This year's wild food celebration brings new approaches to the game.

Holiday Harvest 2006

Photos By Adele Hodde

(Cooking photos courtesy of Joe McFarland.)

For the annual *Outdoor*Illinois wild foods story, Executive Chef Sean Keeley prepared recipes submitted by readers, as well as a few of his own.

*Outdoor*Illinois readers submitted some of their favorite wild game recipes during 2006. From sensational bluegill burgers to mini pumpkins stuffed with wild duck risotto, each recipe tempted our palates with toothsome, wild ingredients—and plenty of creative zest.

Naturally, we had to try every recipe. *Outdoor*Illinois extends a special thanks to the fabulous efforts of Executive Chef Sean Keeley of Springfield's Indigo restaurant. In a blazing display of culinary virtuosity, Keeley and his staff prepared nine wild dishes in a single afternoon, and even offered up a handful of Keeley's own wild creations. We think you'll love every bite.

Roasted Pumpkin Stuffed with Duck and Mushroom Risotto

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By Brenda Rubenacker, Auburn

4-6 pie pumpkins (2 lbs. each)
½ lb. (2 sticks) unsalted butter
¼ cup sugar
2 tsp. grated orange zest
1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. ground allspice
2 tbsp. vegetable oil
2 tsp. Emeril's Original Essence
1 recipe duck and mushroom risotto
½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Preheat oven to 350˚ F. With a sharp, heavy knife, carefully remove the top third of each pumpkin. Remove and discard the seeds and fibers from the insides and tops. In a small bowl, combine the sugar, zest, cinnamon, salt and allspice and mix well. Divide the mixture among the pumpkins and cover tightly with foil.

Bake the pumpkins for 1¼ hours, and the lids for about 1 hour. Remove the pumpkins and lids from the oven, uncover and bake until tender, about 15 minutes longer. Remove from the oven and let stand until cool enough to handle, then drain the butter from the pumpkins and reserve ⅓ cup for the risotto. Spoon the risotto into the cooked pumpkins and garnish with cheese.

Place the lids on the pumpkins and serve.

Duck and Mushroom Risotto

4-6 cups chicken stock
1 tbsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
2 tbsp. unsalted butter
2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup chopped shallots
1 tbsp. minced garlic
1 duck liver, reserved from the roast duck, chopped
4 cups (about ¾ lb.) sliced mixed wild mushrooms, such as oyster, hen-of-the-woods and morels
1½ cups arborio rice
1 cup dry red wine
2 cups shredded roast duck meat
⅓ cup butter reserved from the pumpkins
1 tsp. minced fresh thyme
1 tsp. minced fresh oregano
½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

Bring the stock, salt and pepper to a simmer in a medium-heavy pot over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and cover to keep warm.

Melt the butter with the oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat until foamy. Add the shallots, garlic and duck liver and cook, stirring for one minute. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring until they give off their liquid, about three minutes. Add the rice, stirring constantly for two minutes to coat with oil and cook. Add the wine, stirring to deglaze the pan. Bring to a boil and cook until reduced by half, about four minutes. Reduce the heat to medium, add one cup of the hot stock and cook, stirring constantly until it has been absorbed. Continue adding more stock ½ cup at a time, stirring until the previous addition is nearly absorbed before adding more. Cook until the rice is tender, yet still slightly firm, for about 16-18 minutes total cooking time.

Fold in the pumpkin, butter, thyme and oregano, mixing well. Add the cheese and mix well. Serve hot.

Zesty Bluegill Burgers

By William F. Muntz, Streator

Serves 16

16 bluegills, filleted, boiled and chopped
1 cup bread crumbs

Zesty Bluegill Burgers

¼ cup onions, finely chopped
¼ cup mayonnaise
2 tbsp. prepared horseradish
⅛ tsp. pepper
butter

Combine ingredients; mix well. Shape into patties. Fry in butter until browned. Serve on Kaiser rolls with choice of topping.

Wild Turkey Kebabs

By Neil Waters, Jerseyville

Serves 3 or 4

2 wild turkey breasts, sliced and cut into 1-inch cubes
2 large green bell peppers, cubed
1 large yellow bell pepper, cubed
1 large red bell pepper, cubed
1 large onion, cubed
1 lb. fresh mushrooms, stemmed

Marinade

1 cup apple juice
2 cups cider vinegar
2 cups (packed) dark brown sugar
1 stick butter, quartered
3 tbsp. Dijon mustard
¼ tsp. fresh ground pepper

Place all marinade ingredients into a non-reactive sauce pan and bring to boil over high heat, stirring steadily. Reduce heat to medium and simmer mixture for about 5 minutes.

Wild Turkey Kebabs

Place turkey breast cubes into glass or a non-reactive container or plastic bag and marinate for 8 to 24 hours in the refrigerator.

