

**Venison used to have** the reputation of being a strongly flavoured game meat that required specialised cooking knowledge. It involved mystical processes like "hanging" to improve the gamey flavour and marinating with special ingredients to flavour and tenderise it.

As children on my grandmother's farm, we became familiar with the taste of wild venison because deerstalking was a popular pastime among my grandparents and their friends. We always asked to go, but weren't allowed. This was long before deer became farm animals.

Raising wild animals in captivity for the table generally sounds the death knell for their characteristic flavour. However, while commercially raised deer meat does indeed taste nothing like wild venison, it's by no means inferior; some say it's better. It's a delicious but mild-flavoured red meat with little fat – perfect for all sorts of recipes. In most supermarkets – good ones anyway – you can find handy packs of tender, succulent, quick-to-cook medallions of venison.

While we use the word "venison", from the French *venaison*, there's no escaping the fact that we are eating one of Bambi's relatives. But we Kiwis are a realistic bunch. And besides, deer meat just tastes so good. Try the following and see.

### Barbecued Venison Salad

This is based on a traditional Thai beef salad.

50ml lime juice  
50ml fish sauce

1 red onion, very thinly sliced  
1 cos lettuce, leaves sliced 3cm thick  
200g green beans, stalk ends cut off, dropped into boiling salted water for 3 minutes, drained and cooled under cold water, drained again  
1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved  
6 venison medallions, brushed with soy bean oil

½ cup each coriander and mint leaves  
½ cup roasted unsalted peanuts, coarsely crushed or chopped

■ Put the lime juice, fish sauce and red onion into a non-reactive bowl (stainless steel, glass or china) and mix well. Set aside 20 minutes.

Put the cos leaves, beans and tomatoes into a large, shallow, serving platter or bowl.

Heat the barbecue to moderate (or heat a frying pan over moderate heat) and barbecue the venison for about 3-4 minutes on each side until it is medium-rare. Adjust this time if you like it rarer/more well done.

Remove from the heat, rest for 5 minutes then slice thinly. Pour any juices from the venison over the salad, put the venison on top and cover with the red onion mixture.

Sprinkle the mint and coriander leaves and the peanuts on top and serve. **Serves 4.** (Add steamed jasmine rice and you have a meal.)

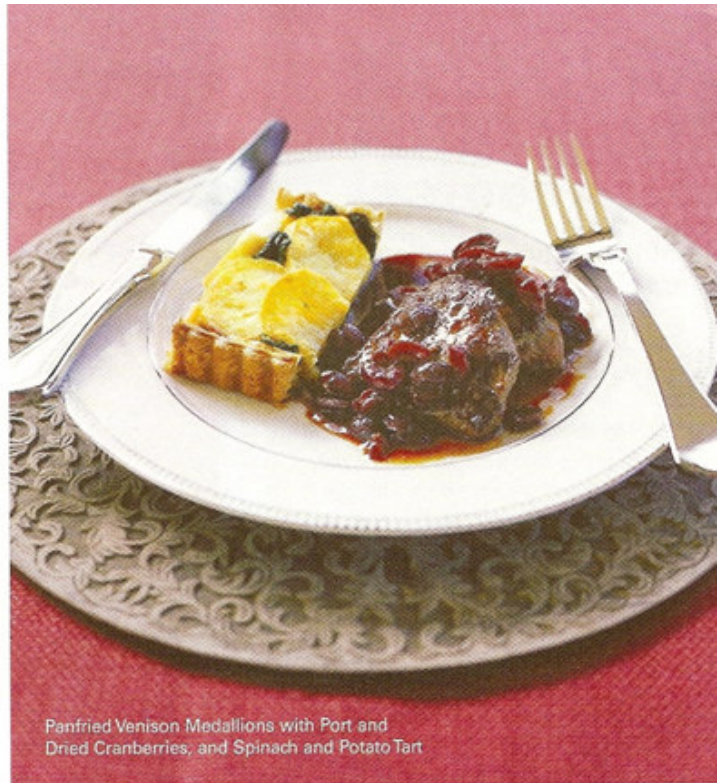
### Panfried Venison Medallions with Port and Dried Cranberries, and Spinach and Potato Tart

This tart can be made a few hours in advance and reheated.

500g peeled potatoes, cut into large chunks  
130g baby spinach leaves (one of those bags you buy from the supermarket)  
3 Tbsp olive oil  
3 onions, finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
salt and freshly ground black pepper  
2 sheets ready rolled flaky puff pastry or 300g block of flaky puff pastry made with butter  
25g butter, finely diced

■ Put the potatoes into a saucepan and cover well with salted water. Bring to the boil, boil until tender, remove from the heat, drain and allow to steam dry. Cool and reserve.

Preheat the oven to 200°C.  
Put the spinach leaves in a



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heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Allow to wilt, drain and cool under cold running water. Squeeze dry and tease the leaves apart. Reserve.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over low to moderate heat and add the onions and garlic. Fry gently for about 10 minutes, without browning, until the onions are soft. Remove from the heat and cool.

Line a 35cm x 12cm loose-bottomed tart tin (or a 25cm diameter round tin) with the pastry. Spread onions and spinach evenly over the pastry. Slice the potatoes 1cm thick and put them in overlapping lines in the tin. Dot the butter evenly over the top.

Place in the oven and bake 40-45 minutes or until very well cooked.

Remove, reserve and keep warm.

#### VENISON MEDALLIONS

4 Tbsp olive oil  
6 venison medallions  
1 clove garlic, finely chopped  
½ tsp cracked black pepper  
¾ cup dried cranberries soaked in 200ml port for 1 hour  
250ml well-flavoured beef stock (I used Essential Cuisine Classic Beef Jus)

2 Tbsp butter  
■ Put the oil, venison, garlic and pepper into a bowl and mix well so that everything is evenly distributed

over the venison. Heat a frying pan over moderate heat and add the venison. Panfry for 3-4 minutes each side until medium cooked, less if you like it rarer. Remove from the pan and keep warm.

Discard any fat from the pan. Add the cranberries and port. Boil 20 seconds. Add stock and any juice the venison has produced as it has been sitting there. Boil until slightly syrupy. Stir in the butter, taste the sauce and season.

Serve the venison with the sauce over it and a slice of warm tart on the side. **Serves 6.**

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This exquisite elegant wine has a smoothness to its texture. The wild-herb/savoury scent and rich plum fruit make an excellent match for these delicious venison dishes.

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