

Venison

Skinning

Processing

- Cut away any traumatized tissue around the wound.
- Remove the inner loins, so they will not dry out as quickly.
- Remove the back strap and remove the heavy membrane and connective tissue.
- Quarter the deer & debone, doing the front legs first, then the rear legs.
- Cut around the front shoulder. Lift the front leg up from the chest and cut the meat attached to the rib cage. Work the knife against the ribs to cut the connective tissue attaching the meat to the ribs. The last cut will be made at the top of the shoulder blade where it attaches to the withers.
- Cut around the rear leg. Lift the rear leg out from the carcass and cut the meat attached to the skeleton. Work the knife between the ball and socket.
- The ribs may be boned out and used for ground meat or sausage material.
- If the weather is warmer than 45° F, the carcass

If you choose to process your own deer, be careful not to cross-contaminate the meat. Wash your hands, knife, and any other tool you use with warm, soapy water often during processing. If warm, soapy water isn't available, you may want to keep Clorox wipes in a Ziploc bag with you.

If the carcass is going to be aged (*See the section on aging*), it is best to leave the hide on until processing, so the meat doesn't dry out as quickly.

It is easier to skin a deer if it is hanging by its back legs (however, if the deer was gut shot, hang it by the head, so more of the meat does not get contaminated). Be careful not to cut the tendon above the hock, since that is how the deer is hung head down from a gambrel.

With a sharp knife, cut the skin around the hock of the rear legs and slit the skin on the inside of the leg to the pelvis.

Peel the hide off the carcass, turning it inside out to avoid letting the hair touch the meat. Pull the hide with one hand and use a balled fist to push between the hide and the meat to help remove the skin without tearing or cutting. For difficult places, use a knife.

Cut and skin the front legs like the rear legs.

If having the head mounted, be extra careful when skinning the deer. You might want to leave the head and hide intact as far back as the rear of the shoulder where the front legs connect and let the taxidermist finish from there. Again consider contacting a taxidermist before you begin processing to see how they prefer this to be done.

After cutting the skin and head from the carcass, roll the skin up inside out and place it in a plastic garbage bag along with the head and/or antlers and tie it securely. Freeze immediately.

If you do not have the freezer space needed, take the head and hide to your taxidermist immediately. Hides may be salted to preserve them if freezing is not possible. Salting will slow the activity of the bacteria that can ruin the hide, but freezing will provide far better results. This is especially true if the head is still intact and there is flesh on the hide.

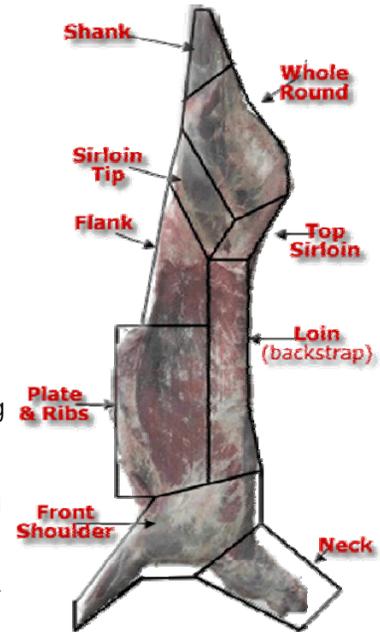


Photo by Kenny Holley of Austin Holley

Venison

Skinning



Whitetail deer at various stages of processing:

Cut off as much of the fat as possible to reduce gamey flavor (other types of fat may be added while grinding: up to 2 lbs. of beef fat to 10 lbs. of venison. Add up to one ounce of sausage seasoning to 3lbs. of venison).

A vinegar-soaked cloth will remove hairs that can also produce undesirable flavors.

Refrigerate immediately. If you do not have a properly chilled (34 -38° F) holding place, cut the carcass and freeze the meat as soon as possible.

| | <i>Whole Body*</i> | <i>Field Dressed**</i> | <i>Carcass***</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Average Weight | 148 lbs | 115 lbs | 96 lbs |
| Average Yield of Meat | 51.7% | 61.1% | 71.6% |

*Whole body is the weight of the entire animal minus blood lost during harvest.

**Field dressed is the whole body weight minus the entrails.

Resources:

Bulletin 581, 1975 Success—You Have Your Deer! Ohio State University.

Jopp, L., 2004. Savor the Deer Hunt – Keep the Venison Safe. University of Minnesota Food Safety Education & Research

Reynolds, A.E., Christian, J.A., 2004. Venison from Field to Table: Getting the Most Out of Your Deer. <http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b915-w.html>

Veronica Wilcox, WVU Extension Tyler County, 2011

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University. West Virginia University is governed by the Board of Trustees of the University System of West Virginia.



Photo by Kenny Holley of Madison