

Variety Meats

VARIETY MEATS, or offal meats, are the edible internal organs and extremities of an animal. If you love to cook and are tired of making the same dishes, variety meats may be a new option. French menu delicacies often use variety meats as a main ingredient, such as the pâté terrine pictured here. Notice that a pâté baked in a terrine looks much like meatloaf, but it is typically served cold. This pâté's "meatloaf" mixture was baked in a bacon-lined loaf pan. Typically, variety meat recipes have loads of flavor and eye appeal.



Objective:



Summarize variety meat types, handling, preparation, and cooking methods.

Key Terms:



asado

cross-contamination

foie gras

giblets

haggis

liver

offal

paté

red offal

sweetbreads

tripe

variety meats

white offal

Understanding Variety Meats

Cooking variety meats may require more care and/or steps.

VARIETY MEAT TYPES

Variety meats, or offal meats, are the edible internal organs and extremities of an animal. **Offal** is the viscera (entrails) and trimmings of a butchered animal. Offal means to "fall off the carcass," which is what the internal organs do when an animal is butchered.

An animal's offal meats consist of the skin, feet, tail, head, tongue, lungs, liver, kidney, spleen, pancreas, stomach, heart, sweetbreads, brains, and testicles. Offal is categorized into two types: red and white. **Red offal** is organ meat (e.g., heart, tongue, lungs, and kidneys). **White offal** is organ meat (e.g., brains, testicles, sweetbreads, and stomach or tripe). **Giblets** are the variety meats (entrails) from poultry, such as the heart, gizzard, neck, and liver.



FIGURE 1. Variety meats consist of the skin, ears, feet, tail, head, tongue, lungs, liver, kidney, spleen, pancreas, stomach, heart, sweetbreads, and testicles.

SAFE HANDLING

Variety meats are highly perishable and should be kept at or below 40°F and used within two days of purchase. Variety meats can be frozen. For the best quality, frozen variety meats should be used within six months. Best practices set by the USDA should be followed for handling any raw meat or poultry. These best practices include clean, separate, cook, and chill.

Clean

Cleaned surfaces and utensils prevent cross-contamination. According to the USDA, **cross-contamination** is the transfer of harmful microorganisms from one food to another by means of a non-food contact surface (e.g., utensils, equipment, or human hands).

Frequent hand washing prevents the spread of germs. Soap and warm water should be used. It is necessary to scrub fingernails, between fingers, and up wrists for 20 seconds. Then a person should rinse and dry with a single-use paper towel.

Separate

Separate raw foods from prepared foods (e.g., cutting boards, knives, and utensils). For instance, keep raw foods in separate containers in the bottom of the refrigerator to prevent cross-contamination in the event juices leak from the packaging.

Cook

Beef, pork, and lamb variety meats are cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F. However, poultry variety meats (giblets) are cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F.

Chill

When purchasing variety meats at a local grocery store, they should be cold to the touch. They should be placed in the cart just before checking out. Once home, they should be refrigerated promptly at 40°F or below and used within two days of purchase.

Raw variety meats can be frozen. For the best quality, they should be used within six months. Cooked meat products should be refrigerated as quickly as possible if they are not being served immediately. Discard any cooked variety meat product left at room temperature for more than two hours. This time shortens when air temperatures are high.

PREPARATION AND COOKING METHODS

Preparation of organs, regardless of the animal source, is similar. Other than liver and onions and pâté, variety meats are not standard fare in mainstream restaurants in the United States. However, they are quite common in other countries and in ethnic restaurants in the United States.

Heart

The heart is a delicacy in some countries. In the United States, many people indulge in this meat at Brazilian restaurants.

Facts and Preparation

Heart is primarily muscle, so it tends to be tough meat. Hearts used in cookery include beef, calf (veal), lamb, turkey, and chicken. When selecting a heart for purchase, it is essential to choose one that is plump and deep red. It should smell fresh. The heart should be refrigerated (loosely wrapped) for no longer than two days. When ready to use, any excess fat should be removed. Then it should be washed.

