

The hunter is morally and legally obliged to make every possible effort to retrieve an animal he or she has hit. The search begins with a thorough examination of the shooting site to determine if and where the animal was hit and continues with careful tracking to recover the animal. This is an important and rewarding part of any hunt.

PROCESSING BIG GAME

The secret to getting good wild meat lies in fast and careful handling in the field. If you get complaints about the “gamey” flavor of the meat, chances are you didn’t look after it properly. Dirt, heat and moisture are the three main causes of meat spoilage.

Suggested Equipment for Field Dressing Large Game

Rope (3 to 4 metres)

Block and tackle gear for handling large animals

Bone saw or small axe

Strings, or cords (at least 30 cm long) for “tying off”

Rubber or plastic field dressing gloves

Clean cloths or paper towels

Cheesecloth game bags

2 sharp knives

Sharpening stone or steel

A strong, metal packframe to pack quartered animal out

To be sure of returning home with good quality table meat, follow these practices. Approach any downed game with caution and from the rear. Watch and listen to see or hear if the animal is still breathing. A live big game animal that is severely wounded can still react abruptly and can cause serious harm to an individual. As you approach the animal be sure to control the muzzle of your firearm. If the animal is lying on its side, use your foot or a stick to touch the animal on its back. The eyes of a dead animal usually remain open. If the animal doesn’t respond to your actions and it is not breathing and unable to move, touch the eye with a long stick. If the animal still doesn’t respond then it should be immediately tagged and field dressing started.

Bleeding

While bleeding an animal is traditional with most big game hunters, modern high-impact ammunition has reduced the necessity of this. The animal will normally bleed internally. Immediate field dressing will also ensure adequate bleeding.

Field Dressing

NOTE: The use of waterproof rubber, vinyl, or latex gloves is strongly recommended when field dressing game.

Field dressing should take place immediately after the kill. Do not delay. Gas, resulting from bacterial action, will immediately begin to collect in the stomach or rumen, and cause bloating. The longer you wait, the more difficult the animal is to clean and the lower the quality of the meat.

The following method is one technique for deer, moose or caribou. You may find that you prefer other methods.

1. Place the animal on its back, legs spread apart, with the head slightly uphill. Placing the animal on its back allows the stomach to fall away from the breastbone. It may be necessary to tie the legs to nearby trees, if you are alone.
2. Straddle the deer and face toward the tail. Insert the knife tip, with edge up, just below the sternum. Carefully cutting toward the tail, make a slit large enough to slip the index and middle fingers of your free hand into. With your palm facing up, spread your fingers to form a “V” and place the tip of the knife between them, edge up.
3. Forcing the abdominal wall and internal organs downward with your fingers and the back of your hand, carefully cut the hide down the centre from the breastplate to the genital region.
4. Position yourself so you are now facing the animal’s head. If the animal is male, cut the penis and scrotum free until you reach its base near the rectum. Cut a deep circle around the anus, being extremely careful not to puncture any organs or intestines. Gently pull out the “core” you have cut, until you can see the anal tube. Tie both the bladder and anal tubes closed with a strong piece of twine. This “tying off” prevents waste matter from spoiling the meat. When quartering an animal, and if regulations require it, cut through the centre of the scrotum so that one testicle remains attached to each hind quarter.

For cows or does, cut one large circle around the anus and vagina. Gently loosen and pull the “core” out until you can tie both tubes closed.

5. Repositioning yourself as in Step #2, skin the hide back from the centre. This exposes the entire abdominal cavity and keeps hair away from the meat. Using the same method with fingers spread, palm and knife edge upward, carefully cut the skin open from sternum to pelvic bone. Do not puncture any internal organs.
6. Cut any tissues connecting the reproductive organ and rectum to the pelvic area and pull them back through the pelvic canal. Do not tear or puncture the

bladder while doing this. Keep the tubes pointed away from the body cavity.

If you prefer to split the pelvic bone, use an axe or bone saw. Do not break a good knife. Cut through the fleshy part of the hams. Clear meat away, exposing the triangular bone of the pelvic region. Split the exposed pelvic bone. Cut away one inch of pelvic bone on each side of the centre cut to allow ample room to work and to reduce the risk of cutting yourself on sharp bones.

7. Open the chest cavity by slicing the diaphragm away from the inside of the ribcage. The diaphragm is the membrane attached to the back and walls of the ribcage. It separates the vital organs from the abdominal region.
8. Reach up into the throat of the animal and grasp the windpipe (trachea) and gullet (esophagus). Cut these as close to the base of the neck as possible. With a firm grip, pull the windpipe and gullet down through the chest cavity. This will pull the heart and lungs out at the same time. Cut loose any part of the diaphragm that remains attached.

