

Vietnamese Shaking Venison

I am indebted to my colleague Jenny Nguyen of the website Food for Hunters for inspiring me to make this insanely good Vietnamese dish. Jenny, as her name implies, is of Vietnamese descent – but she's also a hunter. Shaking beef, *bo luc lac*, is a dish that originated during the time of French occupation of Vietnam, and the shaking refers to how you cook the dish, by shaking the pan to toss and mix the ingredients. Jenny decided to make *nai luc lac*, shaking venison, and it worked wonderfully. What you see below is not her recipe, but my own take on it.

I use backstrap for this recipe, but you could use leg meat that is absolutely free of silverskin or connective tissue.

This is so good you will want to make more than you think you need: Holly and I ate a pound of backstrap done this way at one sitting.

Serves 2 ravenous people, or 4 normal ones.

Prep Time: 20 minutes, not including marinating time

Cook Time: 15 minutes

1 to 1 ½ pounds venison backstrap or tenderloin
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 ½ teaspoons sugar
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons oyster sauce
2 teaspoons fish sauce (optional)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
4 tablespoons lard or vegetable oil
1 medium red onion, sliced thin
1 to 3 hot chiles, such as Thai, serrano, arbol or cayenne
2 bunches of watercress or arugula
Salt and black pepper
2 tablespoons rice or cider vinegar

Cut the venison into ½ to 1-inch chunks. Make sure it has no silverskin at all. Mix the chunks with the black pepper, sugar, garlic, oyster sauce, fish sauce and soy sauce. Let this marinate at least 1 hour, and up to a day.

When you are ready to cook, put 2 tablespoons of lard or oil in a wok or large saute pan and get it ripping hot. When it smokes, add the onion and stir-fry until it begins to brown around the edges, about 2 minutes. Add the hot chiles and stir fry 30 seconds. Remove the vegetables from the pan and set aside. Wipe out the wok.

Add the remaining lard or oil and get this hot over high heat. Add about half the venison in 1 layer in the wok and let it sear for 1 minute without moving. Shake the pan to move the pieces. Use tongs to make sure an unseared side is facing down and sear untouched for another minute (At this point things are smoking pretty good, so have your oven fan on high). Repeat this one or

two more time, depending on how well done you like your venison. When you're ready, turn off the heat, add the onion and chile back to the wok and toss to combine.

Mix the watercress with the vinegar and add a little salt and pepper. Top with the venison and serve either solo as an appetizer, or with rice for a main course.

