



Deer Processing

The quality of the venison you put on your table has a direct relationship to how well it is handled from the time of the kill to the time of processing and freezing. To protect your valuable investment, follow the suggestions in this document.

Preparation

Don't forget these important items:

- Ten to fifteen feet of strong rope to aid in dragging the deer from the kill site.
- A good hunting or skinning knife (sharp) with a 5-6 inch blade.
- A clean, sturdy plastic bag in which to place the liver and heart if saved.
- A large towel or piece of absorbent cloth (approximately one square yard) to wipe the body cavities and to dry your hands.
- Hunters, particularly those in the northwest quadrant of the state should watch for LYME DISEASE ticks on the deer they kill. It is possible for these ticks to crawl off the deer carcass and attach to humans or pets.

Before Field Dressing

Use caution as you approach a downed deer. Be sure it is dead before you get in range of its feet or antlers. If you touch the eye with a stick and the animal does not blink, you can be reasonably sure it is dead.

Field Dressing

The deer should be field dressed as soon as possible to aid in removing body heat and to prevent possible tainting of the meat from intestinal gasses which can migrate into the meat. Try to put the deer in a place where you will have plenty of room to work around it. Prop it up on its back and brace it with a rock or log. Placement on a slight slope will facilitate in draining blood from the cavities.

Begin by opening the abdomen near the breast bone. Cut through the hide along the centerline of the belly from the front to the tail. Using two fingers of the free hand to guide the blade, cut through the muscles of the belly with the sharp edge of the knife cutting outwards.

This will help avoid cutting the intestines or paunch. If an accident occurs, meat that is contaminated by intestinal contents or feces should be trimmed away and discarded.

Next, cut deeply AROUND the anus (called "ringing the butt") and leave it attached to the intestines. If possible, split the pelvic bones with a heavy knife or hand axe.

Open the chest cavity by cutting the ribs loose from the breastbone at their cartilage attachment near the midline. Split the diaphragm which separates the chest cavity from the abdomen.

Go as far as possible in the neck area and sever the esophagus (gullet) and trachea (windpipe) from their attachments. Now pull the entire contents of the chest and abdominal cavities out onto the ground in one piece, if possible, to avoid spilling ingesta, feces, or urine onto edible parts of the carcass. It is now time to remove the heart and liver if it is to be saved.

To aid in getting a quick chill of the carcass, prop open the rib cage and abdomen with sticks. This will allow more air circulation. Hang the carcass for about an hour, if possible and time permits, to allow some cooling time before transport.

The carcass is now ready to drag back to camp or to your vehicle. The deer should be kept as clean and cool as possible during transport.

DO NOT tie the carcass to the hood of your car and drive around for hours to show off your prize to everyone. **DO** get the carcass to proper refrigeration as soon as possible.

If you are going to have a commercial processing plant process the deer for you, you can take the carcass to them as soon as they can readily accept it. If you are going to process it yourself, be prepared to hold the carcass at temperatures below 40 degrees F., either by mechanical refrigeration or ice, until you are ready to cut it up. If the carcass is held outdoors until processed, temperatures of 50 to 60 degrees can cause rapid deterioration and spoilage of the meat.

Commercial Processing

Consider the following if you are going to have a commercial processor process your deer for you. In selecting a commercial processor, check to see if they have a receiving cooler adequate to hang your deer. (If it is already skinned, be sure it can be separated from unskinned

carcasses.) Cooled air circulation cannot get to carcasses that are stored in a pile on the floor.

There should be a "reconditioning" area where the carcass can be skinned and any visible contamination trimmed off the carcass. After trimming of all the visible contamination, the carcass should be thoroughly washed in an area equipped with clean running water and a floor drain. The washing should be done in a manner that does not allow splash from the washing operation to contact any other food products or processing equipment.