If the animal is rolled to its side, all internal contents should roll out easily. Use your knife only when necessary. Drain blood from the body cavity.

If you are not having the head mounted, split the breast bone (brisket) with a knife or saw. On large game animals, cut at the juncture where the bone of the breastplate meets the cartilage of the rib cage. Do this on each side of the breastplate. This allows the breastplate to be pulled upward. Cut the joint connecting the top of the breastplate with the rib cage. Remove the breastplate. Then, using your knife, cut the flesh from the base of the neck to the base of the chin, exposing the windpipe and gullet. The carcass is now open and you are ready to remove the entrails.

Sever the windpipe and gullet as close to the chin as possible. Using a short rope, tie two half-hitches around the cut ends. The rope helps in what is otherwise a slippery operation and it prevents

spillage of the stomach contents. As you pull backward on the rope, cut the organs and diaphragm away from the body cavity. Continue pulling backward and remove the paunch from the body cavity. Cut and remove any remaining attachment of the entrails from the pelvic area.

Be careful not to contaminate the meat. If your animal was gut shot or you have punctured the intestines during field dressing, cut away the tainted meat and wash the surrounding area with a small amount of clean water. Immediately dry the body cavity with a cloth. Ordinarily, you should not wash the carcass. Water removes the glaze of blood that helps prevent bacterial action.

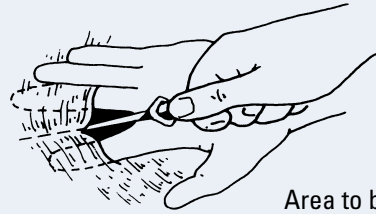
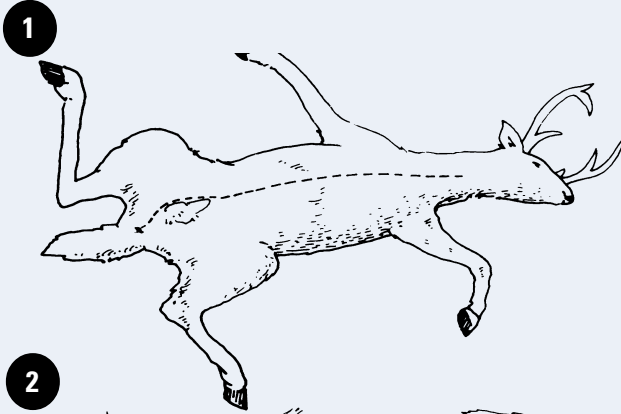
9. Remove the heart, liver and kidneys from the entrails. Place the organs on paper, cardboard or a bed of boughs to allow cooling while you quarter your animal. Do not use plastic or airtight containers for storage or transportation of organs.

CAUTION: In some regions, deer, moose and caribou have shown elevated levels of cadmium, a heavy metal, in liver and kidney tissues. To find out if this is a problem in the area you are hunting, contact the appropriate wildlife office or health department.

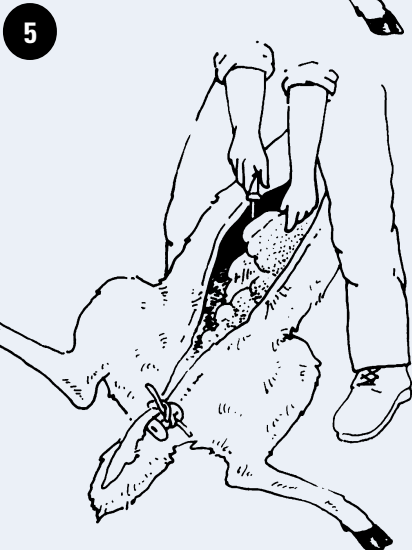
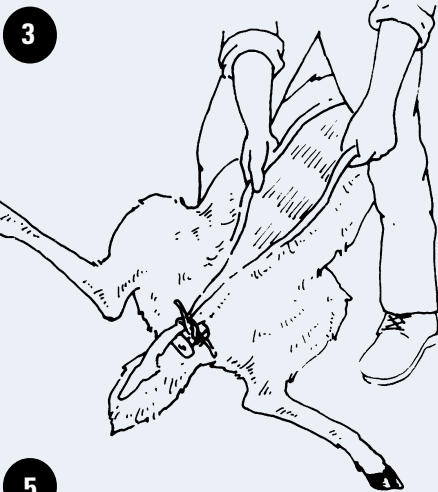
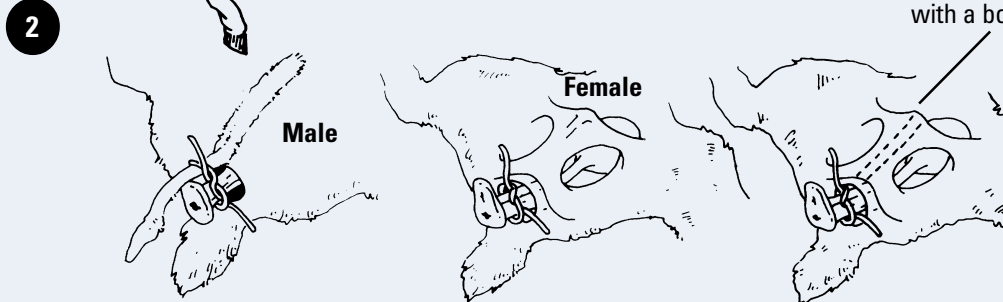
Many big game animals are shot in the evening hours, and the hunter does not have time to quarter or retrieve the carcass before dark. To aid cooling in such situations, elevate the carcass, using logs or rocks, to allow air to circulate underneath. Using a short stick, prop open the rib cage as far as possible.

