

Key Ingredient: Elk & Bison

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ELK OR BISON SLOPPY JOES: In a large, heavy skillet, sauté 1 finely chopped onion and 1 finely chopped carrot in a drizzle of oil until soft. Add 1 lb. ground elk or bison and cook, breaking up with a spoon, until the meat is no longer pink. Add 2-3 crushed garlic cloves and cook for another minute. Add 1 19-oz (540-ml) can diced or whole tomatoes in tomato puree, ½ cup ketchup, 1 tbsp brown sugar, 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce and salt and pepper to taste. Reduce the heat and simmer for 20-30 minutes, until thickened. Serve over split buns or biscuits, or over thickly sliced crusty bread. Serves 4-6.

Photograph by: Julie Van Rosendaal, Swerve

Two of the largest land mammals in North America, bison and elk, can be as intimidating to face in the kitchen as they are in person. Native to Canada and perfectly suited to our climate and environment, both are sources of lean protein, higher in iron and lower in fat than beef, pork, lamb and some cuts of chicken. Plenty of Alberta meals begin with a pound of ground; if you're intimidated by the thought of preparing game meat, starting with ground bison or elk in place of your usual beef is a simple first step—it's inexpensive, and you don't have to worry about overcooking it like you might with a roast or steak. Once you're ready to move on, the general rule of thumb is to cook bison or elk low and slow (as in stews and braises), or quick and high (as in roasting and grilling). Keep steaks to medium-rare, due to their low marbling. To get you started, here are a few simple, stress-free ways to get your prairie-raised elk and bison from gate to plate.

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SAUCY ELK OR BISON MEATBALLS: Tear 2 slices white sandwich bread into small pieces. Place in a bowl and pour 1/3 cup milk over top. Let sit for 5 minutes, then add 1 lb ground beef, bison or elk, 1 egg, ¼ cup grated Parmesan, 2 tbsp finely chopped parsley and some salt and pepper. Shape into walnut-sized balls. In a large, heavy pot, heat 1 28-oz (796-ml) can whole tomatoes and 1 28-oz (796-ml) can crushed tomatoes with ¼ cup butter and a peeled, halved onion. Bring to a simmer and cook for 20 minutes, then drop the raw meatballs into the simmering sauce, cover and cook without stirring for 20 minutes, until cooked through. Remove the onion halves (discard) and serve over cooked spaghetti, topped with more Parmesan. Serves 6.

ELK OR BISON COTTAGE PIE: In a large skillet, cook a chopped onion and 1 lb. ground elk or bison in a drizzle of oil, breaking the meat up with a spoon until it's no longer pink. Sprinkle with 2 tbsp all-purpose flour and stir to coat; pour 1 1/2 cups beef stock or broth, 2 tbsp tomato paste or ketchup and 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce overtop and bring to a simmer, stirring for a minute or two, until the mixture thickens. Season with salt and pepper, add 2 diced carrots and ½ cup frozen peas and pour into a 2L baking dish. Top with a thick layer of mashed potatoes, scatter with grated cheddar and bake at 375°F for 30 minutes, or until golden and bubbly around the edges. Serves 6.

Check out Julie's blog, DINNERWITHJULIE.COM, for more healthy recipes that will help you beat the daily time crunch.



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