

Things to do with rabbits and hares

Contributed by Gil & Sean

Following on from our skinning and paunching article and the jointing article, we present the collated wisdom of our members on what to do with your bits of bunny (or hare). This contains a combination of recipes and suggestions gleaned from our forum. Most of the hard work was done by Gil and Sean. If anything is unclear or you would like some more ideas, then please ask questions in our forum.

If you've bought a whole rabbit, and you don't want to do the jointing thing, you can always casserole or otherwise cook your rabbit whole. Then it's really easy to deal with the front and back legs and the saddle, and you've just got one bony bit (the ribcage and spine) for someone to tackle.

Casserole ideas

First catch your bunnies ...

2 rabbits cut into pieces
 1lb streaky bacon
 4 tbs seasoned flour
 2 large onions, thinly sliced
 6 oz butter
 White wine or dry cider (I used cider 'cos I think it's nicer)
 1/2 pint chicken stock
 2 cloves garlic crushed
 Bay leaf & a couple of sprigs of thyme
 Finely chopped parsley

Dry rabbit & roll in seasoned flour, dice the bacon & brown with rabbit pieces & onions. Place in a casserole with wine or cider, stock, garlic & herbs.

Cover & simmer until tender, about 1 1/2 hrs.

When rabbit is cooked remove the rabbit & if necessary thicken the sauce with *beurre manié* (butter & flour mixed together).

Pour back over the rabbit & serve with sprinkled chopped parsley.

What else could you put in a rabbit casserole?

Dougal : Well apart from cider and bacon, there's cream, prunes and mustard...

TD : casserole with onions and plenty of sage.

Gil : other things that go well in a rabbit casserole would be belly pork (about 6-8oz per rabbit), cubed and sautéed instead of the bacon; also fresh tomatoes (1lb) instead of root veg. Herb and spice-wise, juniper berries go well with rabbit, as with other game; you could also try tarragon or fennel (exploring the 'tastes a bit like chicken' avenue).

Pursuing the cider angle, those of you who like a fruit/meat combination could also add cooking apple chunks to the veg mix. I like elderberry, damson or rowan jelly as an accompaniment to rabbit dishes.

And if you casserole / stew your rabbit any way you want, and put a pastry lid on it (with a hole in), then you've got rabbit pie. If you're making a large pie and haven't got enough rabbit, or just for variety, you can add sautéed pork mince or casserole cubes of pork.

2 wild rabbits, skinned and jointed
 150ml white wine
 200ml chicken stock
 25g butter
 2 tbsp olive oil
 12 cloves garlic, peeled
 A slug of sherry (or use a bit of the white wine)

3-4 sprigs thyme
 2 bay leaves
 1 Savoy cabbage, outer leaves removed, cored and quartered
 1 pigs trotter, split(optional)
 6-8 slices fat streaky bacon

Chop up the small fiddly bits of rabbit and put them in a pan with the wine and stock, simmer for 30 mins or so.
 Season the rabbit pieces and roll in flour.
 Fry in the oil and butter until golden.
 Remove to a dish when all done, and tip in the garlic which you fry until lightly coloured.
 Tip off the residual fat, slosh in the sherry(or whatever) and deglaze.
 Strain the stock into the pan, bring to the boil and reduce by half.
 Put the rabbit back, and add the thyme and bay, trotter if using, and the cabbage.
 Cover the surface with the bacon, and bring to a simmer.
 Cook in a really low oven for two hours. Although the trotter is optional I would strongly recommend using one.

Other things to do with rabbit and hare

1 whole rabbit, skinned and paunched (as it comes from the butcher, with liver and kidneys)
 12 oz carrots
 2 onions
 12 oz parsnips
 Half a head of celery
 Garlic
 Sunflower oil for sweating / frying
 Plain flour for coating rabbit (just enough, you don't want loads left or the gravy will be too thick)
 Bay leaves, black pepper, 10 crushed/ground juniper berries, allspice
 About 1/2 pint red wine (damson was good) or orange juice

Chop and sweat the vegetables with the bay leaves in a large casserole dish with the lid on. Put the parsnips in last, and don't let them get too soft or they will burn to the pan.
 Season the flour with pepper, juniper and allspice.
 Roll the rabbit in the seasoned flour to coat.
 Remove veg from pan into a holding dish
 Add more oil to the pan and brown the rabbit all over (or as much as you can given the constraints of its anatomy)
 Put rabbit into holding dish, add a bit more oil and the remains of the seasoned flour, and cook for a couple of minutes, then deglaze the casserole with wine / orange juice
 Put the veg back into the casserole dish
 Put the rabbit on top, and the lid on.
 Cook in a low-ish oven (100-150C) for a couple of hours or longer, depending on how hot an oven, and how much time you've got, basting the rabbit occasionally, and turning once or twice. There will be plenty of juice.
 Serve with roast potatoes and parsnips, and seasonal green veg. Redcurrant, sloe or damson jellies are good accompaniments, as is wholegrain mustard.
 Damson, sloe or even a nettle wine go well with this dish.

Cab : Might I recommend making a curry paste, with lots of onion, ginger, some garlic and chilli, a little lemon juice and spices all thrown into a blender, and then use that to coat the rabbit. Wrap it in foil or keep it in a tightly sealed baking tin in the fridge for a day or two, then stuff it with dried fruit and roast it (check that it's still covered in the paste before wrapping it in foil or, again, make sure it's in a roasting tin or casserole with a really tight lid) for a good hour and a half, till the marinade and cooking has made it really soft and tasty.

