

Tailgaters got game and go beyond burgers and brats

By LAUREN CHAPIN

'Tis the season to tailgate.

And those hard-core sports fans who want to really skewer their opponent?

They cook 'em and eat 'em.

Serve buffalo when the Bills are in town, bear when Chicago is on the docket. If you're in the mood to impress, wild game is where it's at.

From late August through December, tens of thousands of fans pack up their portable grills, smokers, slow cookers, blenders, picnic ware and, of course, food, food, food to cheer on their team at professional, college and high school football games.

Joe Cahn, the self-appointed Commissioner of Tailgating, travels across the country whooping it up with sports fans from New York to Kansas City to San Diego, and he's compiled some statistics.

- Forty-seven percent of tailgaters do it six to 10 times per season and spend more than \$500 per season.
- At least half of tailgaters arrive three to four hours before the game, while nearly 30 percent stick around for a few hours after the game.
- While many adhere to a diet of burgers and brats, about 40 percent are what Cahn



Try serving up Ostrich Fajitas with Pomegranate Clementine Jalepeño Salsa at your next tailgating party.

calls "adventure seekers" — parking lot chefs looking for something wild and exotic to serve.

"People in the parking lots, as in their homes, are willing to experiment with anything," Cahn says. "And what they are cooking also depends on which part of the

country they're in. In Louisiana, you'll see a lot of duck dishes, like duck gumbo. In southern Florida, fried or marinated and grilled alligator. Green Bay fans are duck hunters, and in Montana, Michigan and Wisconsin, you'll find a lot of elk and venison backstrap (strip loin) and tenderloin and wild game in sausage form."

Among some of the wilder things he's seen: grilled leg of lion when Chicago played the Detroit Lions and bear stew in Detroit when the Lions were playing the Bears.

In Kansas City, Cahn sees barbecue cooks doing, well, barbecue, including whole hogs. What he doesn't see? Quail. "The person in the parking lot wants big food, not dainty, picky, finger food," he says.

As in competitive barbecue, there is one-upmanship: Tailgaters want to go one better than they did the year before. So instead of grilling up burgers and brats, they take a walk on the wild side and choose to grill up something exotic and untamed. Wild boar instead of pork chops. Venison, not hamburger. Even ostrich, elk and buffalo grace the spread.

John Telge is in the thick of the hunt. Telge is president of **Arrowhead Meats** in North Kansas City. He and his wife, Elaine, started their company in 1996 with one freezer full of meat in their basement. But in the last three years they have watched wild game sales triple.

This year the couple moved into a 3,500-square-foot building. They stock more than 40 products, including Iowa-raised Kobe beef, kangaroo, alligator and Piedmontese beef. Their biggest sellers: buffalo, elk and wild boar.

Restaurants play a major role in piquing diners' curiosity about wild meats. Many of the high-end restaurants in the metro area feature game, including Bluestem, the American Restaurant, Le Fou Frog, 40 Sardines, Café des Amis, Ameristar Casino, the Peppercorn Duck Club at the Hyatt-Regency and Sheraton Overland Park Hotel.

"Food service drives retail sales. Once they put something new on their menu," Telge says, people start looking and asking "Where can I find this?"

Buffalo was the first exotic

meat that Mike McGonigle, owner of McGonigle's Market, began selling nearly 20 years ago. Back then, interest was a direct result of customers' concern about health issues such as fat intake and cholesterol. McGonigle traces interest in the more exotic meats to the popularity of the Food Network and other cable cooking shows.

"The chefs are always having to come up with something new and different," he says.

Branching out into ever more obscure ingredients is the norm. "The exotic meats are the new fad thing. And Kobe beef is the new beef in Johnson County," says Susan Duran with Rancher's Gourmet Meats, a purveyor of high-end meats. "For tailgating, we probably sell more Kobe burgers than we do regular ground beef patties."

Mario Fantasma began selling exotic meats at Paradise Locker, an old-fashioned butcher/meat purveyor in tiny Trimble, north of Smithville, in 2004.

"There was an interest in the wholesomeness of the product. Smaller niche farms are producing the products without hormones or antibiotics, and an elk burger, for example, has a similar fat content to chicken. Plus, it tastes pretty darn good," he says.