Heart from an older animal is tough, so it is often prepared by braising or stewing. These methods break down the tissue and allow the meat to tenderize. Calf heart is tender and should be prepared using a quick cooking method (e.g., sautéing, pan frying, or grilling). Other hearts may be braised, stuffed, and roasted.

Common Dishes

Anticuchos is the traditional Peruvian kebab dish made from grilled calf heart. Chiles and spices—aji panca, dried chili pepper, garlic, cumin, vinegar, salt, and pepper—are blended into a marinade and poured over the heart before grilling. Beef heart from an older animal is often used to enrich a stew.



FIGURE 2. Anticuchos is the traditional Peruvian kebab dish made from grilled calf heart. Chiles and spices—aji panca, dried chili pepper, garlic, cumin, vinegar, salt, and pepper—are blended into a marinade and poured over the heart before grilling.

Liver

In some restaurants, liver and onions is served. However, this is just one way to indulge in this organ.

Facts and Preparation

Liver is a large, reddish-brown organ of great nutritional value. It is rich in iron, protein, and vitamin A. Liver is tender, especially calves' liver. Liver used most in cookery includes beef, calves (veal), pork, lamb, and poultry (chicken, duck, and geese). If the outer skin is still intact, it should be removed before cooking. It is often cooked to medium rare to retain the texture and to ensure that it does not become tough through overcooking.

Liver that is bright in color and moist (not slick) on the surface is recommended. Fresh liver can be loosely wrapped and refrigerated for a maximum of one day. Good food preparation choices for quick searing of the outer layer while maintaining the slightly undercooked interior of liver are grilling, sautéing, and pan-frying. Liver toughens quickly when overcooked.

Common Dishes

Liver and onions is a common dish on restaurant and home menus. Liver slices are sautéed, lightly seasoned, and accompanied by sweet caramelized onions. Poultry livers (e.g., chicken or goose) are used to make **pâté**, which is a mixture of any finely ground meats, liver, game, etc. seasoned, flavored, and baked or sautéed and puréed. It is served as an appetizer. **Foie gras** (fwah grah) is the liver of artificially fattened geese or duck. The forced fattening produces a large and especially tender liver organ. The poultry are fed more than once a day for several days using a feeding tube in a process called gavage. This fattened liver is primarily used to create pâté (Pâté de Foie Gras).

Kidneys

Kidneys are nutritious, but they may not be an item you have seen consumed in your household, unless you are of Scottish heritage.

Facts and Preparation

Kidneys are glandular organs. Beef and veal kidneys are multi-lobed, but pork kidney is single-lobed. Kidneys are a good source of protein, iron, phosphorus, vitamin A, thiamine, and riboflavin. Kidneys from a young animal are pale in color and may be grilled, sautéed, and/or



FIGURE 3. Pâté is a mixture of any finely ground meat, liver, game, etc., seasoned, flavored, and baked or sautéed and puréed. It is served as an appetizer. The Pâté de Foie Gras appetizer here is served with cornichons (small pickles), brioche toasts, and onion confit (jam).



ON THE JOB...

CAREER CONNECTION: A Passion for Offal—Offalgood

Chef Chris Cosentino is passionate about cooking with offal. He grew up in New England where he learned to cook with his Italian family. He went to culinary school at Johnson and Wales and worked at Red Sage restaurant in Washington, DC before moving to California. He worked at several restaurants before becoming the executive chef at Incanto, an Italian restaurant in San Francisco. There, he develops recipes utilizing offal and offers new dishes every day. Chef Cosentino is currently writing a cookbook to include variety meats in every recipe. Watch the video, “Why Does Chris Cosentino Love Offal Cooking?” at <http://offalgood.com/press/chris-cosentino-love-offal-cooking/>. Find his recipes and other culinary information on his website at <http://offalgood.com/>.

pan-fried to maintain the tenderness. Kidneys from older animals are a deep reddish-brown that makes them tougher and stronger in flavor.

