Louisiana Gators

The French explorers called them "les cocodries"; the Spanish, "los lagartos." But today American alligators, thriving in Louisiana and the other southeastern states which comprise their natural range. Through sound wildlife management and conservation efforts, the alligator population is steadily growing.

Gator Conservation

Louisiana has been and is still the leader when it comes to research and management of these wild reptiles. Louisiana biologists have studied the habitat requirements, food habits and reproductive traits of gators based on the allocation of tags assigned to specific counties. The wild harvest of gators occurs in September after the nesting season. The annual harvest quota is around 25,000 and is composed mostly of males and non-reproductive females. Since the re-establishment of the statewide harvest program in 1979, the average size of the harvested gators remains about seven feet long although a few 13-footers are occasionally caught.

Hunters can catch only a certain number of gators based on the allocation of tags assigned to specific discard areas. The specially numbered tags are immediately attached and remain on the gator hide until tanned into leather. The tag, along with special skinning procedures, prevents illegally harvested skins from entering the market.

Gator Farming

Farm-raised gators are harvested throughout the year, depending on their size and market demand. The well-cared for gators are between three and five feet in length during their second year of growth. Farm-raised gators more than double their natural growth rate because of a constant warm environment and a balanced diet. Farmers stock their farms by gathering eggs from nests in the wild and artificially incubating them. As the previous year’s crop of hatchlings reach market size, the farmer must release a certain percentage of the gators back into the wild where the eggs were originally collected. In this way, the wild stocks are compensated with as many gators as would have naturally survived.

The farmer, in turn, benefits from all the gators which would have been lost because of natural mortality. Again, all of this is closely supervised by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and is part of the total gator conservation program.

Gator Leather Products

The quality and prestige that alligator leather commands is recognized around the world. Ninety percent of gators harvested in Louisiana will ultimately be purchased as quality leather goods that would have naturally survived. The wild harvest of gators comprises their natural range. THROUGH sound wildlife management and conservation efforts, the alligator population is steadily growing.

Gator Cooking

The aesthetic value of a gator can be viewed as a renewable natural resource, all of this can and does make sense, dollars and sense.

Cooking with Gator

“Alligator has found its way out of the copper sauce pans of fine dining restaurants. Alligator meat offers the professional chef or home cook more versatility and uniqueness than any other comparable meat.”

Chef John Folse, Lafitte’s Landing, Donaldsonville, Louisiana

Recipe Nutritional Analysis:

Slate University

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Gator meat is available from either wild or farm-raised sources. Large quantities of meat are processed during the September harvest season and frozen for later use. The quality of frozen meat is maintained for up to 12 months. Fresh, farm-raised gator meat is available throughout the year.

**Tips for Using Alligator Meat**

1. Use tail and jaw cuts for baked, fried and grilled items. Tenderize body and leg meat, and use in soups, gumbos, picantes, casseroles, etc.
2. Use mechanical tenderization methods for less tender cuts.
3. Cut across the grain for increased tenderness.
4. Remove all fat and sinew before preparation or freezing. Since the fat is not marbled through the meat, it is easy to remove.
5. Freeze alligator for up to one year. Remove fat and wrap in moisture-vapor-proof material.

**Gator is Available in Stores**

Recent legislation has removed the special license requirements for restaurants and grocery stores to sell gator meat. To ensure product quality, gators must be skinned and processed according to the standards set forth by the Louisiana Departments of Health and Agriculture. For a list of licensed gator meat suppliers, contact the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

**Culinary Creations**

Besides the standard preparation methods such as fried alligator or alligator sauce picante', Louisiana chefs have created many award-winning selections.

**Alligator Courttableau** by James Graham, Le Chef de Cocodrie, Prejean's Restaurant, Lafayette, features medallions of thinly sliced strips of alligator rolled around a mixture of crawfish, tasso and Monterey Jack cheese served with garlic-red pepper sauce.

Chef Enola Prudhomme of Prudhomme's Cajun Cafe in Carencro has developed a delectable Alligator Stir-fry and Alligator Pasta. Both of these selections are low in fat.

**Alligator Stir-fry**

**Chef Enola Prudhomme**

Prudhomme’s Cajun Cafe, Carencro, La.

- 1 pound alligator, cut into 1/4 inch strips
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 3 teaspoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium Worcestershire sauce
- 3 teaspoons cornstarch
- 2 cups beef stock or water
- 1 small zucchini, cut into julienne strips
- 1 small squash, cut into julienne strips
- 1/2 thinly sliced medium onion
- 1 cup fresh broccoli florets
- 1 cup fresh cauliflower petals
- 4 thinly sliced red bell pepper rings

Spray the inside of a large skillet with nonstick vegetable cooking spray and place over high heat. Add the meat and saute, stirring for 5 minutes. Add the next seven ingredients; cook for 10 minutes, stirring often. Dissolve the cornstarch in stock and add to the skillet along with all the remaining ingredients, stirring well. Cook for 10 minutes, or until sauce thickens, stirring occasionally. Serves 4.
Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Pound alligator fillets to 1/4 inch thick without tearing. Combine salt, sugar, red pepper, black pepper and garlic powder. Set aside. Prepare egg wash by beating 1 egg with 1 tablespoon milk. Set aside.

 Spread remaining ingredients and seasoning mix over the center of the fillets, leaving a 3/4 inch border around the edge.


**Garlic-Red Pepper Sauce:**

8 ounce bottle clam juice
1/2 teaspoon red pepper
1/4 cup finely diced onion
1 teaspoon freshly minced garlic
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 tablespoon margarine
1/4 cup evaporated skim milk

To prepare sauce: Combine clam juice, red pepper and onion in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil. Mix cornstarch with 1/8 cup cold water and add to mixture. Cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Fold in margarine and evaporated milk. Cool.

Remove alligator from oven and cool for 20 minutes before slicing. Remove toothpicks. Slice in 3/4 inch thick medallions.

Pour sauce into bottom of serving platter. Arrange medallions on platter, either side by side, or slightly overlapped. Serves 4.

**Nutrition Information (without sauce):**

| Calories | 229 |
| Protein | 35 g |
| Fat | 7 g |
| Saturated | 4 g |
| Monounsaturated | 2.3 g |
| Polyunsaturated | 1.1 g |
| Cholesterol | 163 mg |
| Sodium | 366 mg |

Percentage of calories from fat:
- 28 percent

Percentage of calories from fat (with sauce):
- 31 percent

Exchanges:
- 4 lean meat exchanges