

Field Dressing Deer *Pocket Guide*

PENNSSTATE



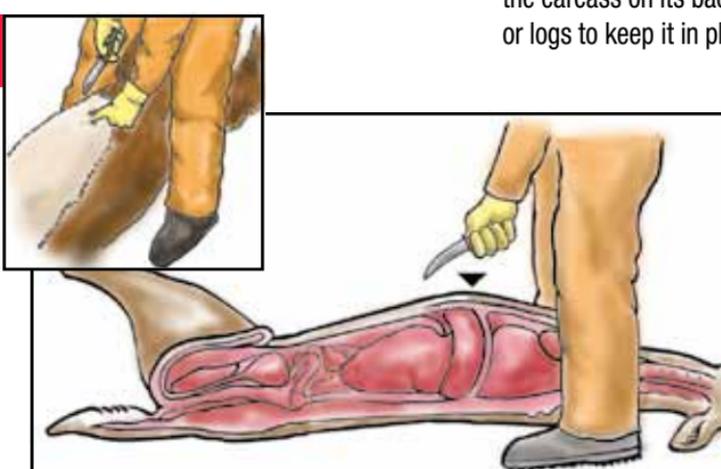
College of Agricultural Sciences
Cooperative Extension

- Field dress deer as soon as possible to ensure rapid loss of body heat, prevent surface bacteria from growing, and maintain overall quality of the meat.
- To reduce your risk of exposure to disease, wear disposable plastic gloves while handling animals. Wash hands and arms thoroughly with soap and water before and after dressing.

Using clean water, pre-moistened wipes, or alcohol wipes, clean your knife frequently between cuts to prevent bacterial contamination.

- Use 6–8 feet of rope to tie one of the animal's legs to a tree to open up the carcass for field dressing. Spread the hind legs by propping a branch between them or position the carcass on its back with rocks or logs to keep it in place.

1



Step 1: Start your cut at the bottom of the breastbone.

- Using a clean knife, make a shallow cut by lifting the skin and muscle together.

2



Step 2: Open the body cavity.

- Position the knife within the cut with the blade facing upwards.
- Insert 2 fingers (one on each side of the knife blade in the shape of a “V”) in the slit next to the breastbone and push the entrails away from the blade.
- Do not pierce the entrails.
- Make an incision following the midline from the breastbone to the pelvis.

3



Step 3: Remove the reproductive organs.

- Use a smaller incision to prevent contamination when dragging or carrying the deer.

4



Step 4: Cut the skin and muscle from the bottom of the breastbone to the brisket.

- Hold the knife with blade facing upward.

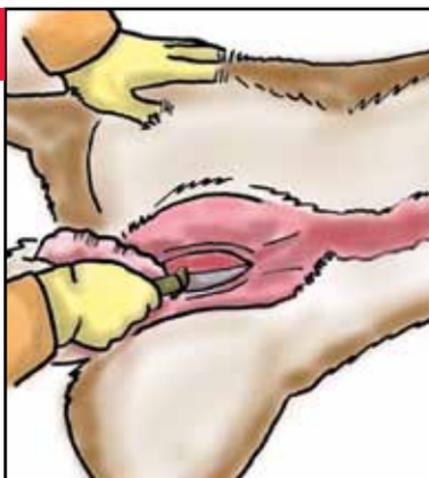
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Step 5: Split the rib cage at the breastbone.

- Cut through the breastbone with a knife or use a small saw on older or large animals.

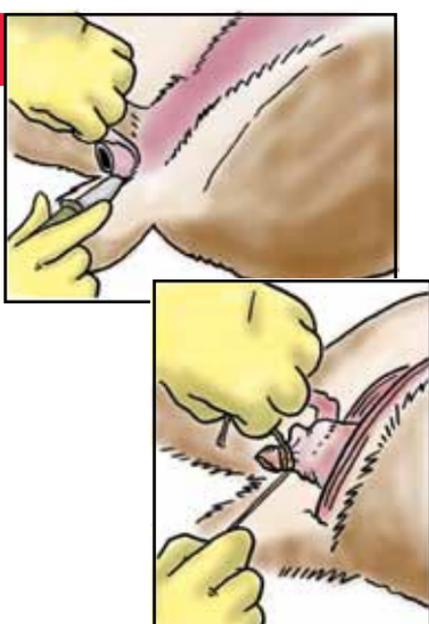
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Step 6: Follow the previous incision from the pelvis to the anus.

- Split the pelvic bone with a saw.
- Carefully cut around the urethra. **Do not sever.**

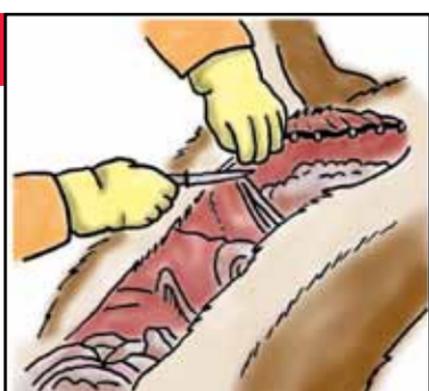
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Step 7: Carefully remove the anus.

