

SQUIRREL & BISCUITS

Here's a homestead twist on the ever popular Chicken and Biscuits. My husband is a third generation hunter, accustomed to living off the land. His sons and grandchildren are following in his footsteps. Nature provides for us; we take what we need and we are thankful.

I am not going to lie...I was a bit apprehensive about trying squirrel. I wasn't raised in a hunting family, as my husband was, but over the years I've become a hunter in order to provide food for our table. I've learned that a lot of people who've eaten wild game didn't like it. The reason is usually that it wasn't prepared correctly from the time it was harvested through how it was cooked. I can't tell you how many times I have heard, "I won't eat (*fill in the blank with any type of wild game*) because it's too gamey!" I can almost guarantee that the game they had eaten was not prepared properly.

Wild game preparation should start in the field and continue all the way through to serving it. When my three granddaughters lined up to try this dish, I figured I should too. After all, my 8-year-old granddaughter Kamryn not only sat with her Papa when he hunted the squirrels, she helped him prepare the squirrels from field dressing through cooking and serving. I must admit, I was pleasantly surprised at how delicious it was...so delicious that that everyone went back for seconds.

I'm not going to lie about one other thing...my husband uses the "season to taste, cook until done" approach to cooking, so this recipe is flexible not just in terms of amounts but in terms of taste. You're going to like squirrel much better cooked with ingredients you like than ingredients you don't like. And if you have a lot of squirrel but not a single carrot, you can substitute another vegetable and still serve a tasty meal.

There are three important keys to success in preparing this recipe. First, the squirrel has been properly field dressed. Second, the squirrel simmers in broth until the meat is very tender and easily pulled off the bones. We won't tell you precisely how long because we don't know the life histories of the squirrels you've got in your pot today. The final step of adding strained vegetable pulp into the pot for the final cooking will add wonderful flavor that you won't find in a can.

Papa's Squirrel and Biscuits Recipe

INGREDIENTS

4 whole squirrels, skinned and washed (or more, depending on how successful your hunt was that day)

For Step 1:

32 ounces (4 cups) of chicken or beef broth

1 large yellow onion, cut into 1" chunks (approximately 1 cup of cut onion)

6 large carrots, peeled and cut into 1" chunks (approximately 3 cups of cut carrot)

4 celery sticks, cut into 1" chunks (approximately 2 cups of cut celery)

For Step 2:

Butter and/or olive oil (to taste)

Vegetables: potatoes, more carrots, onions, celery and/or other, long-cooking vegetables you like; all cut into 1" chunks

Seasonings (all to taste): bay leaf, salt, garlic powder, lemon pepper, and/or any of your favorites

For Step 3:

Your choice of short-cooking vegetables such as green beans, corn, peas (approximately 4 cups total)
Cornstarch or flour (mix 1-2 tablespoons of cornstarch or flour with 2-3 tablespoons of cold water)

For serving: 8-12 biscuits (depending on how many hungry people you've got to feed), made from scratch or a mix

PREPARATION

Step 1:

Put all Step 1 ingredients in a pressure cooker or a large stockpot. If using a stockpot, bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium and simmer until the meat is tender and easily pulls away from the bone. If using a pressure cooker, cook on high pressure for 35 minutes. Release the pressure when time is up. Place the squirrel meat on a plate to cool, reserving the cooking liquid for Step 2. When the meat is cool enough to handle, use a fork or your hands to pull it off the bones. Cut it in chunks or shred it with two forks to the size and consistency you prefer.

Step 2:

Using a wire strainer, strain the broth from the pot or pressure cooker into a large saucepan. Press the cooked vegetables through the strainer with a spoon and scrape the resulting pulp into the pot. Discard anything that didn't go through the strainer. Place the pan on the stove over medium heat. Add the bay leaf and Step 2 vegetables (potatoes, carrots, onions, celery, etc.) to the pot containing the strained broth and vegetable pulp. Cook until the vegetables are tender (to your preference), about 30 minutes.

Put butter and/or olive oil in a large skillet and heat over medium heat until the butter melts. Add the meat, lemon pepper, salt and garlic powder and sauté until everything is well-combined and coated with the seasonings.

Step 3:

Transfer the sautéed meat to the broth and Step 2 vegetable mixture. Add the Step 3 vegetables and cook over medium heat until the vegetables are cooked to your liking.

Add the cornstarch or flour mixture to the pan. Cook and stir it until it thickens to your liking – we like a gravy consistency - approximately 5 minutes.

Serve over the biscuits, and watch your guests' faces light up when they taste this wonderful dish!