

Chef's Corner: Venison Liverwurst Sausage

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Throw away all paradigms and unleash a nutritional powerhouse in an explosion of flavor with this incredible venison sausage!

Readers that follow my recipes have come to appreciate my passion for ethically utilizing every inch and every ounce of the game and fish I harvest – to include offal.

According to Merriam-Webster, the official offal definition is “the viscera and trimmings of a butchered animal removed in preparing it for market or for consumption.”

Although most of us rarely eat offal — aka organ meats — this nutritious ingredient is jam-packed with important vitamins, minerals, and micronutrients that can have a hugely positive impact on your health.

For example, venison liver contains 50 times as much vitamin B12 as steak and more Folate and B vitamins than any other food on the planet. In fact, it is more densely packed with vitamins and minerals than kale, spinach, and broccoli!

Also known as organ meats or variety meats, offal is not commonly consumed in most of the western world. In many cases, we think of offal for dogs or animals rather than a nutritious addition to our diets.

However, organ meats are loaded with important vitamins and minerals, often in much higher concentrations than many other foods.

Furthermore, offal has been highly valued in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) for more than 3,000 years. In fact, a basic tenet of TCM is that consuming organ meats from animals will support the same organ in your own body.

There are dozens of “accepted” types of offal, depending on where you live. Here are the types of offal used in this recipe:

Liver

Often hailed as a nutritious superfood, the more commonly consumed chicken liver has only 116 calories but contains more than double the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for vitamins A and B12 in each serving.

In addition, the folate and riboflavin in chicken liver provides over 100% of the RDA for the average person.

Chicken liver also contains high amounts of vitamin B6, niacin, pantothenic acid, iron, phosphorus, selenium, and copper. Venison liver is even more densely packed with nutrients and makes excellent liver sausage.

While I enjoy the traditional pan-fried venison liver smothered with onions and gravy and a side of homemade mashed potatoes, I also like variety.

Liverwurst is a liver sausage with a similar nutritional profile to liver, including a massive amount of vitamins A and B12. Its selenium content is incredible, and it is a rich source of Riboflavin and other key nutrients. Selenium is associated with a number of powerful health benefits, including the prevention of certain cancer types, decreased oxidative stress, and enhanced immune function.



This German classic is a wonderful snack food or field lunch for the beach, woods, or water!

Heart

While it may not contain as many nutrients as liver, the heart (and especially cow heart) provides the most CoQ10 of any of the offal meats and is loaded with important vitamins, too.

Venison heart provides over 100% of the RDA for vitamin B12 and over half the RDA for riboflavin. It also includes significant amounts of niacin, iron, phosphorus, copper, and selenium.

We often slice and pan-fry the heart, but its mild flavor and firm texture makes it an excellent addition to most venison sausage recipes!

Kidneys

Eating kidneys is not as common as it once was, but venison kidney has over five times the amount of vitamin B12 required each day, as well as almost two times the RDA for riboflavin.

Venison kidney also contains over 225% of the RDA for selenium.

Spleen

This variety meat gets very little attention compared to liver, heart, and kidneys, but it is incredibly nutritious. It is loaded with protein and is a rich source of all B-vitamins; Vitamin C; Iron; Zinc; Copper; Selenium; and a host of other essential amino acids, minerals, and nutrients.

Chef Boyardi Ravioli™ used to list pork spleens as one of the ingredients on the label, and many other processed foods use this ingredient to boost the RDAs of each respective product, so while it is not often listed as an explicit ingredient, it appears in many commonly consumed processed foods!

While Liverwurst and Braunschweiger recipes typically features liver as the primary ingredient, traditional Wurstmeisters used all variety meats in their sausage. This recipe adheres to that tradition and converts each of the above variety meats into one of the most nutritious sausages you will ever eat!

INGREDIENTS:

This is a good base and tastes great as presented. However, it's okay to modify it to suit personal tastes. It's also fine to swap a pound of pork for a pound of trimmed venison heart, which has the perfect texture for this recipe!

