

Women Who Hunt



The author with a nice sized buck, November 1991

In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of women who have decided to participate in the sport of hunting. Many have made the decision simply because they wanted to do something with their husbands, rather than just sitting at home and waiting for him to come out of the woods during hunting season. Others, like myself, have been hunting for years and know what enjoyment the sport brings. Not only is the meat that's harvested free of commercial additives, but just getting out of the rat race for a day and sitting quietly with my own thoughts is a surprisingly therapeutic activity. For me, it's the latter that I enjoy the most. But bagging a deer or some squirrels is the icing on the cake after sitting in the woods all day, knowing you are putting some mighty fine eatin' on the supper table.

In my area of the Blue Ridge Mountains, there is an abundance of women who know how to handle a gun

and themselves while hunting. One morning I remember a man walking through the woods where I was squirrel hunting and he asked me if I was scared to be alone in the woods by myself. I wondered what he was talking about and pressed him further; he replied, "Well aren't you afraid a man might try to bother you out here?" I burst out laughing and told him, "What man in his right mind would accost a woman sitting under a tree with a loaded gun?" He moved on.

Both my parents were city folks and had never even seen a gun up close. The closest I got as a child was one Christmas when I was twelve. All I wanted was a Red Ryder BB gun, to which my mother argued the standard line, "You'll shoot your eye out!" But my observant and indulgent dad, God love him, knew his tomboy daughter's heart and snuck one under the Christmas tree unbeknownst to my mom. I remember heated words between them late that night, but I guess my dad won out because I got to keep my Red Ryder lever-action BB gun—and both of my eyes are still intact!

My first experience with "real" guns came in my high school agriculture class, where I was the only girl in a class of sixty rural boys, most of whom had prior firearm knowledge. I begged them to let me try shooting the tin cans they had lined up in the pasture field, and I should have been more observant of the glint in their eyes and the smile on their faces when they said yes. They

positioned me on the top of a ditch bank with the water directly behind and below me. Then one of the boys handed me a funny looking short-barreled gun and told me to aim at the cans and pull the trigger. They failed to inform me that the gun I was holding was a .12-gauge sawed-off shotgun, and I needed to hold it tight against my shoulder to avoid its powerful “kick.” When the explosion happened, I was flung backward, over the edge of the ditch bank, and found myself sitting in water up to my waist. The boys were laughing their heads off, but the “little German” in me rose up, and I was determined to try again. The next time the gun went off, I was a little wiser; I stood on flat ground with the stock tight against my shoulder. The tin cans flew into the air, and I was hooked. I pleaded with the boys to take me hunting, and one insightful fellow realized that I was not going to be put off, so he patiently taught me the right way to handle a gun safely before taking me with him. I still have and use the first two guns I ever owned;



Lynn at her favorite sport of squirrel hunting

a Marlin bolt action .22 rifle and an old Fox/Savage .20-gauge side-by-side shotgun. They were vintage when I got them at sixteen and by now, antiques, but they continue to get the job done.

I started out rabbit hunting, then graduated to dove and quail, loving every minute of it and learning new recipes to try out at home with the animals I had taken. I never shot an animal if I didn't intend to eat it, and that stands true today. For those people who think it's terrible to shoot an innocent dove . . . obviously, you have never tried to shoot one! They are the wildest of birds, dipping and diving through the sky, and if you do manage to get one, you've worked hard for your supper!

The first deer I killed was a whopper, weighing in at 187 pounds, field dressed. I was living alone at the time and was glad to have that much meat in the freezer. I ate venison every night for a year, following recipes in a wild game cookbook, as well as inventing a few of my own. The meat is free of fat, steroids, and the additives that are commonly used as preservatives in store-bought meat.