And when the Buffalo Bills came to Arrowhead Stadium, Fantasma got calls from fans wanting ground buffalo to serve on game day. Fortunately, tailgating season and the high-sales season for wild game dovetail nicely. "When the weather gets cooler, sales rise. In June, game goes away," Telge says.

And while planning your next tailgating party, consider these menu options: Serve Kobe beef when Mizzou takes on the Texas Longhorns, buffalo burgers when KU goes after Colorado and roasted duck when the Packers come to town.

Wild boar looks and tastes similar to regular pork but is much leaner.

Chef: Edward Allen, executive chef at Ameristar Casino

Tame this: Use bone-in pork chops instead.

Beer pairing: Serve the same beer as the marinade.



Rather than playing it safe with pork chops, Edward Allen, executive chef at Ameristar Casino, created Wild Boar Chops With Apricot Honey Mustard Dipping Sauce.

Wild boar chops with apricot honey mustard dipping sauce

Makes 6 to 8 servings

Dipping sauce:

- 1/2 cup apricot preserves
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1 cup Dijon mustard

Wild boar chops:

- 3 cups fall craft beer
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup julienned sweet onion
- 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/2 cup chopped cilantro
- 24 wild boar chops
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

For the dipping sauce: Combine all ingredients in a small bowl and refrigerate until ready to serve.

For the wild boar chops: In a bowl, combine beer, oil, onion, garlic and cilantro. Transfer marinade to a zip-top plastic food bag and add boar chops. Marinate at least 8 hours in the refrigerator.

Prepare grill. Remove chops from marinade and pat dry. Sprinkle with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Grill until medium rare. For best results, cook slowly over low heat, almost as you would brisket. Let rest, covered, 5 minutes.

Per serving, based on 6, without dipping sauce: 235 calories (52 percent from fat), 13 grams total fat (2 grams saturated), no cholesterol, 2 grams carbohydrates, 25 grams protein, 3 milligrams sodium, trace dietary fiber.

Per serving dipping sauce, based on 6: 180 calories (8 percent from fat), 2 grams total fat (trace saturated fat), no cholesterol, 43 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams protein, 513 milligrams sodium, 1 gram dietary fiber.



Ostrich has the look and texture of beef, but the deep red meat is sweeter.

Chef: Marshall Roth, executive chef of the Phillips Chophouse and 12B in the Hotel Phillips



Tame this: Use flank or skirt steak.

Wine pairing: Try the fajitas with a fruity white like Pinot Blanc or Pinot Grigio or a California Pinot Noir.

Ostrich fajitas with pomegranate clementine jalapeño salsa

Makes 15 servings

For the salsa:

1 red onion, chopped
1/2 cup sliced scallions
4 clementines, peeled, sectioned and skin removed (or any juicy, seedless orange)
1/3 cup pomegranate juice
1/2 cup julienned red bell peppers
1 small jalapeño, seeded and diced
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

For the fajitas:

2 cups pomegranate juice
1/2 cup sliced scallions
1/2 bunch cilantro, roughly chopped
1/2 bunch mint, roughly chopped
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup Szechwan peppercorns
1 tablespoon minced garlic
2 tablespoons minced ginger
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
5 pounds ostrich filet

Sliced scallions, sour cream, julienned napa cabbage, roughly chopped cilantro, roughly chopped mint, lightly grilled blue corn tortillas, for serving

For the salsa: Combine all ingredients in a small bowl and set aside.

For the fajitas: Combine all marinade ingredients except oil in a large bowl. Mix well. Pouring in a slow, steady stream, slowly whisk in oil until well blended. Put marinade in a zip-top plastic food bag, add ostrich and marinate meat in the refrigerator 8 to 10 hours.

Prepare grill with lump charcoal until red and glowing. Add mesquite, hickory or pecan chips. With tongs, place meat on the center of the grate and grill until desired doneness. (Medium rare is 145 degrees.) Let meat rest about 5 minutes, then thinly slice against the grain.

Per serving with salsa, no accompaniments: 331 calories (40 percent from fat), 15 grams total fat (2 grams saturated), 117 milligrams cholesterol, 11 grams carbohydrates, 40 grams protein, 68 milligrams sodium, 2 grams dietary fiber.

Venison is brick-red in color but leaner and sweeter in texture and taste than beef.

Chef: John McClure, executive chef/owner, Starker's Reserve



Tame this: Use ground beef instead of venison. Elk and buffalo would also work.