- 3-1/2 pounds 80-85% lean pork shoulder
- 2-1/2 pounds venison liver, hearts, spleens, & kidneys*
- 2 medium onions, grated (3 cups, coarsely chopped)
- 4 tablespoons Kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon cure
- 1-1/2 tablespoons fine ground white pepper
- 1-1/2 tablespoon ground mustard seed
- 3 teaspoons ground cardamom
- 1-1/2 teaspoons allspice
- 1-1/2 teaspoons dried marjoram, ground
- 2 teaspoons Spanish paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground mace
- ½ teaspoon ground sage
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 tablespoon powdered dextrose (corn sugar)
- 1 tablespoon Accent (optional)
- 3 tablespoons dehydrated non-fat milk
- 1 cup ice water
- 2.5-inch fibrous casings (I used two 20-inch long casings with 3-pound capacity per loaf)

* **NOTE:** I experimented with this batch and used fresh offal from two does I harvested on the last day of the 2019/20 Virginia deer season. This included the liver, spleen, kidneys, and heart from a yearling doe; and the spleen and heart from a 1-1/2-year-old doe. The total weight of all offal used was approximately 2-1/2 pounds (2 lbs 10 oz.)



Pork Shoulder.



Variety Meats: Liver, Heart, Spleen, and Kidney

Variations:

1. Substitute a pound of venison heart for one pound of pork shoulder
2. Can use 50-50 blend of bacon ends and pork shoulder
3. Use additional liver in place of hearts, kidneys, and spleen
4. May substitute fresh elk, mule deer, or moose liver for the venison liver and/or other offal (or use pork or beef)
5. Ground oregano and thyme are optional variations from the classic German blend and can be added if desired
6. Double-down on the sage, nutmeg, ginger, and coriander if you want a more savory flavor!

DIRECTIONS:

Cut the variety meats into easily handled pieces and simmer in about 2 cups of water. The meats should be cooked but still be slightly pink inside as shown. Avoid overcooking to retain nutrients and moisture content.



Trimmed Liver, Spleens, Heart, and Kidneys!



Venison Variety Meats (aka offal)!



Gently boiled to a light pink color inside.

Remove and chill the variety meats prior to grinding. This helps firm them up for a cleaner grind.

Optional: Instead of cooking the liver, soak the raw venison liver in milk for about 30 minutes. Rinse the liver and pat dry. The same may be done for the kidneys and spleens.

Cut the pork shoulder into 1-inch cubes and thoroughly chill before grinding.

While the meats are chilling, pass the chopped onion through a 1/8-inch plate of your grinder. I have a small kitchen grinder that I use for this, and it works perfectly. You can also pulse a food processor to achieve the same results.



Prepping the onion for the grinder.



Coarsely chopped for the grinder.



Finely ground onion and juices!

Mix the ground onions, chilled pork, and variety meats and thoroughly chill before grinding.



Blending the spices.



Mix onions, pork, and variety meats.



Mix in the spices before grinding.

Pass the mixture of onions, liver, hearts, kidneys, spleens, and pork through the fine plate of your meat grinder at least twice (three times is even better). You want a very finely ground, pasty mixture.

Grind the mixture a second time using the fine plate.

Combine the spices in a ceramic, glass, or stainless steel bowl and dissolve with the cup of ice water.

Pour the spice and water mixture into the ground meat and mix thoroughly for at least 2-4 minutes.

If you do not have a sausage mixer, use your hands for mixing to assure even distribution of the dissolved spices and cure.

Let the spiced mixture “set” for 30-45 minutes to chill through and grind once more with a fine plate to assure smoothness and thoroughly integrate all spices.

I placed the mixture in a gallon Ziploc bag in the freezer for 30 minutes to get that firmly chilled texture before grinding.

This extra step truly ensures the spices are well blended and the sausage is smooth – it is also a lot tidier!

Once the sausage is fully mixed and ground, stuff it into natural pork casings or comparable collagen or fibrous casings.