- Cut around the anus, loosening its connective tissues.
- Tie off the anus with rubber bands or string.
- Pull the anus and large intestine into the body cavity.

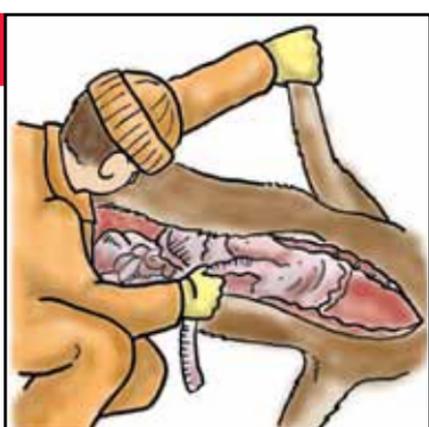
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Step 8: Make your final cuts.

- Hold open the rib cage. Reach into the cavity and cut the diaphragm free from the rib cage down to the backbone.
- Avoid cutting the stomach or intestines to reduce contamination.

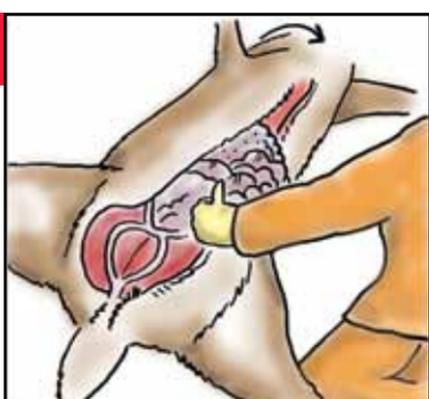
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Step 9: Roll the carcass onto its side to spill out the entrails.

- Loosen connective tissues as needed.
- Remove the windpipe and esophagus.

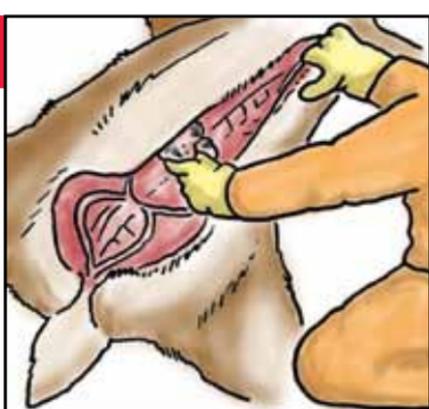
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Step 10: Place the liver and heart in resealable plastic bags and chill.

- **Do not eat the meat** if the organs smell bad, exhibit greenish discharge, have blood clots, are discolored, or exhibit any other abnormality. Do not take any risks if in doubt about the health of the deer.

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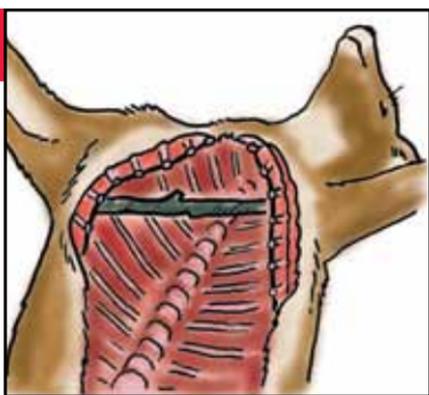
Step 11: Clean, ventilate and dry the body cavity.

- Prop open the body cavity with a clean stick or branch.
- Remove all visible dirt, feces, hair, and bloodshot areas.
- Clean out entrail residue and drain excess blood.

If gut shot...

- Field dress as soon as possible to remove the entrails.
- Trim all visible feces or ingesta with a clean knife. Clean the knife regularly between cuts.
- If you need to wash the cavity to remove contamination, dry it thoroughly with a dry cloth or paper towels.
- Prop open the body cavity to circulate air.

12



Step 12: Wipe the inside of the body cavity with a dry cloth or paper towels.

- Use clean water and dry the insides thoroughly if you choose to rinse out the cavity.

Rapidly chill the carcass by inserting ice packs, milk jugs full of ice, or plastic bags filled with snow into the body cavity and tying the cavity shut with string. If snow or ice is not available, allow adequate air circulation into the cavity and keep the carcass out of direct sunlight.

Upon arrival at home or camp, remove the hide and refrigerate the carcass (below 40°F) as soon as possible to prevent spoilage and maintain the quality of the meat.

Always remove the hide before taking the carcass to the processor.

Note: Please be sure to follow your state laws when it comes to tagging requirements or identification of your animal. In Pennsylvania, deer must be tagged immediately after harvest and before the carcass is moved. The tag must be attached to the ear and remain attached until the animal is processed for consumption or prepared for mounting.

Information presented in this pocket guide was compiled by Catherine N. Cutter in the Department of Food Science.

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