Beer pairing: Pair with hearty beer, like Boulevard Bob's 47.

Venison red chili

Makes 10 to 12 servings

10 each dried pasilla and ancho chilies
3 yellow onions, diced
3 red bell peppers, diced
1/4 cup olive oil
5 pounds ground venison
1/4 cup chopped garlic (about 10 cloves)
1 teaspoon white pepper
1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons ground coriander
3 tablespoons hot paprika
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 tablespoon cumin
1 cup tomato paste
Kosher salt to taste
Diced red onions, sour cream and corn chips for serving

Remove stems and seeds from the dried chilies. Soak in very hot water 15 to 30 minutes while cooking the other ingredients.

In a very large soup pot, sauté onions and bell peppers in olive oil over high heat, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Add venison, using a fork or spoon to break up the meat into fine pieces. Continue cooking until most of the pink is gone from the meat, 10 to 12 minutes. Add garlic, white pepper, black pepper, coriander, paprika, cayenne and cumin. Stir to blend completely and cook 1 to 2 minutes.

Drain the chilies and discard the water. In a blender puree the chilies with an additional 2 cups water until the chilies are completely smooth. Add chile puree and tomato paste. Stir thoroughly.

Add 2 more cups of water and simmer 15 to 20 minutes over low heat. Adjust the consistency with more water. Season to taste with kosher salt.

Per serving, based on 10: 428 calories (27 percent from fat), 13 grams total fat (3 grams saturated), 193 milligrams cholesterol, 22 grams carbohydrates, 57 grams protein, 334 milligrams sodium, 7 grams dietary fiber.

GAME SOURCES

Ostrich, venison and wild boar can be purchased at a few area retailers. Some require several days advance notice. Prices will vary from store to store.

Paradise Locker Meats: 405 W. 208th St., Trimble, Mo. 816-370-MEAT (6328). Paradisemeats.com.

Rancher's Gourmet Meats: 13378 Metcalf Ave., Overland Park 913-338-0606. Ranchersgourmet.com.

Dean & Deluca: 4700 W. 119th St., Leawood, 913-498-3131. Can special-order most cuts with a few days' notice. Ask for Kevin or Josh.

McGonigle's Market: 1307 W. 79th St., Kansas City, 816-444-4720. Buffalo, venison loin, elk chops, ostrich, pheasant, quail, some wild game sausages in stock. Others can be ordered with notice.

TAILGATING TIPS

Commissioner of Tailgating Joe Cahn serves up tailgating tips on his Web site, tailgating.com. Although competition is part and parcel, Cahn is all about community.

"Tailgating is about the social interaction. Tailgate parties are the best place to walk around and get recipes. The games are the world's best free cooking shows," Cahn gushes. "For four hours, you can walk around and talk to foodies."

Cahn's top tips:

- Plan the menu and do prep work a day or two ahead. Allow even more time if using wild game in the recipes as it may need to be special ordered.
- Have your tailgating fare ready to serve at least 90 minutes before the game. You want to share a leisurely meal and allow enough time for some clean-up.
- Make a list of things you'll need for the party. Check them off as you pack.
- Plan to get to the stadium three to four hours early and to stick around for at least an hour afterward.
- Wear team colors, decorate your site and get to know the neighbors. Tailgating, after all, is about team spirit and community.

AVOID OVERCOOKING

Exotic meats are noticeably leaner than their domestic cousins. John Suman, business manager/butcher for Rancher's Gourmet, offered these suggestions to avoid overcooking:

- Cook fowl and pork to medium, or an internal temperature of 165 degrees. Beef, buffalo and venison should be cooked to medium rare or about 140 degrees. Ground venison can be cooked like ground beef.
- Don't add seasonings, especially salty ones, until just before cooking. The seasonings and some marinades can jump-start the curing/cooking process.
- Certain meats, like wild boar, should be cooked low and slow, off the direct heat as you would a brisket. Pile the charcoal on one side and sear the meats on either side to get grill lines. Then move the meat to the other side of the grill, off the direct heat, close the lid, close or nearly close the vents, and let it cook slowly. The goal is to extend the cooking time. "The longer you cook at a lower temperature, the better results you'll get," Suman says.
- Never pierce meat with a fork or knife. "That gives the juices an avenue to escape," Suman says.