasting, stewing, or browning in a small amount of fat. Add ½ teaspoon of salt per pint or 1 teaspoon of salt per quart to the jar, if desired. Pack hot meat loosely into hot jars leaving 1-inch headspace. Fill jars with boiling broth, meat drippings, water, or tomato juice, (especially for wild game) to 1 inch from top of jar. Remove bubbles, wipe jar rims, adjust lids and process in pressure canner.

- **Raw pack** – Add 1 teaspoon per pint or 2 teaspoons of salt per quart to the jar, if desired. Fill jars with raw meat pieces, leaving 1-inch headspace. Do not add liquid. Wipe jar rims, adjust lids and process in pressure canner.

Process jars in a dial-gauge pressure canner at 11 pounds pressure at altitudes of 0 to 2,000 ft or at 12 pounds pressure at altitudes of 2,001 to 4,000 ft. Process jars in a weighted gauge pressure canner at 10 pounds pressure at altitudes of 0 to 1,000 ft or at 15 pounds pressure at altitudes above 1,000 ft. For hot and raw pack jars, process pints for 75 minutes and quarts for 90 minutes.

These procedures apply to the selection, preparation and canning process for other red meats (bear, beef, lamb, pork, sausage, veal) as well. Just remember that spoilage and disease-causing microorganisms thrive on venison and other meats. Following the four “C’s” (clean, chill, don’t cross contaminate, and pressure can properly) is critical to producing safe, high-quality, canned meats. If you are new to canning, go to the HGIC section on Preservation: Canning, Freezing & Drying, [http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/food_safety/preservation/](http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/food_safety/preservation/) for a detailed study of canning.

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