

Chef's Corner: Venison Osso Buco a la Germanos!

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This month's feature explodes with flavor and nutrition while utilizing the most underrated and misunderstood cut of venison – the succulent shank!

The ethical use of every ounce and every inch of the game and fish we harvest is the driving force behind most of my recipes, and this month's feature is certainly no exception!

Osso Buco is Italian for “bone with a hole” and refers to the marrow in the center of the cross-cut shank. The reason for cutting is to expose the richness of the bone marrow. The marrow in the shank bones bathes everything in its rich flavor as it renders during the braise, while a bright mixture of parsley, lemon zest, and garlic (known as Gremolata in Italian) finishes the dish off.

Osso Buco is typically made with veal shank containing marrowbone, stewed in wine with vegetables and seasonings. Venison, lamb, and goat shanks are excellent as well! This dish is also an incredible “make-ahead” dish because it tastes even more amazing on the second day!



Venison Osso Buco with Homemade Mashed Potatoes and Savory Gremolata Topping!

This venison shank dish features vital nutrients extracted from the bone marrow; protein; and succulent healthy fat. Traditionally, the dish does not include tomatoes and was flavored with cinnamon. My hybrid recipe combines the best of all worlds and uses venison shanks braised with vegetables, wine, cinnamon, clove, and venison bone stock.

The shanks may be served with mash potatoes, rice, risotto, pilaf, linguini or other options. The classic accompaniment is saffron-scented *Risotto alla Milanese*, but I opted for good old-fashioned Yukon Gold mashed potatoes for this recipe!

As with many of my recipes, consider this a base and don't be afraid to modify it a bit. When making this for friends and family with robust palates, I'll add crushed red pepper or fresh hot chilis.

I also do a variation on this dish that includes aromatic curry spice blends which highlight that beautiful turmeric color and fragrance.

With this variation, I like to serve alongside saffron rice and with fresh peas or garbanzo beans folded into the sauce.

A Greek variation called "Stifatho," precedes its Italian knock-off by centuries and is my "go-to" when I want to go truly instinctive!

Stifatho - sometimes spelled "*Stifado*" - is a Greek stew dish. The word comes from "*stufado*," a dish brought to Greece by the Venetians in the 13th century after the fall of Constantinople and before the Ottoman invasion.

It's the Greek version of comfort food—warm, filling, and satisfying. It's also been a family staple since I can remember.

Stifatho substitutes a rich red wine for its white cousin and often includes potatoes or Jerusalem artichokes cooked into the sauce rather than served on the side. It is heavier on the cumin and coriander and is served in a bowl with crusty hard bread for sopping-up the rich, savory broth. Goat, venison, or lamb shanks are awesome for this recipe!

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 venison shanks, cut into thirds (can sub lamb or veal shank)
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 4 peppers, medium-hot, chopped
- 6-10 garlic cloves, crushed and chopped (to taste)
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 can Italian plum tomatoes, drained and chopped, juices reserved
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3-5 whole cloves
- 3 bay leaves



Finished with a Gremolata Topping!



Fork-tender and Ready for the Gremolata!



Chopping the Vegetables for the Sauce!

1 sprig fresh thyme
2 teaspoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons dried oregano
Salt and pepper to taste
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1 cup dry white wine
Flour for dredging the shanks
Butter and olive oil for braising the shanks (or use bacon grease)
2-3 cups venison stock as needed (can sub chicken or beef broth)



Sautéing the Vegetables for the Sauce.

Gremolata Topping:

4 tablespoons. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
4-6 large cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons. finely grated lemon zest
2-4 anchovy fillets, minced

DIRECTIONS:

Put the flour in a dish and season the venison shanks with salt and pepper. Dredge the shanks very lightly in flour, thoroughly shaking off the excess.

In a large heavy skillet, heat about 3 Tbs. of the oil over medium-high heat (I used bacon drippings). Put the venison shanks in the pan and sear on all sides, turning carefully until they are a richly browned with a crust (approx. 4-5 minutes per side). Drizzle a little more oil into the pan if needed or as the shanks soak up the oil.

Heat the oven to 350°F and have ready a roasting pan or baking dish large enough to hold the shanks in a single layer.

Move the shanks to the roasting pan and deglaze the skillet with about ½-cup of stock. Add the stock and three bay leaves to the roasting pan. Cover with heavy duty aluminum foil, and place in oven while completing the sauce.



Dredging the Shanks in Flour.



Fresh-cut Venison Shanks.



Searing the Venison Shanks.

Return the skillet to medium heat and add the butter and remaining tablespoon of oil. When the butter is melted, add the onion, celery, carrot, peppers, oregano, and 1 tsp. salt. Cook the vegetables, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly browned, 15 to 20 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high, and add the wine, oregano, and lemon juice. Do not skip the lemon juice, it draws the minerals out of the bones adding to the nutrition of the dish. Simmer until the wine is reduced to about 1/4 cup, about 3-5 minutes.

Stir in the tomato paste. Add the tomatoes with their juices, the broth, thyme, bay leaf, 1/2 tsp. salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Bring to a soft boil and pour the contents of the pan over the shanks.

Cover tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil.

Reduce the heat to 325 degrees and braise the venison in the oven until fork-tender, 1-1/2 to 2 hours, checking the liquid occasionally. If it has cooked down, add some broth. The level of cooking liquid should always be about ¾ the way up the shanks. To check for doneness, pierce a shank with a fork. The meat should pull apart easily. Taste a morsel—it should feel soft and tender. With a wide, flat metal spatula, carefully transfer the veal shanks to a dish and serve with bed of homemade mashed potatoes garnished with fresh parsley and/or dill.

NOTE: Begin preparing the mashed potatoes or other accompaniment 15-20 minutes before taking the Osso Buco out of the oven to time the side correctly!



Par-roasted Braised Shanks!



Osso Buco Sauce Ready to Go!



Pouring the Sauce over the Shanks!



Adding the Wine to the Sauté...



Adding Tomatoes and Paste.



Simmering the Sauce...

For the Gremolata:

Just before finishing the sauce and serving, combine the parsley, garlic, lemon zest, and anchovies. Add about two Tbs. of the gremolata to the sauce. Serve the Osso Buco topped with the sauce and a small sprinkling of the remaining Gremolata.



Zested Lemon and Other Goodies!



Gremolata Mixture Ready to Go!

While it is a labor of love and takes some time to prepare, this recipe is truly one of my all-time favorites, so I am happy to share it and hope you enjoy it as much as I do!

Contributed by VBAC angler John Germanos (aka "The Instinctive Chef").