(This is probably a 'fricasee', and needs a young, tender bunny).

2 small rabbits, jointed
 S&P
 4 oz butter
 6 shallots (I used an onion), chopped
 1/2 bottle dry white wine
 4 rosemary sprigs
 1/2 pint double cream

Juice of 1/2 lemon

Season rabbit with s&p, then fry gently in the butter for about half an hour until golden.

Remove rabbit pieces, and tip out fat (keep about 3 tbs in the pan), being careful not to lose any nice crusty bits.

Fry the shallots/onion until softened and gently coloured.

Return rabbit to pan.

Add a small glassful of wine, and bring to a simmer.

Baste the rabbit with the winey juices until they go syrupy.

Add some more wine and repeat until all the wine is used up, and there's about a glassful of liquid left in the pan.

Add the rosemary, cover, turn down as low as possible and allow to cook for 10 minutes.

Remove the lid, add the cream and bring to the boil.

Simmer until nicely thickened, add lemon juice and check seasoning

1 kg rabbit off the bone

White wine

Calf's foot

Sprig thyme

Bay leaves

2 shallots, finely chopped

1 onion chopped

s&p

Dried herbes de provence

800g belly pork, minced

Thinly sliced bacon.

Marinate rabbit for at least two hours in white wine

Make stock with calf's foot, rabbit bones, thyme, a bay leaf, shallots, onion and a litre of water. Simmer down to a cupful or two. Mince rabbit, season with s&p and a pinch of dried herbs.

Mix with minced pork and put into glass jars.

Put a bay leaf and bacon on top of each jarful.

Sterilise for 2 hours at 100C

You could use a pig's trotter instead of a calves foot as they're rather easier to come by.

One rabbit (weighing approx. 1 1/2 lb)

Stock (veg or chicken) or cider

1 lb belly pork

¼ lb unsmoked streaky bacon

Rind of ½ lemon, grated

Garlic

Nutmeg

Fresh or dried thyme

2 T brandy

S&P

Serves 6 – 8

Joint the rabbit, then simmer the pieces in a little stock or cider (no more than ½ pint) for about 30 minutes. Allow to cool, then take the flesh off the bones and mince it coarsely with the pork.

Chop as much garlic as you like (at least 2 good fat cloves), add to the meat with a good sprinkling of thyme and the grated lemon rind. Season with freshly ground pepper, salt and nutmeg and add the brandy. Mix everything up very thoroughly (use your hands). Fry up a small piece of the mixture and leave to cool. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

Line a small terrine or loaf tin with the bacon (stretch it with the back of a knife to make it easier to use). Decorate the bottom of the tin with bay leaves, cranberries or other pretty things if you wish and then add the meat mixture. Cover with some more bacon and put foil over the top. Steam in a baking tin of water for 1 1/2 hours at 325 °F / 160 °C. Weight the terrine as it cools.

You can also make confit of rabbit. Over to Jonnyboy for:

(or any other jointed part of the rabbit actually)

This is basically the procedure for any kind of confit, you can do it with duck, pork, goose and rabbit. but I omit some of the stages for rabbit due to its nature.

Joint your meat, rub with coarse salt and appropriate herbs if available. place into a non-metallic container and leave covered in the fridge for 24-48 hours. This isn't strictly necessary for rabbit as it has a low water content.

Depending on your choice of meat it should have leached water into the container, remove the joints and wipe down removing all traces of salt and moisture.

Place into an oven proof dish, cover with melted goose fat and pop into a low oven (140) for around 2- 2 1/2 hours. If you don't have enough fat to cover the meat then turn it 3 or 4 times during the cooking process. You can alternatively simmer it very gently on the hob, but I tend to get better results with the oven.

Remove from the oven and check with a knife, after this time it should be meltingly soft, however large duck or goose legs may take slightly longer.

Leave to cool slightly and then return to your container, strain over the cooking fat to cover completely. leave to cool and then return to the fridge. If it is completely covered then it will be fine for up to six months.

To serve, gently remove from the fat, scrape off any bits that cling to it and then pop into a hot oven for 10 -15 mins to heat up. If you have a meat with skin, such as goose or duck then use a high heat and crisp the skin.

Shred with two forks and serve on warmed plates, great with a peppery salad and balsamic vinegar.

Things to do with a saddle of hare

Cab : Season with pepper and then wrap it in fatty bacon, and then wrap the whole thing in foil. If you really want, marinate it first, ideally in something like olive oil, a drop of wine, garlic and herbs, but it isn't necessary. Roast it in bacon and foil and it ought to stay succulent and nice. If you want to marinate, go heavy on the oil and light on the alcohol.

I'd serve it with boiled spuds, swedes and carrots mashed together with a grating of nutmeg and some butter, and I'd also steam through some kale. I like some gravy with my roasts, so I'd also be looking for some stock from somewhere... Got any marmite?

Judith : Marinated the saddle for a couple of hours - oil, marjoram, rosemary and garlic, S&P and a splash of red wine. Cooked it wrapped in bacon as per Cab's instructions. Made gravy by frying some finely chopped red onion, then adding the carrot water, some more red wine and all the juices left after the saddle had rested for 10 minutes and a bit of cornflour. I have to confess that the mystery ingredient was a teaspoon of rosemary jelly, rather than marmite, but the whole thing, served with potato wedges, carrot and swede mash and PSB, was food fit for the gods.