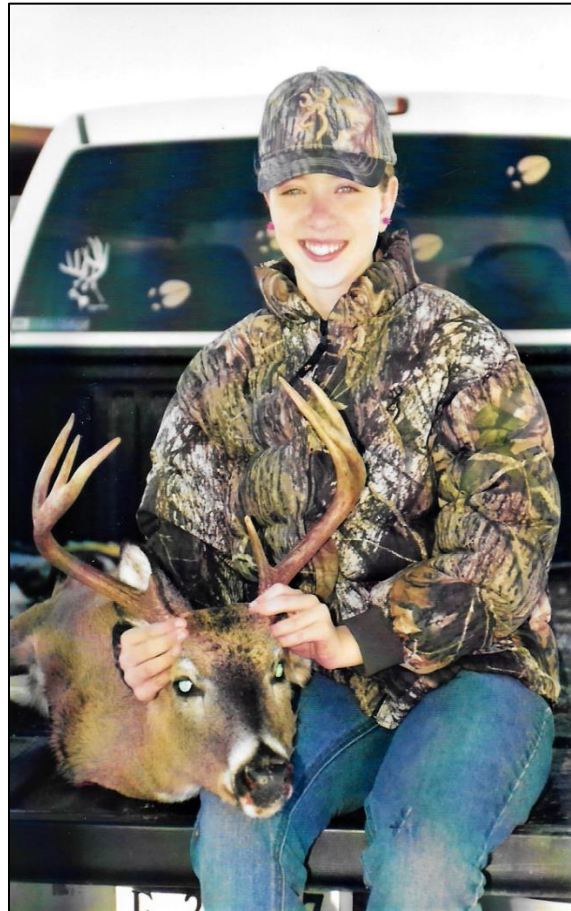
I guess my all-time favorite animal to hunt is the squirrel. I'd rather squirrel hunt than anything because the season opens in the fall when the weather isn't as cold as deer hunting, and you are pretty much assured of coming home with some game. Plus, if you've never eaten squirrel and gravy over hot biscuits, you have not lived! The article accompanying this story about women who hunt includes several wild game recipes that I've used over the years and the one for squirrel and gravy is included.

Here on the mountain, most of my girlfriend's hunt. Charlotte Hodge, who at one time chided me for hunting, would bang on pots and pans off of her back deck to warn off the squirrels whenever she'd see me heading for the woods. But in later years, she jumped on the hunting band wagon and is now a seasoned turkey hunter like her husband John.

Rebecca (Garris) Jones, who lived down the mountain from me, bought herself a rifle and killed a doe deer the first autumn that I knew her. I have this vision of her that never fails to make me laugh. I was going to work one morning and as I passed her house, I noticed her standing on her porch in a flannel nightie, aiming a gun at something down in the pasture. When I got to work, I called her to ask what she was shooting at. She offered one word that needed no explanation . . . *groundhog!* Groundhogs are the blight of anyone who has cattle or horses in open fields. The groundhogs dig deep holes in the ground, which the livestock could very well fall into and break a leg. For that reason, mountain people have no mercy on groundhogs and kill every one they see. One summer, however, we live-trapped a young one with a glittery silver coat and transported it to another location because of his unusual coloration.



Charlotte Hodge with a big turkey gobbler



Kelsey Coffey with a nice 8-point buck

Young Kelsi Coffey, who is our across-the-road neighbor here in Love, began to hunt with her dad, Mike, at an early age and has brought home her share of deer. Years back when this photo



Peggy Campbell with a large bear she took

But the ultimate woman hunter in our neck of the woods is Peggy Campbell. Peggy is an original mountain woman, raised up on Spruce Creek in Nelson County, Virginia. The only girl in the family, Peggy learned to handle a gun early in life as she trooped through the woods in search of food for the table with her father and two brothers, James and John Wade. For the Campbell family back then, hunting wasn't sport; it was survival. Throughout her adult life, Peggy continued to hunt, and walking through her house, with the various animals she has mounted on the walls and floor, is like going to a museum.

Peggy does it all, hunting with compound bow, rifle, longbow, muzzleloader, crossbow, shotgun, and anything in between. She knows exactly what she's going after and usually comes home with it. She's our main source of meat production in the winter months, giving us venison and bear meat for the freezer whenever she gets something. But she's something of an anachronism in that while she does hunt, she has a tender heart towards all of God's creatures and seems to attract everything from young bears, turkeys, stray cats, and deer with her gentle demeanor. We've seen her scrape a clearing in deep snow with her tractor and put out food for the animals stranded

was taken, she was a beautiful young lady about to graduate from high school. Now she is a young mother but she continues to enjoy hunting with her dad.

Jerry Lou Hanger got interested in hunting with a crossbow and has had good luck deer hunting on her and her husband Dennis's land, which is located in the community of Love. Jerry Lou had great success with her crossbow over the years and had 14 deer to her credit with it. She and Dennis later operated a deer processing business at their home that most area hunters frequented and I remember my daughter and I helped wrap and label the meat during the season when things got particularly busy.

