

Better Burgers

by Scott Leysath, The Sporting Chef

Americans eat a boatload of burgers. Based on an annual consumption of over 38 *billion* burgers, or about 3 burgers per person, per week, that's about 40 pounds worth of quarter-pounders a year for every man, woman and child in the U.S. If you figure that some folks aren't big burger eaters and others don't eat them at all, some of us are eating way more than our share. But while overindulging in the high-fat, fast-food burger might increase your risk of a heart attack, a burger made from lean ground ducks and geese is a healthy and tasty alternative that might give you a few extra years in the blind.

Grinding your trimmed, skinless duck or goose breasts is relatively simple. If you have meat grinder, run the meat through on a coarse setting. Too thin a grind leaves the meat without much texture and it tends to fall apart easier when cooking. Since most people don't own a grinder, the next best thing is a food processor. Cut the meat into 2-inch chunks and pulse it until the pieces are roughly the size of garbanzo beans. When all that's on hand is knife, start chopping. Place the processed meat in a bowl and start adding ingredients that will enhance, not disguise the flavor of your burger.

The reason that people eat so many fatty hamburgers is because fat equals flavor. Waterfowl meat is very low-fat, so many home chefs add 10 to 20 percent ground beef or pork to their burger mix to make them taste better and to help bind meat together when pressed into a patty. While I'm all for a juicy burger and often add some beef to my ground duck, there are other ways to add moisture to your mallard. Sautéed mushrooms, onions, garlic and peppers, to name just a few ingredients, contribute both moisture and flavor. Add some fresh salsa, diced jalapeno peppers, a squeeze of fresh lime and some salt and pepper and you've got Southwestern Duck Burgers. Slap them on the grill, add a slice of jack cheese and hand me a cold frosty beverage.

Adding a binder such as egg or yogurt and a little flour or some crushed quackers...sorry, *crackers*... will help keep your burger intact when cooking. The wet stuff mixes with the dry stuff and holds the burger together. For your first attempt, I'd recommend making duck burgers in a heavy skillet rather than a grill. It's less likely to fall apart in the pan. Once you've got the hang of it, flame on!

Duck Burgers

Makes 4 - 6 servings

This recipe works with trimmed goose breasts and antlered game as well. Serve as you would any burger with bun, lettuce, tomato and your favorite condiments.

2 1/2 cups duck boneless, skinless duck breasts, cut into pea-sized pieces (see above)

3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

2 egg yolks

1 tablespoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon coarse ground pepper

- 1/3 cup Japanese breadcrumbs (panko) or substitute any breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 4 slices cheese, any kind (optional)

In a medium bowl, combine ground duck, Worcestershire sauce and egg and mix evenly. Combine next 6 ingredients and mix evenly. Cover and refrigerate for 1 – 2 hours. Sprinkle flour over mixture (to help bind them) and form into 4 – 6 patties. Heat some olive oil in a large, heavy-duty skillet over medium heat. Brown on both sides, about 3 minutes each, or until cooked to desired doneness. Top with cheese until melted and serve immediately.

Check out Scott's website, www.HuntFishCook.com, for more fish and game recipes.