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### G76-279 Processing Deer

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# Processing Deer

It is important to process game properly to obtain maximum flavor and storage stability.

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It is a pleasure to hunt game, but perhaps an even greater satisfaction comes from eating the meat. In order to have a flavorful experience, the game animal must be handled, processed and prepared properly. If the game is improperly processed or handled, one may lose much of the desirable flavor and storage stability.

## Processing Deer

### Equipment:

To assure easy handling of your deer, proper equipment should be available. Equipment needed includes: (1) a sharp hunting knife; (2) a small hatchet; (3) 12 to 15 feet of light rope or nylon cord; (4) 2 or 3 large plastic bags; (5) a clean cloth; (6) cheese cloth to wrap the carcass if the animal is killed in hot weather, thereby requiring skinning and wrapping for proper cooling.

### Bleeding:

After the animal is shot, approach with caution. Avoid standing near the legs until you are certain the deer is dead.

A deer with warmth in the carcass should be bled. Insert the hunting knife in the base of the neck a few inches in front of the breast. The blade should be inserted about 4 to 5 inches with the blade pointed toward the tail. Cut sideways to sever veins. Thoroughly drain blood by elevating the rear portion of the deer.

### Dressing:

The deer should be dressed promptly and carefully. Viscera is easier to remove if the deer is hanging by the head or lying on the back with rump downhill. If a tree is nearby, the animal may be hung, using a rope (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 1.**

Remove sex organs first (*Figure 2*). Cut along the midline of the body from the breast to the rectum (*Figure 3*). Avoid puncturing paunch or intestines by holding them back with back of the hand and guiding the knife between the first two fingers with the cutting edge up. The pelvis should be split where the hind legs are joined by making a cut with the white membrane that separates the two rounds. At the pelvis fusion point it may be necessary to use the hatchet, particularly if the deer is older (*Figure 4*).



**Figure 2.**

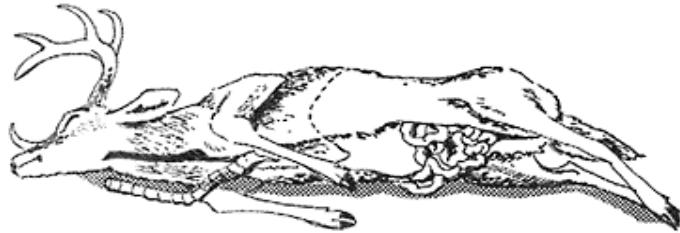


**Figure 3.**

Cut around the rectum and remove all viscera (*Figure 5*). Save the liver, heart and tongue. Place these in plastic bags and cool.



**Figure 4.**



**Figure 5.**

Wipe out the body cavity with a clean cloth. It is best to use no water, since it may speed spoilage.

If a particular part is mutilated or bloody from the shot, it should be removed immediately and soaked in a weak salt solution (one-fourth pound salt to one gallon of water) for 24 to 48 hours. This will make the meat suitable for boiling or grinding. Badly mutilated parts may be used for dog food.

### **Skinning:**

If the weather is warm, it is better to skin the deer in the field because the insulating affect of the skin hinders proper cooling. In this case skin the deer. It is usually easier to skin by hanging the deer from a tree. After skinning, sprinkle black pepper on the carcass and wrap in cheesecloth. Provide plenty of air circulation around the carcass to allow for cooling

During cool weather it is preferable to leave the skin on the carcass. The skin will protect the carcass, keep the meat clean and prevent excessive shrinkage during aging. Some people prefer to have a locker skin, hang, cut, wrap and freeze the deer.

### **Transporting:**

The carcass should not be placed over the hood of the car where it may be exposed to exhaust fumes or excessive heat. If the car has a luggage rack, this may be the preferable place for hauling the carcass. A clean trunk or truck bed is also acceptable.