Our granddaughter, Renea, has also gotten interested in hunting in the last few years, and since then buying Christmas presents has been pretty easy for us. All we have to do is purchase any type of cammo hunting attire, and she's happy! She's done pretty well with squirrels over at our Chicken Holler homeplace but after she married her husband, Derek, she graduated to deer hunting with Derek at his family farm and did well there, too.



Peggy Campbell with a nice 8-point buck

in bad weather. Once, we came up to her house for a visit and watched as two young bears frolicked in her yard. Peggy is the only person we know who has two strands of hot wire stretched around her house to keep the bears off the porch. She is one tough, independent lady who has the most generous, giving heart of anyone we've ever come in contact with, and her quiet but strong faith in God has endeared her to us forever.

There are many more women who enjoy the pleasure of hunting, but these are just a few in and around the Love area that I know personally. Below are some of my favorite tried-and-true recipes.

Wild Game Recipes

Bear, Deer, Squirrel, Birds and Bunnies

Over the many years I've hunted, there have been numerous recipes for wild game that I've collected from other sources but most of them are my own. The recipes in my file have stains all over them, which is a good indication they have been used over and over again. Most of our meat diet is made up from animals that have been harvested and I cannot remember the last time I bought beef from the grocery store. Wild meat is very healthy and nutritious and those who say they don't like wild meat because it tastes "strong" or "greasy" haven't learned how to cook it properly.

As the holidays roll around, our granddaughter Renea always asks, "Mumsie, are we going to have barbeque bear meat?" If we've been blessed with some meat from area bear hunters, I always try to save a large roast for Thanksgiving or Christmas so Renea will be happy. This is a powerful testimony for a taste test... you can't fool a kid!

BARBEQUE BEAR MEAT

The number one important point to remember in cooking bear meat is to make sure as much of the fat on the animal is trimmed off before cooking. Folks who complain that this meat is greasy probably had it prepared with too much fat left on. Remember, when bear season is in, the bruins have spent the whole summer stuffing themselves on nuts, berries, grubs and an occasional raid on a bee hive (we can attest to this!) By December they are fat as ticks and getting ready to den up for the winter so they have packed on plenty of weight; most of it in layers of fat. So, trim it off painstakingly. Another hint I've found to be helpful is to pour off the cooking broth before serving. This will eliminate even more of the greasy effects it may have. I have found the best way to cook a roast (plain or barbecued) is to place it in a crock pot, add a small amount of water or a can of French onion soup (no water added) and just let it cook on low all day. If you plan to barbecue it, about an hour before serving, pour off the broth, slice the roast in chunks and "pull" the meat apart. Then add your favorite barbecue sauce or concoct your own and turn the crock pot to high and let it cook that last hour. Serve with mashed potatoes, vegetables, fresh biscuits and you've got yourself a hearty and delicious meal.

VENISON STEW

Venison is probably the most popular meat with the mountain people (next to hog meat) because most of the men, along with a smattering of women, are hunters and deer are plentiful in our area of the Blue Ridge. Deer meat isn't as fat as bear and the fat is easier to trim off. If venison is cooked like beef, you would be hard-pressed to tell the difference. Deer can be cooked a variety of ways; roasts, steak, tenderloin, heart, ribs, and hamburger.

For stew, start with four cups of meat, cut up into bite sized pieces and season with a mixture of salt, pepper, garlic powder and paprika. Toss in a bag of flour until meat is coated then fry in hot oil in a skillet, scraping the bottom of the pan to keep the meat from sticking. When the venison is browned on all sides, put the meat into a soup pot and add two packs of dry onion soup mix and eight cups of water. Bring to a boil and then turn down the heat, cover, and simmer on low for about one and a half hours. Scrape the bottom of the pot often. The last hour of cooking, add cut up carrots, onions, celery, potatoes and if you prefer, some fresh button mushrooms with a couple of good shakes of Heinz 57 steak sauce. Thicken with milk and flour that has been put in a Mason jar and shook until well mixed. Serve with French bread and salad and you've got a hearty meal.

BEAR OR VENISON TENDERLOIN WITH ONIONS & PEPPERS

Sauté' fresh-cut slivers of onion and green or red peppers until soft and set aside. While these are slowly cooking, mix up a pan of white or brown rice and let it simmer (20 min. until finished). Cut up tenderloin into small bite sized pieces and fry in olive oil. When meat is seared on both sides, add some water and Worcestershire sauce along with the onion/pepper mixture, enough to make some broth. Take off the stove and serve over a bed of rice. With a salad and crusty French bread, it's one of our favorites and is very easy to fix.