Preheat the grill. If using wooden skewers, place the skewers into warm water until ready for use. Prepare vegetables. Alternately thread turkey and vegetables onto skewers. Grill kebabs 18 to 20 minutes, pouring remaining marinade over kebabs, turning after first 10 minutes.

Great with grilled pineapple slices on the side. Mix 2 cups sugar and ¼ cup cinnamon in flat container. Open one 20-ounce can of pineapple in heavy syrup. Place each pineapple ring into mixture, covering both sides. Carefully remove and place rings on grill. Cook each side approximately 5 minutes. Serves 5.

Rotisserie Wood Duck with Stuffing

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By Executive Chef Sean Keeley, Indigo restuarant, Springfield

1 red onion, thinly sliced
½ stick butter
leaves from 3 or 4 sprigs of fresh thyme, minced
¼ cup minced parsley
2 apples, cut to ½-inch dice
1 pint fresh blueberries
½ cup chopped black walnuts
zest and juice from 1 lemon
½ tsp. pepper
¾ tsp. kosher salt
2 wood ducks, cleaned

Mix in a medium bowl lemon zest, juice and walnuts with spices and herbs then toss with apples and blueberries. Meanwhile, melt butter in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat and slowly cook onion until well browned. Let cool, then add to other ingredients and stir together.

Pre-heat grill rotisserie, or light charcoal and set up for indirect cooking. Put as much stuffing as you can get into two cleaned wood ducks. Place a drip pan in the center bottom of grill and skewer stuffed ducks onto rotisserie. Cook for 45 minutes to one hour, depending on size of ducks or cooking heat. Buttermilk mashed potatoes and any stock seasoned with soy sauce and a little butter tastes great with this dish.

Blueberry Apple Cobbler

Blueberry Apple Cobbler

By Executive Chef Sean Keeley, Indigo restuarant, Springfield

Prepare and heat oven to 350˚ F.

1 cup sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
zest and juice from one lemon
4 medium apples, your favorite, cut in ½-inch slices
1½ pints fresh blueberries

Mix ingredients and place in a 9- x 13-inch baking or casserole dish.

1½ cups all-purpose flour
½ cup sugar
½ tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. salt
¾ cup unsalted butter, softened
½ cup buttermilk

With an electric mixer on medium high, blend dry ingredients with butter until just crumbly. Mix in buttermilk until combined. Crumble dough mixture over apples and blueberries. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes or until top is golden brown. Allow to cool slightly and serve with vanilla ice cream.

Our thanks to the staff at Indigo restaurant for their time and use of the facility for the photo shoot. Indigo is located at 3013 Lindbergh Blvd., Springfield. Call (217) 726-3487.

Venison Medallions on Tomato Sage Sandwich with Chipotle Butter

By Executive Chef Sean Keeley, Indigo restuarant, Springfield

Chipotle butter

2 sticks (½ lb.) butter, softened
2 chipotle chilies from can, minced (found in most supermarkets)
3 scallions, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
juice from half a lemon
1 tsp. black pepper
1½ tsp. kosher salt

Place ingredients in a mixing bowl and blend together with a wire whip or an electric mixer until butter has a nice rust color. Store at room temperature until assembly or keep in refrigerator for up to 3 months.

Sandwiches

8 ¾-inch thick venison tenderloin steaks
16 ½-inch thick slices of French baguette
2 Roma tomatoes, sliced ¼-inch thick
fresh sage leaves
butter, softened
kosher salt and pepper

Preheat a large, 12-inch, heavy-bottom skillet on medium heat. On top of eight slices of bread rounds lay two tomato slices and cover with a layer of fresh sage leaves. Top with remaining bread rounds. Butter the outer bread rounds and grill each side of sandwiches in skillet until golden brown. Set on plates. Turn heat to medium high, season venison with salt and pepper and sear each side 2 to 2½ minutes for medium rare. Set medallions on each sandwich and top with a small spoonful of chipotle butter.

Our mouths watered as we sorted through the submissions, trying to narrow the field of recipes down to just five. We're so sure *Outdoor*Illinois readers will enjoy the other recipes that we created a recipe site on our Web site (www.dnr.state.il.us/OI). We hope you enjoy sampling Fresh Blueberry Dumplings (Dianne Blasa, Alton), Bob's Philly Deer Steak Sandwiches (Linda Keller, Fults), Venison Wellington with Bearnaise Sauce (Brenda Rubenacker, Auburn), Goose and Dressing (Brenda Rubenacker, Auburn), and Venison Chili Relleno and Glazed Pheasant Satay (Executive Chef Sean Keeley, Indigo restuarant, Springfield).

Venison Medallions on Tomato Sage Sandwich with Chipotle Butter