

FALL HUNTING

Butchering

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with the how-to's of correctly butchering deer, there is heavy emphasis placed on how to make sure the meat is usable by proper handling in the field and after it has been brought back to camp or transported home.

One of the biggest contributing factors to contaminated meat is rupturing organs when field dressing because of not knowing where and how to make the proper incisions. If no one with experience is available to learn this basic skill from, there are many instructional DVDs on the subject and information is no further away than Google and a click.

There is nothing "macho" about field dressing a deer without wearing common latex gloves or those made especially for the task. Wearing them provides protection from ticks and also makes it easier to handle slippery organs, thus providing better control for cutting.

It is important to drain all excess blood from the body cavity of a deer, as it should be dragged from the field on its back to keep the meat as clean as possible. Never wash the body cavity with drinking water or in a pond or stream, but when getting the deer to the vehicle wipe the inside with paper towels or a clean towel, removing all blood clots and hair.

If using ice to cool the body cavity to stunt bacteria growth, make sure that pools of water do not form in the deer. It is also important to skin a deer as soon as possible to help cool the meat, hanging it in the shade, and if transporting a deer home outside of a vehicle, never secure it to the body near the engine.

For those doing self-butchering, the Pennsylva-

nia Game Commission has an instructional video showing deboning in the field on its website (www.pgc.state.pa.us). Deboning the meat allows it to be frozen and later processed into roasts, sausage, ground meat and jerky.

Steaks, including round steaks from the hind quarters, tenderloins and the back straps should be cut fresh and then frozen. When tenderloins and back straps are removed fresh, very often most of this meat can be removed from the carcass by pulling it out with little cutting involved.

When processing one's own deer it is important to remove the hide, which comes off easier if the front legs are cut off at the elbows and the rear legs are removed just below the knee joint with a saw, as soon as possible. Use a knife to cut the hide from where each leg was sawed off at the elbow back to the body trunk, and cutting the rear legs just below the joint also makes it easier to hang a carcass by the large tendons on the back legs on a gambrel or meat hooks.

Pull the hide from the carcass starting at the rear end and work downward toward the head, peeling from the hind quarters first, then cut the tailbone and pull it down to the shoulders, working the hide over the shoulders and pulling it away from the legs. Finish by pulling the hide down the neck as close to the base of the skull as possible and then cut the head from the carcass with a clean saw, removing the trachea.

After the hide has been removed the carcass should be wiped off immediately, and if water is used to clean the cavity or carcass, dry the meat immediately. Wet or damp meat spoils more quickly and is more prone to

cultivate and nurture bacteria, and rinsing meat with water can hasten the spread of bacteria.

Inspect the carcass again for any blood and hair and remove large fatty deposits to improve the quality of the meat. This helps lessen that "gamey" taste some people dislike about venison.

Unless one has a walk-in cooler, the carcass should be quartered and placed in a refrigerator. If the air temperature is above 50 degrees, hunters should get their carcass refrigerated as soon as possible.

Two free brochures on venison care and field-dressing deer are available from the PGC by writing to: Pennsylvania Game Commission, Dept. MS, 2001 Elmerton Ave., Harrisburg, Pa. 17110-9797. "To Field Dress a Deer" offers step-by-step instructions with illustrations on how to complete the task; "Venison Needn't Be Pot Luck," offers field-dressing instructions and cooking tips. Other books and DVDs also are available from the Outdoor Shop on the PGC website.



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