

Main cuts of venison on a deer carcass

1. Saddle (back) – breaks into rack, loin, fillet

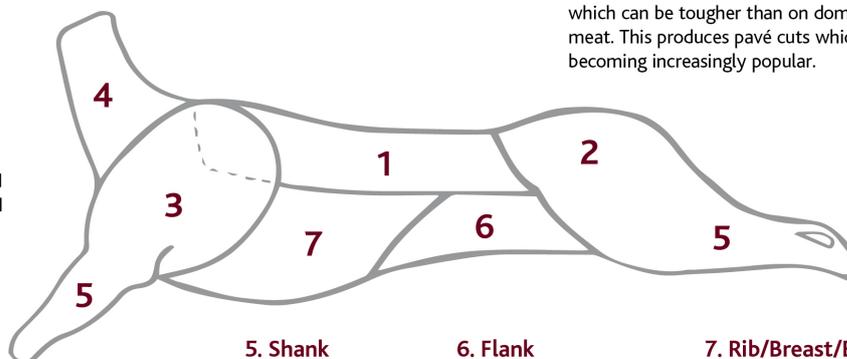
Traditionally, caterers buy whole saddles cut between the 11th and 12th rib. Increasingly they buy boned out loins and/or fillets. To avoid confusion between these terms, it is more helpful to refer to loins as loin or loin fillet and to the true fillet as fillet mignon, undercut or tenderloin. A carvery saddle is cut between the 6th & 7th ribs.

2. Haunch (back leg)

Can be cut into bone-in joints if young or from roe deer haunches, or boned and rolled, or sliced into steaks. Older venison is best seam butchered to remove sinew which can be tougher than on domestic meat. This produces pavé cuts which are becoming increasingly popular.

3. Shoulder

The shoulder is most commonly diced for stews or casseroles. It can also be sold boned and rolled (and stuffed for added value) for braising. Shoulder joints from young deer are also suited to roasting. Old venison shoulder is often minced for processing. Occasionally wild deer have shot damage in the shoulder so look out for bruising or bone shards.



4. Neck

Good for mince or making venison stock. From young deer, diced neck makes a good stew.

5. Shank

Can be minced for processing or diced for a slow-cook stew. Can also be cut into neat shanks or sliced into osso buco.

6. Flank

From young deer, flank can be stuffed and rolled. From older deer in the autumn it can be over-fat and is either discarded or used for processing.

7. Rib/Breast/Brisket

Processing mince, rolled stewing joint.

Much of the Scottish venison meat is from deer that roam freely, rather than being farmed. Good quality venison is tender, tasty and close textured, which means it's easy to produce great recipe dishes.

Four species are used for food in Scotland: the red deer (iconic of the Scottish Highlands); the roe (the smallest and considered the best by many cooks), sika and fallow.

History

Meat from deer has been important in the human diet since prehistoric times. The term venison (from the Latin venari - to hunt) originally referred to meat from any wild animal.

For centuries, deer parks owned by European aristocrats have been used as a source of sport and high quality food. This concentration of valuable meat with access restricted to the elite few has long been a source of conflict between poacher and gamekeeper.

Biology

Deer are ruminant animals belonging to the family Cervidae. They are characterised by having antlers, rather than horns, and small, unspecialised stomachs. Instead of grazing on vast quantities of grass, deer tend to select easily digestible shoots, young leaves, fruit, fungi and lichens.

Nutrition

Venison has higher iron levels than any other red meat, contains omega 3 and omega 6 fats in approximate ratios of 1:2 and has less fat than a skinned breast of chicken.

Tips

Buying

Go for wild venison over farmed. The strength of flavour and fat content can vary between sources so buying from a farmers' market or trusted butcher will enable you to pick up cooking tips.

Storing

For a few days in the fridge (or longer if vacuum packed).

Preparing (avoid overcooking)

Compensate for the lower fat content, eg. use moist cooking methods by barding or marinating. Quality steaks and tenderloin can be pan-fried. Serving with a complimentary sauce is recommended.

