



## Holiday fare from field and stream

Bob Mueller/Contributed Photo

A day's kill of half a dozen mallards and a pair of widgeons will be breasted out, ground up, and made into duck burgers or pepperoni.



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THE NATURAL WORLD

As culinary habits shift, holiday tables that once showcased prime rib and Aunt Sue's sweet potato-and-marshmallow delight are no longer the norm. What hasn't changed in my family, though, is the desire to share food harvested from the field or stream. My family might serve a roasted bird and mashed Yukon golds for the main course, but a wide variety of side dishes harvested from the wild are offered to ensure those with different eating habits don't go home hungry.

Salmon was a rare entree until my work as a fisheries technician led to the opening of "Dauble's Delicatessen" following a day spent pulling gill nets on the Columbia River. You can't be expected to monitor salmon populations without knowing how they taste. Although those technician days are decades in the past, I occasionally land an orange-meat fall chinook salmon during their upriver run in September and October.

A tasty spread from leftover grilled salmon or scraps from the filleting process makes a favorite side dish during the holidays. I



Dennis Dauble/Contributed Photo

A portion of this large haul of chanterelle mushrooms ended up in a soup pot.

first mash up cooked salmon in a bowl to prepare as if for a sandwich made from canned tuna. Mix in equal amounts of mayonnaise and sour cream, diced sweet onion, a pinch of salt and pepper,

and a generous dash of dill weed. A shake of Tabasco sauce adds pizzazz. Serve this fishy treat with an assortment of favorite crackers. No double dips allowed. The distant blast of a 12-gauge

shotgun from the Yakima River echoes across acres of big sage to signal the first hour of sunrise and remind me of duck burgers. I no longer hunt upland game, but once raised a small flock of domestic

ducks in our backyard. I'd occasionally ask folks if they wanted to eat a duck egg, but rarely had a taker. Mention "duck burger" and you might receive a similar quizzical look.

My introduction to dark-meat fowl came with a six-pack of fresh-killed mallards and no instruction from a hunter friend other than, "You can pluck the feathers and save the birds for roasting or you can breast them out."

Two hours of plucking led to an epiphany ("too much work") and the grinding of duck breasts to make sliders. For every two cups of duck meat add half a cup of ground pork or fatty beef. Season with salt and pepper, and form patties for frying. Top the creation with a crispy strip of bacon, slices of fresh avocado, and slip it into a fresh baked brioche bun. Don't forget to save room for dessert.

Whenever I hear Joni Mitchell's distinctive mezzo-soprano intone the lyrics, "... he's staring a hole in his scrambled eggs," the odor of canned mushroom soup bubbling on the kitchen stove brings back poignant childhood memories when Mom reminded, "quit staring and eat your soup. Otherwise, you don't get apple pie."

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## Preparing perfect pheasant



**TOM CLAYCOMB**  
BASE CAMP

While this column is about cooking pheasant, it also applies to turkey and grouse. If you read my columns then you know that two weeks ago I was in South Dakota pheasant hunting. I didn't want to use the same ole, same ole cook in a crock pot with mushroom soup recipe so I thought I'd try something different.

When I boned them out, I pulled the breast and cut off the legs and bagged each separately. As a side tip, if you're flying with meat, you don't have to use a cooler. I usually wrap the bag of meat in clothes in my luggage and they stay frozen fine. It was no different this time. I threw them in my luggage at 2 p.m. and when I got home at midnight they were still frozen. In fact, the next afternoon when I pulled them out of the fridge to cook, they were still crusty.

Let's start with the breast. I laid them on a cutting board and used a thick bladed Smith's knife to slice them into thin strips. Cut them cross grain. I then laid them out and sprinkled them with the Hi Mountain Apple Blend Turkey Jerky seasoning. I then flipped the slices and seasoned the other side and then put them in a bag and squeezed the air out.

I like to season my jerky and marinate my meat in a plastic bag. That way every few hours I can flip the bag over and gently massage it for a couple of seconds and be sure that it is getting evenly marinated.

I let it marinate for nearly 24 hours and then pulled it out and slapped it on my jerky air dryer. It dries unevenly due to all of the slices not being cut uniformly as well as the tray on bottom dries faster than the top trays. I'll rotate the trays every hour or two and be watching for any small pieces that are done. As they finish, I pull them off. Once again, I was reminded that Hi Mountain makes the best jerky and sausage seasoning in the

world. This batch isn't going to last long.

Now for the legs. I put them in a bag and poured in a bottle of Tony Chachere's 30-minute chicken marinade. I also threw in a dash of raspberry vinaigrette dressing and pressed out the air and put in the fridge to season overnight.

The next day I put them on my Camp Chef pellet grill on high smoke, which is high smoke but low heat. Then I had to run over and pick up an Anderson Mfg. 5.56 that I had ordered. I have some Bowden Tactical aftermarket parts and a Riton Optics scope that I'm going to trick it out with. I'll be writing about that soon.

When I got home I pulled any jerky that was dried and turned up the heat on the smoker to get the legs ready for dinner. By now the legs were a golden brown and looked awesome. I only cook real potatoes and think instant potatoes are a communist plot but while shopping I had grabbed a pack of butter garlic instant potatoes. I cooked them and threw in some chopped onions and a spoonful of



Tom Claycomb/Contributed Photo

Pheasant legs on the pellet smoker will get golden brown when you turn up the heat.

chopped garlic.

Kolby had a dozen tomatoes left over from the season that were on the edge. I made some homemade tomato soup, which is easy. Cook the quartered tomatoes in a pan. When stewed, put in a blender. Throw in a spoonful of chopped garlic and blend for a few seconds. Then return to the pan and throw in some chopped onions and chopped cilantro and a couple of cups of half & half or whole milk and stir.

We were now ready to eat like kings and queens. As you know if you've ever hunted pheasants,

they're the roadrunners of the game bird world. I don't think that anything you do will keep them from being a little tough, but gee, these had a great flavor and were great. We ate some more the next day for lunch after church.

So if you have a freezer of game birds you might want to try these methods on them. And yes, you can make jerky out of waterfowl.

I hope everyone had a Happy Thanksgiving and takes a minute to give thanks for living in the best country in the world and for your many blessings.