

Every other month, Ric Smith and Steve Downey of specialist ingredients supplier Ritter Fresh share their sourcing expertise and hand-pick an exclusive recipe to show off the best seasonal produce



# Two million reasons to eat venison



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Head of sales  
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Two million. Apparently that is how many of our six species of deer we have roaming the UK at present and, frankly, it's far too many. That's double the population in 1999, the highest since the last ice age and if left unchecked we will see exponential growth which, according to environmentalists and scientists, will have devastating consequences for both crops and wildlife.

Studies have shown that roe and muntjac deer have destroyed two thirds of the foliage below head height in English forests leading to sharp declines in the populations of nightingales and lesser spotted woodpeckers and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Let's go back to 1079 when William the Conqueror created the New Forest. Prior to this Norman Conquest we only had two species of deer; roe and red. William brought over fallow, which has much more recently been joined by muntjac, Chinese water deer and



sika to give us a total of six species.

Modern farming provides plentiful food and along with the milder winters we are experiencing perfect conditions for a population explosion. Farmers and conservationists are concerned at the impact deer have on crops and wildlife and this is backed up with strong scientific investigation. In fact it is these very scientists who are saying that we need to urgently cull their numbers by up to 60%. This is in excess of one million and not the 350,000 that we currently kill and put into the food chain each year.

It's reassuring to hear of healthy populations of deer but we need to manage this resource and look at the many negative impacts on our wildlife and environment. So as we enter the colder seasons associated with hearty venison recipes consider it your duty to cook as much as you can knowing that with each dish you serve you are making a real contribution to the wellbeing of the Great British countryside.

Below, Jan Ostle of Wilsons in Bristol shows us how to prepare fallow deer topside with muscat grapes and beetroot.

"Fallow deer has a strong smokey

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flavour that pairs perfectly with autumnal fruits and root vegetables," he says. "In this recipe we lightly smoke the deer over old juniper twigs while it rests after cooking. We dress it with a little fresh salad and a tart beetroot purée."

## FALLOW DEER TOPSIDE, MUSCAT GRAPES AND BEETROOT PURÉE

**Wilson's Restaurant**  
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**Ingredients:**  
1 whole haunch of fallow deer  
A bunch of dry juniper twigs

**For the beetroot purée:**  
1kg peeled beetroot  
100g honey  
35g sherry vinegar  
250g unsalted butter

**For the grape salad:**  
100g muscat grapes  
8-10 borage flowers  
1 bunch of dill



Ship shape: acclaimed Bristol chef Jan Ostle

Needle point: the venison topside is flavoured with the smoke from dried juniper twigs



► Break down the deer haunch and seam out the topside. Carefully trim off any excess sinew or fat.  
► Place all purée ingredients in a heavy based sauce pan and barely cover with water. Cling film the top of the pan and place over a high heat.

► When the beetroot's are just cooked drain off the excess liquid and reserve. Place the beets in a blender and blend until smooth. Add the liquid back to the blender as and when needed to create a purée that will hold itself on the plate.

► Colour the topside quickly over a high heat and place on top of the juniper twigs. Put the deer and twigs in a pre-heated oven at 160°C for about 8-12 minutes depending on its size. Remove the deer and the twigs from the oven to rest in a warm place. Lightly

burn some of the twigs with a blow torch so they begin to smoulder. Leave to rest and smoulder for 15-25 mins.  
► Carve the deer and dress with the grapes and herbs. Place on the plate with a dollop of purée and serve.