

Get creative with your elk meat

Two flavorful steak recipes to try

By Chris Sykes

Some of my best memories from childhood and high school were spent up at Butch's cabin, elk hunting around Matlock, Little Baldy, and Big Baldy Mountain in the Umatilla National Forest. Being invited to join Mark Pointer, Butch Laughlin, and Archie Ball on their hunting trips was something I looked forward to every year. Along with Donnie Pointer, Dwayne Ball, Shane Laughlin, and Dan Burnside, we would head out into the mountains, always hopeful for a successful hunt.

Archie, who everyone joked was the luckiest hunter of the bunch, often came away with an elk. He had a knack for being in the right place at the right time. Afterward, we'd gather back at Butch's shop, where everyone would pitch in to cut up the elk. It was a group effort, and everyone received some elk meat to take home. I learned so much from those guys, not just about hunting, but also about the mountains and life.

When I got my share of elk, I'd take it home, season it with pepper, salt, and garlic powder, then dredge it in egg, bread it with flour, and fry it in oil. It was one of the best meals I knew how to make. Later, when I lived in Pendleton, I'd invite my friends over, and we'd fry up 10 pounds of elk for a feast—it was always a good time.

If you've cooked elk

before, you know it's a fantastic game meat—lean, flavorful, and with just the right amount of gaminess. But if you're ready to mix things up and try something new, I found a couple of recipes that will bring out the best in this wild game. Whether you're looking for something bold or a more refined twist, here are two elk steak recipes that will surprise you with their bright flavors and simple techniques: **Peppercorn-Crusted Elk Steak and Herb-Crusted Elk Steaks with Marsala Mushrooms.**

Peppercorn-Crusted Elk Steak: For those who appreciate the combination of smoky flavors and peppery heat, the Peppercorn-Crusted Elk Steak is a recipe you'll want to try. This dish is straightforward yet flavorful, allowing the natural richness of the elk to shine while adding a peppery kick.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs elk tenderloin
- ½ cup crushed peppercorns
- 1 cup softened butter
- 1 tbsp minced garlic
- Salt and dried parsley

Instructions:

1. Preheat your smoker to 225°F.
2. Prepare a garlic butter mixture by blending the butter, minced garlic, and dried parsley. Rub this mixture generously onto the elk tenderloin.
3. Coat the steak with crushed peppercorns, ensuring an even crust.
4. Place the steak in the smoker and cook until

the internal temperature reaches 130-135°F (for medium-rare). This typically takes about 1 to 1.5 hours.

5. Once smoked, let the steak rest for 5 minutes before slicing to allow the juices to settle.

The slow smoking process ensures the elk remains tender, while the peppercorn crust provides a burst of flavor with every bite. The simplicity of this recipe allows the rich, gamey nature of the elk to take center stage, enhanced by the peppercorn and buttery garlic rub. Perfect for an outdoor grilling night or a hearty, smoky dinner indoors.

Herb-Crusted Elk Steaks with Marsala Mushrooms: A Gourmet Twist

If you prefer a savory, herb-infused steak paired with a rich sauce, then the Herb-Crusted Elk Steaks with Marsala Mushrooms will be your go-to. This recipe combines fresh thyme with the flavors of a Marsala mushroom sauce for a gourmet experience.

Ingredients:

- 4 elk sirloin steaks
- Salt, pepper, and fresh thyme (to taste)
- 1-2 bacon slices (chopped)
- 2 cups mushrooms
- 4 tbsp butter
- ½ cup Marsala wine

Instructions:

1. Season the elk steaks with salt, pepper, and fresh thyme. Let them marinate for at least an hour to fully absorb the herb flavors.
2. In a skillet, cook

the chopped bacon until crisp, then set it aside. In the same pan, sauté the mushrooms with butter until they're golden and tender.

3. Add the Marsala wine to the mushrooms, allowing it to simmer and reduce slightly, creating a flavorful sauce.

4. In a separate pan, sear the elk steaks for 2-3 minutes on each side to develop a crispy herb crust. Once seared, transfer the steaks to the Marsala mushroom mixture and cook for another 2-3 minutes.

The Marsala wine adds a subtle sweetness that complements the savory flavors of the thyme and mushrooms. Combined with the lean elk meat, the result is a balanced dish that's rich and satisfying.

Why Try Elk?

Elk meat is not only a flavorful alternative to traditional cuts of beef, but it's also leaner and often considered healthier due to its lower fat content. Its distinctive flavor stands up well to strong seasonings, making it ideal for experimenting with robust herbs, spices, and sauces. These two recipes demonstrate the versatility of elk—whether smoked with a peppery crust or paired with a Marsala mushroom sauce.

If you're ready to shake up your usual elk steak routine, give one (or both!) of these elk recipes a try. If you try these recipes, please let me know what you think.

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