

Field Dressing

General comments:

- A lot of meat that comes into butchers has been poorly handled in the field due to ignorance in how to take apart an animal in the field to yield both the best quality cuts and the most amount of meat.
- A lot of waste also occurs due to improper handling of the meat once it arrives back at hunter's home.

Before your hunt:

1. Review the meat charts to help you plan what will end up in your freezer

- Know what cuts you want to get from the animal that you have harvested, that way you can locate, preserve and protect those parts of an animal and maximize the cuts that you want to get
- How you field dress your harvest is based on a personal assessment of your interest in obtaining the various cuts of steaks, roasts, stew, ribs, burger, etc.
- How you bring your meat home will have a bearing on how you process the meat for the freezer

2. Review the equipment that will be needed in order to successfully complete the task of field dressing and protecting/preserving the meat

- Basic/minimum items you should have:
 - Medium length sturdy knife (ensure it has been sharpened well before the trip)
 - Sharpening steel (or other knife sharpening device)
 - Roofer's knife/hooks knife for making the opening cuts in the skin
 - Sufficient number of good quality meat bags (fine mesh)
 - A clean small or medium size tarp (preferably new)
 - Minimum of 25' of sturdy cord (more for working on larger animals)
 - Some large zip-loc bags for organ eaters/barterers
 - Folding meat saw
 - Roll of surveyors flagging tape
- Additional items
 - Extra rope for hanging bags and quarters to cool
 - A spare knife or two
 - A second larger tarp for covering meat from rain
 - A light weight come-along
 - A pack for carrying meat back to camp/other mode of transport

The 3 most important rules of field dressing:

1. Keep meat cool:

- Meat is highly perishable and spoils quickly if it doesn't cool down fairly quickly. For large cuts of moose or bison, this would be 10-12 hours. To achieve this, 360° air circulation is required

2. Keep meat clean:

- Wild game meat is highly prized and valuable as a processed product.
- By comparison, a similar organic grown product would be more than \$10/lb. Extra trimming required to remove dirt, leaves, etc. from the surface of the meat is one of the biggest contributors to loss of meat.

3. Keep meat dry:

- This reduces the conditions on the surface of the meat in which bacteria grow. Once surface is dry, it must be kept dry by either hanging it somewhere where a breeze or fan is able to evaporate off expelled moisture.

MEAT PROCESSING

You have arrived home with your harvested animal and are ready to start processing the meat.

- Included in your pre-hunt preparations was a careful study of the meat cut chart
- You field dressed your animal in such a way to ensure the greatest variety of cuts available to put in your freezer.

Once at home

1. Clean and store your gear

2. Check all your bags of meat

- Visual and sniff test to determine if bacteria has begun to cause any spoilage
- Meat is highly perishable and once spoilage starts, it will taint the meat and make it inedible in a very short time

3. Hanging your meat

- The age of the animal that you harvested will determine how long the meat should be hung to age
- Different portions should be aged differently
- When determining how long to hang your meat, consider how long it has been since the animal was harvested and hung in the field
- Carcasses hung in ideal conditions (4°C) approached maximum tenderness within 7-14 days.
- Wild game is most often not handled as well so the above time frame will often result in excessive drying and/or spoilage. This means less meat that you put in your freezer.
- If you want to get the most and best cuts from the animal harvested, processing your animal sooner rather than later is always the best course

4. Start with the loose bits

- Neck meat
- Meat from the ribs
- Flank meat

5. Clean the various pieces first then cube them to fit in the meat grinder

6. Place the cubes in plastic pails

7. Grind some of this meat for immediate use and store the rest to be used for burger or sausages in the future

8. Next, process the ribs and loin meat

- These cuts are relatively tender or will be tenderized in the cooking process
- Excessive hanging = more loss by drying than what may be gained by hanging the pieces for a longer time

9. Lastly, process the hind and front quarters

- Hanging these portions will provide a better ratio of meat to trim in relation to the time spent hanging

Cold induced toughening

- Occurs when the internal temperature of meat is dropped too quickly
- This stops the natural process that allows for the connections within the muscle to break down
- Common in the winter if the meat is not protected from freezing
- Once this happens, aging is negligible regardless of time spent hanging