Fine dining goes wild with these exotic, yet easy-to-make, dishes from the woods and waters of Illinois.

Wild and Easy

Recipes By Chef Lee Conway
Photos By Joe McFarland

*O*utdoorIllinois' annual recipe selections bring together the best what everyone craves in the kitchen: amazing food that's actually quite easy to prepare. If simple ingredients and easy techniques sound appealing, these four fish and game recipes created by Chef Lee Conway will delight even the most novice cooks in Illinois. What's more, the sensational flavors and appearance of these dishes elevate the deceptively simple preparations into culinary greatness.

"None of these dishes are complicated," the founder of Conway's Catering Company in Maryville tells *O*I readers. "Anyone can make these dishes—I designed them to be simple so everyone can enjoy the great flavors of fish and game without a lot of fuss."

For this year's annual *O*I recipe selections, Conway teamed up with Ron and Jill Doering, owners of The Hunt Club in Percy, to present four outstanding recipes from the wild. We are grateful for their generosity, the use of the kitchen and dining facilities at The Hunt Club—and, especially, for each mouth-watering bite.

Bacon-wrapped Snow Goose Rolls with Apricot and Sour Mash

Sometimes, it seems the world would be a better place if everything were wrapped in bacon. Clearly, the flavor of snow goose breast—considered by many to be a culinary challenge—benefits with sensational results once bacon rolls into the kitchen.

Snow goose hunters benefitting from Illinois' generous, late-winter Conservation Order regulations simply need to marinate strips of snow-goose breast meat, adding bacon and vegetable slices, then roll the bacon-perfected appetizers into the oven or grill.

Serves 4

2 snow goose breast, skinless
1 8 oz. jar apricot preserves
3 oz. Jack Daniels Whiskey
4 slices thick-cut bacon
1 medium Portabella mushroom, cut into ¼-inch slices
1 medium red bell pepper, cut into ¼-inch julienne slices
6 green onions, trimmed (about 4 inches of white end)
salt and pepper
toothpicks

Cut snow goose in ¼-inch slices lengthwise. Mix apricot preserves and whiskey together in a bowl until smooth. Add goose strips to apricot mixture and mix well. Place goose mixture in refrigerator overnight.

Cut bacon slices in half and place on cutting board. Place one strip of snow goose on each slice of bacon. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, to taste. Lay crosswise a slice of Portabella, pepper and green onion. Roll each piece of bacon-wrapped goose tightly around vegetables and stick with toothpick to hold.

Grill atop hot charcoal until bacon is crispy. Remove toothpick and enjoy.

Bacon-wrapped Snow Goose Rolls with Apricot and Sour Mash
Per Serving: 443 calories, 20 grams protein, 17 grams total fat, 5.4 mg saturated fat, 41 grams carbohydrate, 1.5 grams dietary fiber, 40 mg calcium, 2.7 mg iron, 600 mg sodium, 47 mg vitamin C, 1317 IU vitamin A, 65 mg cholesterol. This dish has 7.5 grams alcohol per serving, which contributes approximately 53 calories.

Corn-dusted Largemouth Bass atop White Wine Cream with Carrots
Per Serving: 1459 calories, 77 grams protein, 104 grams total fat, 59 grams saturated fat, 39 grams carbohydrate, .5 gram dietary fiber, 472 mg calcium, 8.5 mg iron, 939 mg sodium, 11 mg vitamin C, 6709 IU vitamin A, 549 mg cholesterol. This dish has 8.2 grams alcohol per serving, which contributes approximately 57 calories.

Pan-Seared Venison Loin with Black Trumpets, Brandy and Cream
Per Serving: 940 calories, 53 grams protein, 61 grams total fat, 37 grams saturated fat, 29 grams carbohydrate, 1.9 grams dietary fiber, 78 mg calcium, 7.5 mg iron, 950 mg sodium, 4 mg vitamin C, 2533 IU vitamin A, 301 mg cholesterol. The 10 grams alcohol per serving contribute approximately 70 calories.

Barbecue Duck Breast with Oven-roasted Plums and Honey
Per Serving: 428 calories (approximately 29 calories from the 4.2 grams alcohol), 40 grams protein, 17.6 grams total fat, 3.9 grams saturated fat, 19 grams carbohydrate, .9 gram dietary fiber, 11 mg calcium, 9 grams iron, 544 mg sodium, 341 IU vitamin A, 153 mg cholesterol.