SQUIRREL AND GRAVY

To be perfectly honest, squirrel hunting is my go-to sport come autumn. I don't go early in the season because the worbels (disgusting worms that infest the live squirrels) are still rampant. I wait until late October when the leaves cover you while you are sitting in the woods. Good cover! The meat is truly delicious but it's the gravy that's to die for. For a tasty meal, kill one to two squirrels per person. After they are cleaned, quartered, or left whole, put them in a pot with just enough water to cover the meat. Sprinkle with salt and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer until the meat is fork tender or falls off the bone. Remove meat from pot and cool before deboning. Bring the broth to a boil and thicken with flour, milk, salt and pepper until a nice consistency of gravy is obtained. Put the deboned meat back in the gravy and serve over hot, fresh-baked biscuits. Can't do no better!

TURKEY, GROUSE, DOVE AND QUAIL

All four of these game birds are delicious and the same recipes can be used for all of them, adjusting the time needed to cook them since turkey and grouse have larger bodies.

One year for Thanksgiving I skipped the traditional turkey and cooked an abundance of quail for the holiday and everyone was pleased with the results. I'll give the basic recipe for that meal along with my grandmother Gocke's fabulous homemade stuffing recipe which can be used with wild or domestic turkey as well. After the entrails and feathers are removed from the bird, wash with clean water. Salt and pepper the inside cavity and stuff with the dressing. For quail and dove, wrap each bird with a slice of bacon after stuffing and secure with a toothpick to keep bacon in place. Place the birds in a greased casserole dish and add a few small pieces of butter on top of each. Bake in a 325-degree oven for about one and a half hours, while baking the rest of the dressing in a separate casserole dish in the same oven. Cover the dressing and the birds with tin foil to keep in moisture. For a 15-to-20-pound turkey, stuff cavity with dressing, cover and bake at 350 degrees for two hours then turn oven down to 250 degrees and bake for two more hours. The grouse is cooked the same way in a 350-degree oven for an hour to an hour and a half. Anyone who hasn't eaten wild turkey as opposed to store-bought domestic turkey will not believe the difference in taste. The wild turkey has an earthy, nut-like flavor that's unbeatable. Same for the grouse, quail and dove.

GRANDMA GOCKEL'S BREAD STUFFING

Fry a half-pound of bacon until crisp. Take bacon out of skillet and drain on paper towels. When cool, crumble into small pieces. Fry one cup each of diced celery and onion in the bacon grease until translucent. Pour the celery/onion mixture and crumbled bacon over one large loaf of bread, which has been pulled apart and put into a large pan or bowl. Add four eggs, one tablespoon parsley and one can of cream of chicken soup plus a can of water. Mix thoroughly and stuff cavities of desired fowl. This is one family recipe I've always used and the dressing turns out moist and delicious every time. I've improvised over the years and have also added fresh oysters (cut in pieces) and different kinds of nuts such as pecans and black walnuts. Any way you fix it, the stuffing is a perfect addition to a holiday meal.

BUNNY RABBIT POT PIE

I made up this recipe when I didn't have a plan for supper one night and it turned out so good, I decided to keep it. I used two fat bunnies for the recipe but you can use any kind of meat with the same results.

2 rabbits, boiled until tender	2 cans cream of mushroom soup
6 potatoes, cubed	Piecrust for top and bottom of pie pan
2 medium onions, chunked	Salt and pepper to taste
2 medium cans or packs of peas	

Boil rabbits until fork tender and when cool, pick meat off bones and put in large bowl. To the meat, add the potatoes, onions and peas. Put the soup plus one can of milk into a sauce pan and heat until hot but not boiling. Pour this soup mixture over the meat and vegetables in the bowl. Stir until everything is coated and then line two nine-inch pie pans with dough and spoon the mixture into them. Cover both with top layer of dough and cut a few slits for the steam to escape and bake at 350 degrees for one hour. You can cook them both at the same time or put one in the freezer for another day. Here is an easy pie crust recipe that is flaky and tastes great.

PIE CRUST RECIPE

4 cups flour	1-3/4 cup Crisco shortening
1 egg	1 teaspoon salt
1 Tbsp. vinegar	1/2 cup cold water
1 Tbsp. sugar	

These easy wild game recipes should be a good start for those who have never attempted to cook meat from the wilds. They are a great source of protein without all the steroids, additives and preservatives that store-bought meat has. Bon' Appetite!