

Photo of the Month

Benton County Possum Hunters



Possum Wrangling, ca. 1916
(Neg. #000987, Courtesy of Maryetto Aynesworth)

In this photograph, taken around 1916, members of the Benton County Possum Hunters [not their real name] show off their catch of possums. Perhaps there is a possum race in the offing, but more likely a feast of baked possum and sweet potatoes!

While today many people would balk at the thought of dining on baked possum, a hundred years ago it was a common dish and there were numerous ways to prepare it. Possum, along with raccoon and a number of fish not commonly eaten today, was a staple in the diet of many an Ozark family well into the twentieth century and hunting possums with hounds is still practiced in some areas as a sport, rather than a subsistence activity.

The recipe below seems to be a traditional way to cook a possum. Bon apatite!

Baked Possum & Sweet Potatoes

2 young possums, 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 lbs each, dressed weight
1 baking potatoes, 1/2 lb
7 cups cold water
2 lbs sweet potatoes or yams
4 tsp salt
3/4 tsp black pepper

1/8 tsp red pepper
3 tablespoons flour
1/4 cup cold water
2 cups possum broth
Parsley

Clean possum carefully and remove scent glands and any clinging hair.
Pare potato, wash and cut in quarters lengthwise; lay potato inside possum.
Fit into a 5 qt kettle. Add water, cover kettle but leave open space on one side for steam to escape. Heat to boiling and boil gently 15-20 minutes; then skim froth that collects; pour off about half the both.

Add 3 cups fresh hot water, return to heat, again partially cover and boil gently until meat is tender, but not tender enough to pull away from the bone. Remember possums will not become more tender after they are placed in a roasting pan

Sprinkle outside well with the seasonings that have been well mixed in a coup. Make gravy by sprinkling flour over cold water, mix to a smooth paste, then blend with 3 coups of broth drained from kettle in which possums were parboiled. Mix and pour around possum. Arrange pared, washed sweet potatoes around possum. Cover pan and bake until possums and potatoes are about tender. Now uncover and bake until possums and potatoes are tender and beautifully browned or from 35-40 minutes. Baste every 10 minutes with the gravy in the pan. Remove meat and potatoes to platter and garnish with parsley. Pour gravy into separate dish and serve meat and gravy piping hot.
Makes 5 to 6 servings.

This and many other interesting recipes can be found at: <http://www.angelfire.com/ny/durene/>