

Savor the Hunt

The thrill of the hunt can continue at the dinner table if the game is handled properly along the way.

Game meats are excellent sources of protein and are similar in composition to domestic animal meats. Calorie and fat contents vary with the age and species of the animal.

A 3½-ounce portion (before cooking) of game meat provides about half of the daily adult protein requirement and about 150 calories. Game meats are usually slightly lower in total fat but higher in polyunsaturated fats than grain-fed beef.

Proper handling of the meat at each step from field to table helps ensure optimum eating quality. Keep the following food handling and hunting tips in mind.

Care in the Field

- Be prepared for the hunt.

Remember to bring a sharp hunting knife, a small hatchet, a whetstone or steel, about 12 feet of light rope or nylon cord, plastic bags, and clean cloths or paper towels. Other essentials include proper clothing, binoculars, a canteen of fresh water, a compass, a map, and matches.

In warm weather you may want to bring a can of ground pepper and some cheesecloth. The carcass may be sprinkled with pepper and covered

Care and Handling of Deer from Field to Table

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with cheesecloth to repel flies.

Abide by game regulations for hunting, transporting, and storing game.

- Bleed, field dress, and cool the carcass promptly. Improper temperature is meat's worst enemy.

The surface of the carcass may be contaminated with bacteria that can spoil the meat unless the growth is stopped by chilling.

Clean your hunting knife often with clean water and a cloth to prevent contamination of the meat.

Usually it is not necessary to bleed the animal because the bullet or arrow has caused enough damage to the animal to bleed it sufficiently. However, if the animal is shot in the head, it will need to be bled. If the animal is a trophy buck that you plan to mount,

do not sever its throat, because this will cause problems during mounting.

- Cool the animal quickly. Cool the carcass by propping the chest open with a clean stick and allowing air to circulate. Filling the cavity with bags of ice will also enhance cooling.

To aid cooling in warm weather, the deer may be skinned if you have provisions to keep the carcass clean. Use ground pepper and cheesecloth to protect the skinned carcass from contamination by flies.

In cool weather (28° to 35° F), wrap the carcass or quarters in a sheet and hang to chill in a ventilated shed.

Do not allow the carcass to freeze. Freezing may toughen the meat.

- Keep the carcass clean.

Remove all foreign particles and loose hair. Remove bloodshot areas.

Wipe out excess blood in gutted cavity with a paper towel or clean cloth and clean water. Use as little water as possible, because damp meat spoils faster than dry meat.

Do not use grass or snow to wipe out the carcass because this may contaminate the carcass.

Field Dressing

(You may wish to wear plastic surgical gloves during field dressing.)

1. Place the animal on its back with

Nutritive Value

	Preparation	Portion	Calories	Protein (g.)	Total Fat (g.)	Saturated Fat (g.)	Cholesterol (mg.)	Iron (mg.)	Sodium (mg.)	Zinc (mg.)
Deer	Roasted	3½ oz.	158	30.2	3.2	1.25	112	4.5	54	2.7

Source: USDA, *Composition of Foods*.

the front end elevated and spread the hind legs. Support the carcass in position by placing rocks or sticks on each side.

2. Cut along the midline of the belly from the breastbone to the anus. Avoid cutting into the paunch and intestines by using the handle of the knife and the heel of your hand to crowd the guts away. Cut around the anus, loosening the bung so it will come out with the guts.

3. Cut the diaphragm (The thin sheet of muscle and connective tissue between the chest and the abdomen) free from the rib cage by cutting through the white tissue near the rib cage.

4. Reach forward to cut the windpipe, gullet, and blood vessels at the base of the throat.

5. Pull the lungs, heart, and guts out of the animal. If you like variety meats, save the heart and liver in a plastic bag and put on ice.

Care in Transport and Processing

■ Keep the carcass cool during transport.

Do not tie a deer carcass across the hood of the car or put it in the trunk when it is still warm.

The game may be processed commercially or at home.

Be sure to keep the carcass cool until it reaches the locker plant. Keep the carcass out of direct sunlight and allow for adequate air circulation.

■ If you choose to process your own game, don't cross-contaminate during processing. Wash your knife, hands, and cutting board often with warm soapy water.

■ Aging meat is the practice of holding carcasses or cuts of meat at temperatures of 34° to 37° F for ten to fourteen days to allow the enzymes in the meat to break down some of the complex proteins in the carcass.

Aged meat is often more tender and flavorful.

Aging is not recommended for carcasses with little or no fat covering. They may dry out during aging.

Leave the hide on and maintain the proper temperature when aging a carcass. If you do not have the proper cooler space, spoilage or dehydration may result.

Aging the carcass two to three days is sufficient.

If you intend to grind the meat into sausage, aging is unnecessary.

Care in the Kitchen

■ For immediate use, store the meat in the refrigerator and use within two or three days.

Keep raw meat and cooked meat separate to prevent cross-contamination.

■ Freeze game properly. Prevent "freezer burn" by using the right packaging materials.

Divide meat into meal-size quantities.

Use moisture/vapor-proof wrap such as heavily waxed freezer wrap, laminated freezer wrap, heavy duty aluminum foil or freezer-weight polyethylene bags.

Press the air out of the packages prior to sealing.

Label the packages with the contents and date.

Avoid overloading the freezer. Freeze only the amount that will

become solidly frozen within 24 hours.

Game will keep nine to twelve months in the freezer if properly wrapped.

■ Do not can the meat unless you have a pressure canner.

Low-acid foods, such as meat and most mixtures of foods, should never be canned using the water bath method.

Pressure and adequate time are necessary to produce safe canned meat. For the latest canning information, contact your county extension office.

■ Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator or microwave oven. Cook game meats thoroughly.

Foods thawed in the microwave oven should be cooked immediately. Refrigerator-thawed meat should be used within one to two days.

■ Game meats should be cooked to at least 160° F or until gray inside to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

Big game animals usually exercise more than domestic animals, so game meats may be drier and less tender. Moist heat methods, such as braising (simmering in a small amount of liquid in a covered pot), may result in a better product. Chops and steaks may be pan fried or broiled.

The distinctive flavor of game meats is mainly due to the fat they contain. To reduce the gamey flavor, trim the fat from the meat. You may wish to add other sources of fat to maintain the juiciness of the meat.

Spices or marinades may be used to mask the gamey flavor. Meat should always be marinated in the refrigerator.

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