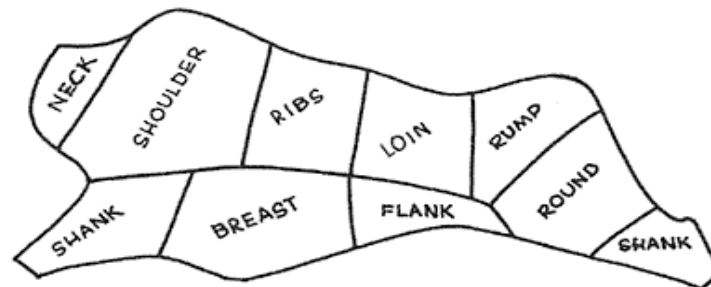
### **Hanging Cooling and Aging:**

It is important to remove the body heat from the animal as soon as possible. Aging carcasses at refrigerated temperatures for 10 to 14 days tenderizes the meat. Animals killed when temperatures are over 65 degrees Fahrenheit should be handled differently than those slaughtered at cold temperatures. At 65 degrees Fahrenheit, the carcass tenderizes much more quickly and requires less aging. Perhaps no

further aging would be needed at this temperature. Care should be taken in warm temperatures to avoid spoilage of the meat and prevent loss of flavor. It is best to cool the meat as rapidly as possible.

Carcasses from animals shot in cold weather should be aged at 34 degrees Fahrenheit for about 14 days.

### Cutting-Up:

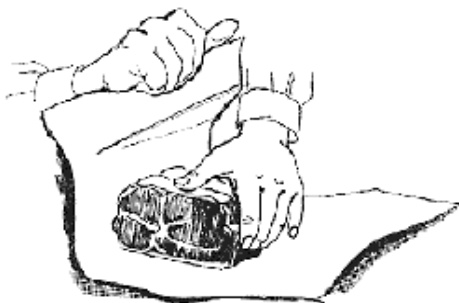


**Figure 6.**

*Figure 6* shows the cuts to be made if you decide to cut the carcass yourself. Locker plants can do this professionally, usually at a moderate cost. They can also blend inferior cuts with pork to make a desirable sausage.

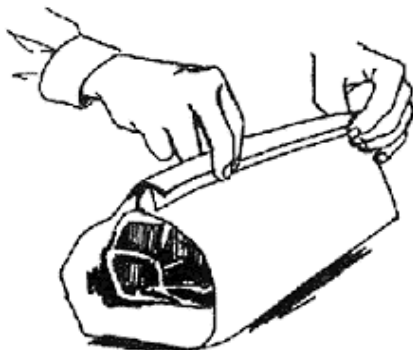
### Packaging and Freezing:

Deer should be well-wrapped to avoid development of off-flavor in storage. Heavy duty aluminum foil is a good packaging material. Use a packaging material that is a good moisture and air barrier. Air and loss of moisture causes more rapid flavor deterioration.



**Figure 7. Place meat in center of wrap.**

The drug store wrap is the preferred method of wrapping meat (*Figures 7, 8 and 9*). This method uses less wrapping material than the butcher wrap and provides a tighter, neater wrap.



**Figure 8. Fold wrap tightly against meat.**

Place the meat cut in the center of the wrapping material. It is convenient to place freezer paper, plastic wrap or foil between steaks to prevent them from sticking to each other. Two sheets between the steaks make them easier to separate. Put the opposite edges of the paper together and fold down against the meat to provide an air-tight seal. Fold the ends and press firmly against the package. Seal ends and seams with freezer tape.

The butcher wrap is faster, but not as air free as the drug store wrap. The meat is placed in the center of a square piece of freezer paper. Fold one corner over the meat. Then fold the two side corners over the

meat. Roll over toward the remaining corner to provide a complete wrap around the meat.



**Figure 9. Tape ends to avoid air leaks and dehydration.**

Packages should be labeled to identify the contents as venison, the date, name and hunting permit number of the owner. Venison given to another person should have a statement attached indicating the person who harvested the deer, his hunting permit number, and the name of the person receiving the venison. Deer meat may be legally stored until June 1 following the hunting season. A cold storage permit tag should be attached to each package stored in a commercial locker. Storage permit tags are available at no cost from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Venison will keep in satisfactory

condition for this period at zero degrees Fahrenheit or lower. Ground deer meat should not be kept longer than 4 months in frozen storage.

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***File G279 under WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT***

***E-2, Game Processing***

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