

# COTSWOLD PRODUCE

## Cooking wild boar:

Simon says, "I once tried to stir-fry some on the Aga – typical boy, I needed food quickly! It smelt delicious, and it tasted fantastic, but my goodness did I chew.

"A far better method is to marinate it and cook it in the bottom oven of an Aga for a couple of hours: it's fantastic."

## Wiltshire Wild Boar in cider – serves four.

1 kg/2lb wild boar shoulder  
500g/1lb seasonal vegetables including potatoes  
180g/6oz shallots/onions  
450ml/¾ pint cider  
450ml/¾ pint of stock  
Seasoning and mixed herbs  
Oil or butter to seal

Seal boar in a large casserole dish. Add everything; bring to boil; cover and put in oven at 180C/350F for 2 hours. Thicken stock, if need be. How easy is that!

itself proves boar are far from stupid – the estate is owned by Sir Paul McCartney, one of the country's most high profile vegetarians.

No one is quite sure how many there are living in the wild today, but they're spotted in ever increasing numbers. They're known to have settled happily into the Forest of Dean, particularly around Cinderford. Groups of more than 20 have been observed, with sows and boarlets.

They live similarly on Simon's farm. He keeps 30 female boar in two family groups – or sounders (the collective name for wild boar) – each with a good strong male in charge. Julian is one: Sparky is the other. Compared with feisty Julian, Sparky's a wuss. Which is good news for Simon. "Sparky's a lover not a fighter, thank goodness," he says, with admirable feeling. Part of the attraction is the character of these fascinating creatures. The girls are full of personality too – particularly the lighter-coloured boar Simon got from Polish stock. Inevitably, they're nicknamed the Skittish Blondes. "We've got some fiery girls, and you can definitely see that in their young. We have one that's about six, seven months now and he's christened Red Rum because whenever you go in there, he's gone.

"Itchy is a definite favourite, as is Tina, named after Tina Turner because she has hairy ears!"

Boar usually breed usually three times in two years, according to the amount of food and light available. The mothers will disappear off to build a nest made from mouthfuls of grass, and the young are born after a gestation of three months, three weeks and three days. They're generally pretty good mums, though there's always the risk that they could eat their offspring, or accidentally roll on them. During the summer's floods, Simon discovered



Simon Gaskell with his wild boars, sows and boarlets.



The Real Boar Company sells salami cured in red wine among its products.

a whole litter of six, drowned, because their mother had left them in a submerged nest.

When the youngsters begin to lose their stripes and mature – from around three or four months onwards – they're weaned and sorted into males and females. They're then kept separately, away from the sounders, so they can concentrate on growing without the distraction of teenage romance. At up to 18 months, they're sold for meat.

"Having to determine their sex after they're weaned is absolutely exhausting," Simon admits. "You have to pick them up to look and make sure, while they struggle and kick – and they're all muscle. I sweat buckets!"

They're matured slowly – far more slowly than domestic pigs, which take a mere five months – before being taken off to an abattoir in Dorset. Because of their designation as 'dangerous wild animals', there are only certain places they can be slaughtered.

As Christmas approaches, you can expect to see Simon's boar on offer at top establishments. As well as the Fat Duck, Cotswold hotels such as Barnsley House, Bibury Court, Calcot Manor, Whatley Manor and Lucknam Park have all proved big fans of the produce. It's a great alternative for domestic Christmas dinners too – but put your order in early to avoid disappointment. You're guaranteed a treat.

"It's a good old-fashioned taste," Simon says. "When you're cooking it, it can't be hurried. If you think about the difference between mutton and lamb, then wild boar is of that ilk. It's a flavour from the old days: traditional, slow, delicious." ■

**For more information about wild boar products and where to buy them, contact Simon Gaskell at The Real Boar Company on 01249 782861 and 07889 154002; email [real.boar@virgin.net](mailto:real.boar@virgin.net) or log onto [www.therealboar.co.uk](http://www.therealboar.co.uk)**