Cover the carcass with trees and boughs to protect from birds and place a flag or marker in a nearby tree. The marker makes it easy to locate the kill site the next morning. Do not turn over or invert the carcass. This traps heat and prevents cooling.

Field Dressing Procedure



Area to be cut with a bone saw



Quartering

For some big game animals such as moose, quartering is recommended to aid handling and rapid cooling of the carcass. When quartering your animal, use a bone-saw. If one is not available, use your axe.

The first step is to remove the head. With your knife, cut through the flesh to the neck vertebrae. Saw through the vertebrae and using your knife again, remove the head from the carcass. Cut as close to the head as possible. Many hunters remove the head by cutting too close to the chest thus wasting many pounds of valuable mince and stew meat.

The next step is to halve the animal. With blade facing outward, place the back of your knife against the backbone between the second and third rib from the rear. Plunge the knife out through the flesh and hide. Cut upward following the second rib as a guide. Repeat this procedure on the opposite side. Saw through the backbone and use your knife to cut the remaining flesh and hide. Your animal is now halved with the floating ribs attached to the hind quarters. Next, saw straight down the backbone of the front and hind halves separating the underlying flesh and hide with your knife. You now have four quarters. The halving and quartering is made easier by elevating the carcass, using logs or sticks.

Remove the lower part of the hind legs by cutting the skin and tendons a short distance below the point of the hocks and snapping downward to break each joint. The front leg should be cut off at the knee joint. You may use your saw or axe if you wish. Finally, remove the tongue and jawbone and trim away all meat that was damaged by the gun shot.

If you have not already done so, attach and lock your tags before you remove the quarters from the place of kill.

Some provinces require you to tag the animal before field dressing. Be aware of and follow the laws of the province you are hunting in.

If you cannot remove the quarters before dark, hang them in nearby trees or elevate them on logs or trees to aid cooling. Cover with boughs to protect from birds and the weather and place a marker nearby.

Skinning, Transportation and Cooling

You are now ready to transport your animal to your hunting camp. In retrieving the quarters, it is advisable to leave the hide attached. The hide protects the meat from dirt and flies and prevents drying during the aging process. If you wish to skin your animal, which will help in cooling, you are advised to do this after the quarters have been hung at your hunting camp.

While most hunters can carry quarters on their shoulders, a sturdy metal packframe is recommended to lessen the burden. Handbars are also helpful depending upon the terrain. While backpacking, attach a piece of blaze orange cloth to each quarter to prevent “*mistaken-for-game*” accidents.

Transportation of a carcass for a few hours in your vehicle, boat or ATV seldom presents a problem. Keep the carcass clean and cool. Lay out each quarter individually. Do not stack or allow the quarters to touch. Transport the quarters with the hide down, meat side up, elevated on a rack of cut poles to allow free circulation of air.

Transport, preferably, in the back of an open pickup. Cover loosely with a porous canvas tarp or trees and boughs, in dusty or rainy conditions. Do not use plastic or air tight materials. If you transport in a covered truck or camper trailer, leave windows, air vents and tailgate open to allow good air circulation.

Upon reaching your hunting camp, hang each quarter on a constructed log-pole frame or from a cross-pole between two trees located in a shady area with good air circulation. You are strongly advised to hang the carcass overnight to facilitate cooling and to allow exposed meat to “*case*” or surface dry, before transporting home.