Registered Dietician Karen Little developed the nutritional information based on the USDA Agricultural Research Service Nutrient Data Laboratory, Nutrient Database for Standard Reference (see www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search).

Corn-Dusted Largemouth Bass atop White Wine Cream with Carrots and Leeks

Many Illinois waters are teeming with an abundance of small-to-medium-size largemouth bass, and managers of individual waterways often encourage anglers to harvest a few young bass—perfect for this recipe—to reduce competition.

There will be plenty of competition at the table once this elegant preparation of pan-fried bass is served. The light, flaky, bass fillet dusted in corn flour (a pleasant departure from the gritty corn meal treatment) rests upon a luxurious bed of flavorful cream with a hint of vanilla.

Serves 6

12 6-7 oz. boneless largemouth bass fillets
2 cups corn flour (seasoned with salt, pepper and paprika, to taste)
8 oz. whole butter
½ vanilla bean
2 cups dry white wine
1 shallot, finely chopped
1 qt. heavy cream
1 large carrot, fine julienne cut
1 4-inch section of white of leek, fine julienne cut
salt and pepper, to taste

In a saucepan, place white wine, split vanilla bean and shallots. Reduce on medium heat by half.

While wine is reducing, cut fine juliennes of carrot and leeks about 4 inches in length. Place in cold water until serving time.

Add heavy cream to reduced wine mixture and reduce slowly on low heat until slightly thickened. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Lightly coat fish fillets with seasoned corn flour and set aside. Heat skillet on medium heat, add butter. When bubbling, add fillets. Turn gently when a nice bronze color, approximately 3 minutes each side. Remove and place on paper towel.

Place hot sauce on plate, top with bass. Garnish top of bass with crisp carrots and leeks.

Pan-Seared Venison Loin with Black Trumpets, Brandy and Cream

The best cuts of venison are the tenderloin and back straps, and either can be used here to convince those nonbelievers that venison really is one of the tenderest and most flavorful meats found anywhere. Forget those heavy- handed treatments bent on dis-

guising meat flavor. This simple preparation pan-sears the flavorful venison portions and bathes them in the smooth, rich sauce of Black Trumpet mushrooms with brandy and cream. Substitute Yellow Chanterelles or thin slices of Hen-of-the-Woods mushroom.

Serves 4

12 2 oz. venison loin medallions
6 oz. whole butter
salt and white pepper
10 oz. fresh Black Trumpet mushrooms
2 shallots, finely chopped
4 oz. brandy
8 oz. heavy cream

Heat skillet with butter. When butter is hot, sear venison medallions, approximately 3 minutes each side. Place to the side, keeping warm for service.

In same skillet, add shallots and trumpets. Sauté until tender. Add brandy, flame until alcohol is cooked off. Add cream. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Reduce until slightly thickened.

Place three pieces of venison per plate and top with sauce. Serve.

Excellent served with oven-roasted root vegetables and potatoes or sweet potato rusks.

Barbecue Duck Breast with Oven-roasted Plums and Honey

"The plum is an under-utilized fruit in the culinary world," insists Chef Conway. We couldn't agree more after sampling these fruity, robust slices of duck breast glazed with just enough peppery spice to add a barbecue punch. Know that over-cooking duck breast—and venison—is a recipe for failure, so you'll want to cook fast and serve this delightfully savory entrée before the juicy, lean breast meat loses its best qualities.

Serves 6

6 mallard duck breasts on other wild duck, boneless and skinless
6 red plums, pit removed and cut into wedges
3 tbsp. barbecue spice rub
4 tbsp. olive oil
6 oz. Port wine
2 oz. honey
salt and pepper, to taste

Rub duck breasts with barbecue spice, fully coating.

Heat 12-inch skillet on medium heat.

When skillet is hot, place olive oil and then duck breasts in pan, making sure you hear the sizzle. Cook approximately 4 minutes each side. Remove from heat and set aside.

Quickly sauté plums in same pan, cooking until slightly brown. Add honey and wine. Reduce until light syrup appears.

Slice duck and top with plum sauce.

Best served with roasted winter vegetables and mashed sweet potato.