Kidneys should be purchased as fresh as possible and in their surrounding fat. Those with dry spots or a dull finish should be avoided. It is important to use kidneys the day they are purchased or to store them loosely wrapped under refrigeration for up to one day. The skin and excess fat should be removed before cooking. Soaking helps eliminate any strong odors. Kidneys may be braised, broiled, simmered, or served in casseroles (e.g., steak and kidney pie and stews).

Common Dishes

Hough kidney soup is a Scottish recipe in which beef shank and kidneys are combined with beef broth and are simmered for several hours. The soup is served as a simple broth, or vegetables may be added. Steak and kidney pie is a traditional English dish made with sautéed beef-steak, beef kidney, and onions cooked in wine and stock. A milder flavor is achieved when using lamb or veal. A thick stew is made with the steak, kidney, vegetables, and beef broth. Then the stew mixture is placed in a flaky piecrust and baked. Steak and kidney pudding is similarly prepared (as for the pie), but it has suet pastry rather than flakey pastry crust. It is steamed rather than baked. Pudding is typically served with a rich gravy or sauce.

Stomach

Stomach lining is quite versatile in culinary arts.

Facts and Preparation

Tripe is the rubbery lining of the stomach of cattle or other ruminants. Stomach is listed as “tripe” on restaurant menus. Typically, tripe is from beef, but pig and lamb are also common in restaurants and in some groceries. Cows have four stomachs, of which the first three are used in culinary dishes. Rumen (blanket, plain, flat, or smooth tripe) is the first stomach.

Reticulum (honeycomb or pocket tripe) is the second stomach. It is the meatiest and is most often used by cooks and chefs. Omasum (book, bible, or leaf tripe) is the third stomach.

Stomach is washed thoroughly and often bleached by the butcher. Tripe is extremely tough and is often partially cooked before being sold to assist a chef in shortening the preparation time. Even with pre-market cooking, tripe is prepared using lengthy cooking techniques, such as braising or stewing. Tripe is also used as a casing for sausage or other ingredients within a recipe.

Common Dishes

Haggis is the chopped, minced, or ground innards of an animal—lungs, liver, and heart—mixed with fat, oatmeal, stock, salt, and pepper and enclosed in another organ (typically the stomach) before boiling to preserve the delicate offal. As the offal meat is extremely perishable, this preservation process is completed quickly following slaughter. It is considered the national dish of Scotland. Haggis is commonly prepared with beef suet (rather than mutton fat). Cayenne pepper or nutmeg is usually added.

Tripe is used to make the traditional Mexican Menudo soup. Tripe is simmered in a chili broth with lime, onion, and cilantro. It is served with tortilla chips. The Roman-style tripe soup is similar and adds chili flakes and garlic, but no cilantro. Callos stew is a thick Spanish dish made using tripe, chickpeas, chorizo sausage, and paprika. Pepper pot soup is a thick stew made with beef tripe, vegetables, and seasonings.



FIGURE 4. Stomach is listed as “tripe” on restaurant menus and typically means beef stomach: the second stomach. The Roman-style tripe soup pictured here is served in a spicy marinara sauce and is often accompanied by crusty bread.

Sweetbreads and Brains

In some areas of the United States, consuming these items is more common. However, sweetbreads and brains are not typical fare in this country for the majority.

Facts and Preparation

Sweetbreads are the thymus glands of a calf, lamb, or piglet. These glands disappear as the animal matures. Sweetbreads are widely used in home and restaurant cookery and are considered a delicacy. This variety meat is especially perishable and must be used or frozen the day of purchase. Sweetbreads are prepared for cooking by soaking them for several hours in water to remove any blood. Because of the tender texture and mild flavor, sweetbreads can be pre-

pared in a variety of ways, including grilled, sautéed, and pan-fried. Brains are used interchangeably with sweetbreads in recipes, but they are softer in texture and are not as common as sweetbreads. Sweetbreads and brains are high in cholesterol.

