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HEG81-144 Home Processing of Chickens

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Home Processing of Chickens

This NebGuide provides complete step-by-step instructions with pictures for home processing of chickens.

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Steps for processing chickens are feed withdrawal, killing, scalding, plucking, eviscerating, cooling, packaging, and freezing.

Begin the process by removing feeders the night before birds are to be dressed. This empties the gut and reduces fecal contamination if the intestines are cut during evisceration.

It is important to start with clean equipment, working surfaces and hands. Keep tools clean as you work. Spoilage and disease are not easily transferred to the carcass when you work in a clean manner.

Frozen poultry will stay flavorful for 6-8 months. After that they may become rancid. As long as they stay frozen they will be wholesome for 12-15 months.

To thaw, place the carcass in the refrigerator for 24-48 hours. If speed is necessary, thaw it in a pan with running cold water or a microwave oven (follow maker's directions) until soft and the joints are movable. Keep the thawed chicken refrigerated at 40-45 °F until cooking time. Thawed storage shouldn't exceed two days.

1. Equipment and materials:
Small cloth bag, 1 sharp butcher and 1 table knife, one 3 gal. scald bucket, hot water and unscented no-suds dish detergent, water proof work table that's easily cleaned, one large and one small container of ice water, freezer bags, paper, or foil.



2. Prepare the scald water. Heat and keeps the water at 138-140°F. Add 2 Tbs. of unscented, no-suds dish detergent in 3 gal. of water.



3. Humane killing. Put the bird in a small cloth bag that has a *very small* part of one corner cut off. Draw the head and neck through the



4. Hold the head so your fingers are out of the way. Put the heel of the knife on the earlobe just behind the jaw bone. Cut through the earlobe from top to bottom with a swift firm stroke of the knife (*Do not cut to the bone*). This will cut the blood vessels located in the side of the neck.



hole in the corner. Tie the bag around the feet and hang it from a clothesline or other support.



5. Hold the bird's head to make sure you have a good flow of blood. If necessary repeat the cut. Release and wait till the bird stops its reflex struggle (2-3 minutes).



6. Scalding. Remove bird from the sack. Hold the bird by the feet and plunge it head first into the scald water. Keep fully submerged and work up and down to get the water well under the feathers (About 1-2 minutes).



7. Test the feathers by pulling a few from the leg. Continue to scald until the feathers pull easily.



8. Plucking. Rehang the bird or work on a table top. Pull the main wing and tail feathers first. Pluck the body feathers by pulling against the grain. Work quickly while the carcass is warm.



9. Use a table knife to remove pin feathers.



10. Evisceration. It's easier if the carcass is hung by the feet. Cut around the neck at the base of the head.



11. Twist and pull the head off.



12. Open the neck. Start between the shoulders and cut the skin open *along the back of the neck*.



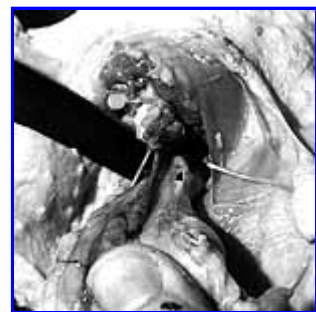
13. Cut around the neck where it joins the back. Don't cut the gullet or windpipe.



14. Grasp the neck and body firmly, twist to break the neck and pull it free from the body. Put the neck in ice water.



15. Remove crop. At the shoulder, push a finger along the side of the neck stub and behind the crop. Work the crop loose being careful not to tear it open.



16. Cut the gullet and windpipe where they enter the body cavity. Pull downward and strip them from the neck skin.



17. Push a finger into the body cavity along the backbone. Work loose the heart and lower gullet that

are attached to the spine. This will make the viscera easier to remove at a later time.



18. Remove the oil gland. Hold the gland and cut from the back to front.



19. Open the abdomen. Poke a finger into the vent and push the intestines away from the back. Push the knife through the skin and cut between the vent and tail. Keep the knife point close to the backbone. Do not cut the intestines.



20. Cut along the side of the vent to the tip of the keel.



21. Work the knife behind your finger and cut the skin on the other side of the vent. Rinse your hands.



22. Steady the bird and insert a hand into the body along the keel until you can grab the gizzard. Pull the gizzard out of the body. Let it and the intestines hang.



23. Again reach in along the keel and pull out the heart and liver. All viscera should come free of the body. Save viscera for the liver, gizzard and heart.



24. Reach into the ribs and remove the lungs. Peel them out with your finger tips.



25. Remove the feet. Grasp the drumstick or feet so the front of the hock joint is toward you. Put pressure on the back of the hock.



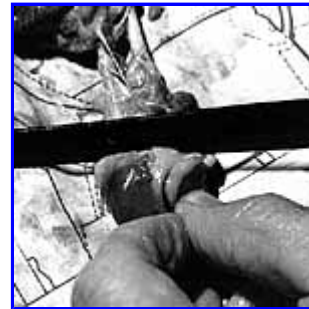
Cut between the knobs of the joint. Wash your hands and the carcass. Put the carcass in ice water.



26. Giblet preparation. Cut the liver from the gall bladder and intestines. Do not break open the gall bladder. Wash and put in ice.



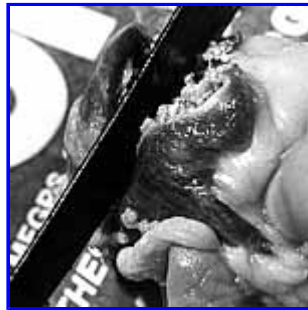
27. Cut the intestine from the gizzard. Put in a separate pan of ice water.



28. Cut the heart loose and pull away the membrane sac that holds it. Put in ice water.



29. Let everything chill for two hours.



30. Clean the gizzards after chilling. Hold the gizzard with the intestine openings up and pointing away from you. Cut through the top of the gizzard from front to back.



31. Open the gizzard and empty the contents. Wash.

33. You can cut up the carcass now using HEG81-145 and HEG81-146 or package the whole bird.



32. Peel out the lining. This is done easily when the gizzard is cold. Wash.



34. Packaging. Wash and drain each chilled carcass or part. Put a set of giblets (neck, liver, heart and gizzard) with each bird.



35. Put each carcass in a plastic freezer bag or wrapper. Squeeze out the air and seal.



36. Freeze at 0°F or below. Leave air space around each carcass for more rapid freezing. When frozen, you can store them more compactly.

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