If you must transport it home immediately, do not hang meat in your garage, shed or unheated basement unless good air circulation exists. While your shed may feel cool, good air circulation is the critical factor in rapid cooling of the meat. If the weather is cool, you may remain in camp two to three days. If the daytime temperatures are above 15°C and more importantly, if night time temperatures are above 4°C, you should skin the quarters to aid cooling. Whether or not you skin your animal, cover each quarter with a meatsock or wrap it in cheesecloth to protect exposed meat from dirt and flies. Before doing this, it is helpful to wrap loose cardboard or branches around the quarters. This keeps the meatsock or cheesecloth from actually touching the meat, so it acts as an effective flyscreen. Many hunters have taken every precaution only to find fly spits developing where the meatsock touched the meat, thus allowing flies access to the meat. Flies are also discouraged by black pepper. Once the meat has cased, flies seldom present a problem.

Aging and Butchering

The purpose of aging is to make the meat more tender. Aging outdoors for three to five days is sufficient, depending upon air temperature. In a butcher’s cooler at 4°C, the carcass may be aged up to 14 days. Preferably, the services of a professional butcher should be used for aging and butchering. If you do the job yourself, remove as much of the fat and bone as possible. Wild animals, unlike domestic, have unsaturated fats. Unsaturated fat

turns rancid rapidly. Removal of the fat prior to freezing enhances the flavor of the meat. Removal of bones saves freezer space. Double wrap and tightly seal your meat to prevent freezer burn.

Important Note for Caribou and White-tailed Deer Hunters

Caribou and white-tailed deer, because of their social (herding) behavior, have very active scent glands. Meat quality can be affected by the tarsal glands on the inside of the hind legs at the hocks, metatarsal glands on the outside lower portion of the hind legs and the large gland on the underside of the tail. This last gland is present but not as active in white-tailed deer. Since these glands excrete a strong musk odor, hunters should avoid touching these areas and then touching exposed meat. Leave the glands attached to the skin and skin them off as you skin the quarters of carcass. These glands only open to the outside and will not taint meat if left on.

During the fall, male caribou may develop a strong ratty smell and taste. A survey of hunters showed that between October 3 and 23 about 35 percent of large stags were reported to be strong flavored. During the peak of the rut between October 10 and 15, over 50 percent of large stags were of poor quality. In some cases, the meat was so strong that it was not edible and was discarded.

Diseased Animals

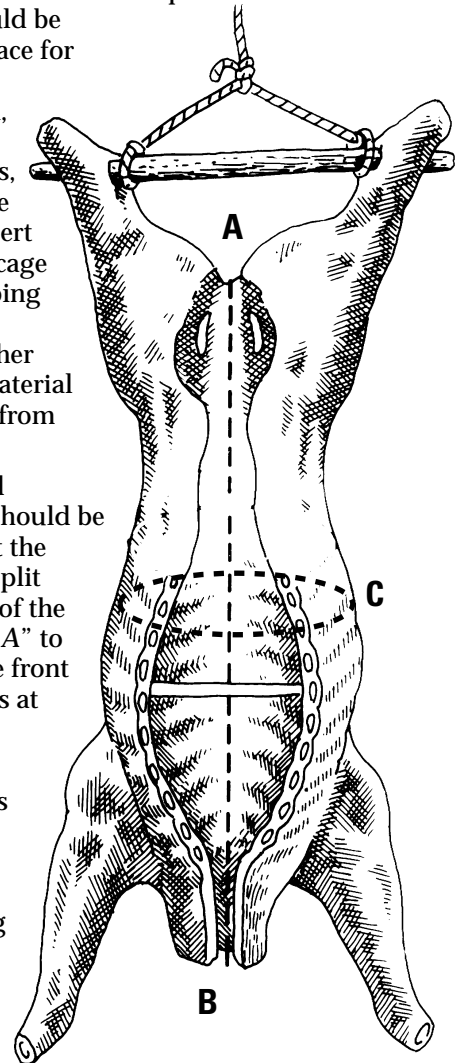
Please report any observations of injured or diseased animals to a wildlife officer.

