

Outdoors


How to cook a Gobbler's Goose

As one who takes a certain pride in eating whatever I shoot, I find myself on the horns of a dilemma relative to turkey gobblers. I am not necessarily a hunter of trophy turkeys, being willing to settle for whichever long-beard comes to the call. I also take pride, however, in fooling big old mature toms and generally give jakes a free pass.

This is where the dilemma comes in. For eating purposes, the best turkey that's legal to shoot during the spring season is a jake, a young male of the year. But jake turkeys are too easy to call to represent much of a sporting challenge. On the other hand, the two- and three-year old (and older) longbeards get a little – well, chewy.

The solution is in the manner of cooking. If you shoot a jake for the table (which I recommend), you roast him, smoke him, or have him smoked commercially. The flavor will be deep and rich, far better than any farm-raised bird of the same age

Currently Outdoors



John Wootters

cooked in the same way. But if you use another tag on a trophy bird and smoke or roast him, you will most likely find that he lacks something in the palatability department.

My answer is turkey fajitas. Clean and butterfly the two halves of the breast and tenderize them if you wish. A couple of hours in buttermilk will remove any strong taste, but may not be necessary in view of the fact that the next step is to marinate the breasts in your choice of commercial fajita marinades. My choice is Fabulosa brand, available at HEB and elsewhere.



Photo by John Wootters

This fine gobbler looks more like a trophy than a dinner ... but the treatment Wootters describes in the adjacent text will turn him into both.

It doesn't take long, generally about 30 or 40 minutes in Fabulosa will do the trick. If you use another brand of marinade, follow the manufacturer's directions. Then grill over a hot bed of coals, preferably mesquite. Don't overcook; doing so makes the meat tougher and defeats the purpose of marinating. Depending on the thickness of the breasts and your defini-

tion of "hot" coals, not more than three to five minutes on each side should be enough, but make sure the meat is white all the way through.

While marinating the meat, sauté a sliced bell pepper and a sliced medium onion in a little cooking oil. Turn the heat down and cover. When the breast meat is done, slice it diagonally into 1/2-inch wide strips and

add it to the sauteed vegetables. Note: the slicer is entitled to sample the small pieces and scraps, still sizzling from the grill, as a reward for all his hard work ... not that you can keep him from it anyway.

Serve with warmed flour tortillas, refried beans, guacamole with a little pico de gallo mixed in, sour cream, and grated cheddar cheese. To

eat, "butter" a strip of refried beans down the middle of a tortilla and cover it with hot meat, onions, and bell peppers. Garnish with guacamole, extra pico de gallo, sour cream, and grated cheese to taste. Roll the whole delicious mess up into a bulging, dripping taco and get after it. You need no salad or side dishes, just your beverage of choice (Tecate? Corona?), but you will definitely need some extra warmed tortillas for seconds and thirds.

As mentioned above, a wild turkey tastes somewhat like a domestic bird, only more so. But neither you nor your guests will ever again wonder what to do with a "tough, strong-flavored" old turkey gobbler again.

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Peterson's "Hunting" magazine and author of the monthly column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy Deer." He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for "Shooting Times," "Rifle," "Handloader," "Guns & Ammo" and Peterson's "Hunting."