

# Handling and Processing Deer

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If you are new to hunting, you may have lots of questions after killing your first deer. Following these tips will help you obtain venison that is both tasty and safe to eat.

- When you are sure the deer is dead, sever the neck arteries to allow blood to flow out of the deer.
- Remove the two scent glands on each hind leg just above the joint, which can cause a strong "wild game" taste. Also remove the sex organs of male deer. Many hunters use a separate knife for these removals so the musk cannot be spread to the rest of the meat.
- The next step is to remove the entrails (intestines and stomach) from the rectum to the esophagus in the neck in one piece without puncturing any organs or the stomach. First, place the deer on its back and cut the rectum free and tie it off to prevent any feces from getting into the body cavity. Care must be taken to avoid puncturing the bladder in this step.
- Next, cut a line through the skin from the rectum, along the stomach, to the throat. Then cut through the bone between the hind legs and the sternum between the front legs. This may require a hatchet or saw. Spread the legs apart with a stick or by tying them to nearby trees.
- Next, tie off the esophagus at the base of the neck and cut the esophagus off between the tie-off and the head. It's difficult to cut the esophagus while you squeeze it closed and try to avoid cutting yourself. Tying off the esophagus will prevent any leakage from the stomach into the body cavity. The final step is to roll the deer over on its side and remove the entrails as a unit. Removing the entrails should be **completed within 30 minutes after the deer has died.**
- Then remove the heart and liver from the entrails. Keep them clean and immediately place them in plastic bags that can be tightly sealed. They should be rinsed off with water, if possible, and placed in a cooler as soon as possible if the weather is above freezing.

- At this point, wipe out the cavity with clean cloth. Water can be used, but it may speed up meat spoilage.
- The next step is to drag or carry your deer from the woods where you can hang it up for cooling or transport it to a cooler. Now is a good time to cut out any bloody meat injured by the bullet or arrow.
- Skinning the deer is the next step, which should be completed in the field unless the venison is going to be aged for 7 to 14 days to tenderize the meat. If the meat is to be aged in a cooler, you can leave the skin on to help aging and reduce shrinkage and discoloration.
- Do not tie the deer on the hood of a vehicle - transporting a deer should not be for show or bragging rights. Wrap the deer tightly and transport it on a luggage rack, in the trunk of a vehicle, or in the clean bed of a pickup. Heat, road dust, and exhaust fumes can ruin your meat.

Many people take their deer to professional meat processors for aging, cutting, and packaging. Most charge between \$35 and \$45.

Take the following items with you on each hunting trip so you will be prepared to field dress your deer: (1) two sharp knives with 4- to 6-inch blades and a whetstone; (2) 20 to 30 feet of strong rope; (3) 2-gallon plastic bags; (4) two 15-inch cords to tie off the rectum and esophagus; (5) a supply of wiping cloths; (6) hand-saw or hatchet; (7) muslin or cheese cloth to wrap the carcass if the weather is warm or hot; (8) a plastic tarp big enough to wrap the carcass for vehicle transport if the animal and weather are cold or a large sheet or cloth that will keep out dust and dirt but permit ventilation if the animal is not completely cooled; and (9) a pair of latex gloves.

If your deer is a trophy, talk to a taxidermist before you go hunting. Get the facts about how to remove the antlers, the head, or the head and neck so your deer can be the trophy you want to hang in the den.

*For more information from the Internet, search for "handling and processing deer."*