

## ***How to Field Dress Deer*** ***by Clair Rees***

**Venison can be delicious, but only if it's been properly cared for..** This care begins in the field immediately after you've downed your deer. It's vital to dress the animal quickly to prevent meat from spoiling or becoming tainted.

Your first priority is cooling the carcass down. This means removing the entrails so air can circulate through the body cavity. Note: before you begin dressing the animal, be sure it's properly tagged. If you want a few photos of your kill, take them quickly. Then it's time to start work.

If the animal is lying in the sun, drag it into a shady area if one is nearby. Prop the carcass on its back. If you're on a slope, move the carcass until the hindquarters are downhill. Roll up your sleeves; if you have a set of deer-dressing gauntlets available, put them on. You don't need a huge knife to dress a deer. Any knife with a sharp, sturdy blade more than 3 inches long should do the trick (a slightly longer blade comes in handy for the first step in the cutting process).

The first cut should encircle the anus. Hold the anal (lower intestine) tube clear with one hand while you cut with the other. Keep cutting until the intestine is fully separated from the connective tissue surrounding it. Try to prevent any dung pellets that may be expelled from falling into the cavity. Also, be sure you're aware of any state regulations that may require you to leave sex organs attached, not cut from the carcass. The first cuts should remove a buck's penis and scrotum.

Next, carefully slit the skin over the stomach, beginning at the anus and working the knife all the way to the animal's throat. Don't cut too deeply; you're only trying to cut through the skin. Extend the cut as far forward as possible. (If you intend to have the head mounted, stop the cut below the brisket to provide the taxidermist a solid cape.)

The next step is to return to the anus and begin opening the body . Also, be sure you're aware of any state regulations that may require you to leave sex organs attached, and not cut from the carcass cavity. Again, take care not to cut too deeply. You want to cut through the membrane covering the entrails, but avoid puncturing the intestines or stomach. One way to keep the knife from over-penetrating is to cradle the tip of the blade, cutting edge up, between your index and middle fingers. Use your fingers as a guide as you cut upwards toward the throat. The entrails will spill from the body cavity as you cut.

You can stop cutting when you reach the breastbone, or use a meat saw (or heavy-bladed knife) to cut through the breastbone and separate the ribs. If you're using a saw, angle the blade to prevent it from penetrating too deeply into the body cavity. If you use a knife, be sure to always cut away from you, never toward your body.

Once the carcass is fully open, carefully cut away all connective tissue holding the entrails inside the rib cage. Next, reach as high as possible inside the throat cavity and cut completely through the windpipe. A firm two-handed tug should pull the windpipe free, along with the remaining entrails. Cut away any bloodshot tissue. If you intend to eat the heart and liver, keep them clean and allow them to cool. Then place the organs in a fly-proof container.

---

**Unless air temperature is above 50 degrees F., don't remove the skin. Skin helps keep the meat clean and fresh.**

---

If possible, hang the carcass in the shade and allow it to cool. Otherwise, turn the carcass on its back and use sticks to hold the body cavity open to promote air circulation. Unless air temperature is above 50 degrees F., don't remove the skin. Skin helps keep the meat clean and fresh. If possible, leave the skin on until you're home and ready to butcher the animal. Unless it's too cold for flies to be active, completely cover the carcass with a good commercial deer bag. Don't rely on cheesecloth to protect meat from becoming contaminated with fly eggs.