Common Dishes

Asado is Argentinian for barbecue, roasted, or wood-fired barbecue. An Argentine Asado includes barbecued beef filet mignon, beef, pork, and lamb loin ribs, short ribs, blood sausage, lamb kidney, sweetbreads, chorizo sausage, chitterlings, peppers, and provolone cheese. It is served with chimichurri sauce. Asado is cooked over a wood fire and is popular in Latin American and Spanish cultures. Sweetbreads Grenobloise is an appetizer that uses poached and sautéed veal sweetbreads seasoned with salt, pepper, olive oil, unsalted butter, lemon juice, capers, and parsley.



FIGURE 5. An Argentine Asado includes barbecued beef filet mignon, beef, pork, and lamb loin ribs, short ribs, blood sausage, lamb kidney, sweetbreads, chorizo sausage, chitterlings, peppers, and provolone cheese. It is served with chimichurri sauce. Asado is cooked over a wood fire and preferably over live coals rather than flames.

Testicles

Do not get “Rocky Mountain Oysters” (testicles) confused with regular oysters, as the items are quite different.

Facts and Preparation

Testicles are offal meat; also referred to as fry or as animelles. Most culinary dishes are beef or lamb. Soaking the testicles in water for several hours to remove excess blood and contaminants before cooking is recommended.

Common Dishes

Rocky Mountain Oysters are deep-fried testicles served as an appetizer with lemon garnish. Menu titles include “Rocky Mountain Oysters” or “Prairie Oysters” or “Huevos del Toro.”

Grilled lamb testicles are placed on a hot grill for 8 to 10 minutes. Salt and pepper are added to taste. Then they are garnished with lemon.

Tongue

Tongue is often considered a delicacy. It can be from various animals, including beef and whales.

Preparation

Fresh tongue is a tough variety meat. Most chefs simmer or boil the tongue and then submerge it in an ice bath to allow for the removal of the outer skin. After the initial preparation, tongue is braised, stewed, or baked to tenderize it.

Common Dishes

Tongue is typically sliced for deli sandwiches or is used in salad preparations. Tacos de le Tongue is a variation of traditional tacos that replaces other cuts of beef with tongue. Tongue is sautéed and placed in tortillas along with salsa.

Summary:



Variety meats, or offal meats, are the edible internal organs and extremities of an animal. Offal is the viscera (entrails) and trimmings of a butchered animal. Offal means to “fall off the carcass,” which is what the internal organs do when an animal is butchered. An animal’s offal, or variety meats, consists of the skin, feet, tail, head, tongue, lungs, liver, kidney, spleen, pancreas, stomach, heart, sweetbreads, brains, and testicles. Giblets are the variety meats (entrails) from poultry. Giblets include the heart, gizzard, neck, and liver.

Follow the USDA’s four safe handling practices when working with offal—clean, separate, cook, and chill—as variety meats are highly perishable. Preparation of an organ, regardless of the animal source, is similar. Other than liver and onions and pâté, variety meats are not standard fair in mainstream restaurants in the United States. However, they are quite common in many other countries and in ethnic restaurants in the United States.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is cross-contamination? How is it prevented?
2. List and describe the four safe handling practices for variety meats recommended by the USDA.
3. What is offal?
4. What are giblets? Which giblets are used to prepare pâté?
5. What is tripe?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Foie gras uses the livers of ducks or geese that have been force fattened to produce a large and especially tender organ. Although it is a well-known dish in French cuisine, it is controversial. Have you ever heard of this dish? Have you or anyone you know eaten foie gras? Research the history, the fattening process, and how foie gras is prepared. In your own words, what makes foie gras so controversial?

Web Links:



Beef Variety Meats

<http://www.recipetips.com/kitchen-tips/t--342/beef-variety-meats.asp>

Giblets and Food Safety

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/poultry-preparation/giblets-and-food-safety/ct_index

Offal / Variety Meats

<http://myculinaryjoy.com/offalvariety-meats/>

Safe Handling Practices

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/basics-for-handling-food-safely/ct_index

Style Guide

<http://foodsafety.adcouncil.org/assets/5/2011%20FSF%20STYLEGUIDE%20FINAL.pdf>