I like to use a 2- or 3-inch fibrous casing such as that which I use for summer sausage, trail bologna, and salami. This makes spreading easy, and it is a good size for sandwich slices!

Simmer the stuffed sausage in water just below the boiling point until the internal temperature reaches at least 152 degrees Fahrenheit.

I used a long Dutch oven and simmered over two gas burners to get good heat distribution. I also used a couple plates to keep the sausage submerged while it was simmering.

Once the liverwurst has finished cooking, cool it to room temperature and package it for the fridge or freezer. It will keep well in the refrigerator for a week and freezes very nicely – especially if properly vacuum-sealed to keep the air out!



Ready to chill the first grind and prepare for a second pass through the grinder!



Slow-simmering the sausage over twin gas burners.



Cooling the sausage before packaging.



Fresh Venison Liverwurst Sausage



Portioned, Wrapped, and Ready!

This can be served in many ways and is rich in protein, vitamins, and essential minerals.

- Spread or place slices on toasted English Muffins – one of my favorite snacks!
- Spread or slice onto a cucumber sandwich with buttered wheat or rye bread (or toast)
- Serve on your choice of crackers such as Ritz, Saltines, Pita Chips, Wheat Thins, Triscuits, or other favorite.
- Serve on crusty French, Italian, or Artisan Bread (toasted or untoasted)
- Use as a base ingredient for a variety of p ate, dips, and spreads



Liverwurst on Tuscan Peasant Crackers with Jalapeenos, and Sharp Cheddar!



Portioned and Vacuum Sealed for the Freezer or Cooler.



Venison Liverwurst on Toasted and Buttered English Muffin

Final Thoughts

Liver, heart, kidneys, and spleens are some of the types of organ meats that fit the official “offal meaning” and boast the best nutritional profiles.

While they are often considered “lesser” meats, or perceived as dangerous, these variety meats are densely packed with nutrients.

Most variety meats are extremely high in Vitamin A, an antioxidant that is linked to decreasing cancer risk, protecting your eyes, and reducing chronic inflammation.

Offal generally contains significant amounts of B-Complex vitamins which are known to help prevent cancer, reduce the risk of heart disease, and help the brain function at peak levels.

Variety meats are rich in selenium, which has numerous health benefits – most notably its ability to boost the immune system, improved thyroid health, and combats mercury toxicity. Optimum levels of selenium may also have a protective effect on cognitive health; positively affect male fertility; decrease levels of inflammatory markers and oxidative stress; and lower the risk of depressive symptoms!

Offal also contains minerals that aid in pregnancy and fetal health, treating anemia.

Because farming standards greatly impact the quality of organ meats, it is very important to only eat meats raised ethically, using organic guidelines.

Offal from wild game is free from toxic substances typically used in the growth and production of commercial livestock such as chemicals, hormones, and other undesirable additives.

Free-range animals which are fed species-appropriate diets (not grain-fed) are relatively safe, but wild game such as venison is about as good as it gets!

To get the right consistency during processing, the meat needs to be processed multiple times.

If you have a food processor, but no grinder, you can get by as long as you buy ground pork to start with.

If you have a grinder, it is best to grind several times with a fine plate, but the pastier this gets, the harder it is to put through the grinder.

That is why I recommend thoroughly chilling and firming the mixture before grinding!

As for the sausage stuffer, I recommend a standalone compression style stuffer.

If you do not have a dedicated sausage stuffer, but have a jerky gun, that would work in a pinch. Stuffing the paste in the small chamber will be a pain, but you can work with it. If you only have a grinder attachment sausage stuffer, you can use that as well, but because the paste gets more challenging to grind, trying to run it through the worm gear of the grinder stuffer will be just as challenging.

In any case, the rewards are well worth the work, and the final product will be a nutritionally rich sausage that fully utilizes some of the most overlooked variety meats associated with freshly harvested venison!

Contributed by: VBAC Member John Germanos, aka “The Instinctive Chef”