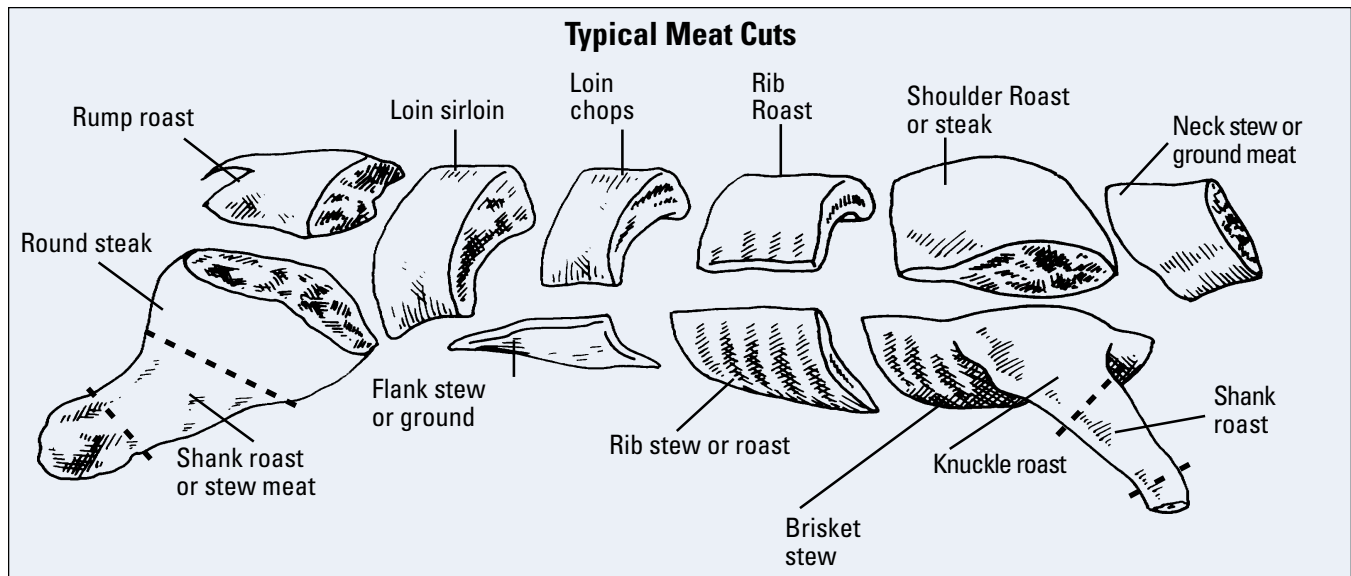
Home Care of Game Meat

The carcass, skinned and wiped free of hair with a damp cloth, should be hung in a cool place for aging at least 36 hours. A gambrel, inserted through rear hock tendons, should spread the hindquarters. Insert a stick in the rib-cage as shown. Wrapping or sacking in cheesecloth or other loosely woven material offers protection from flies.

Excess fat and bloodshot parts should be cut away. To start the cutting process, split down the length of the backbone, from "A" to "B", and separate front and hind quarters at point "C".

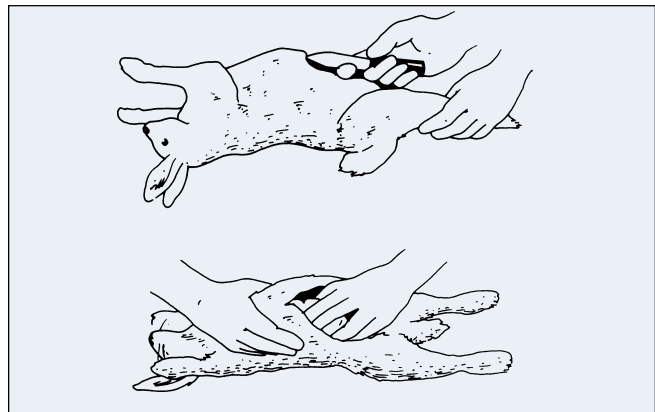
On a table or block, cut meat as shown in the figure on the following page. Further trimming cuts will be necessary before meat is wrapped and frozen.





PROCESSING SMALL GAME ANIMALS

1. Cut through the skin and pelvic bone at the anus. Cut up to the breastbone, working a finger under the blade to avoid cutting the stomach or intestines.
2. Hold the animal with one hand. With the other, reach into the body cavity and pull loose the esophagus and windpipe, and work loose the internal organs. Pull free the lower intestine and anus in a downward motion.
3. Wipe out the cavity and allow the body to cool.



PROCESSING GAME BIRDS

1. Pluck off the bird's belly feathers.
2. Make an incision at the anus, circle it with a knife, then cut up to the breastbone.
3. Insert two fingers into the body cavity and pull free the internal organs, stomach, and intestine. Pull free the lower intestine and anus.
4. Drain the cavity and store the body in a cool ventilated place.

NOTE: Federal law requires that no person shall possess or transport a migratory bird unless at least one fully feathered wing is attached to the bird.

The wing and plumage may be removed from a migratory game bird:

- when the bird is prepared for immediate cooking; or
- after the bird is taken to your residence for preservation i.e. freezing.

