

Taking care of your game post-harvest

Proper field dressing and care of your game post-harvest is essential for safe and high-quality meat. A game animal's body-especially the intestines-begins to decompose within one to two hours of death. This is especially a worry if temperatures are unseasonably warm (above 45 degrees) during your hunt, as the bacteria that cause illness and spoilage flourish at warmer temperatures.

To prevent this, field-dress your game promptly after harvest, ideally within a half-hour. Quick and careful removal of the intestines is a priority, as this is where most of the bacteria are found. Wear disposable gloves and use clean knives and utensils, both to keep the meat clean and to protect yourself from the animal's blood. (There are several illnesses which hunters can acquire from the blood of an infected game animal). A guide to proper field-dressing can be found at <http://extension.psu.edu/food/safety/educators/fact-sheets-brochures-books/game-meats/proper-field-dressing-and-handling-of-wild-game-and-fish>

If you will be taking your deer or other game to a locker or other facility for processing, call or talk to the processor beforehand to ask how they would prefer to receive the meat. Many processors prefer to receive the whole, hide-on, field-dressed carcass. This method works well, as the hide protects the meat during transport. Lockers have large coolers and freezers to chill and preserve carcasses and meat; take your deer to the locker as soon as reasonably possible for best safety and quality.

If you will be boning out the carcass yourself, be sure to use food-safe containers to store or transport the meat. Clear plastic, "zipper-lock" style bags (found in the food-storage section of most grocery stores) are food-safe, available in large sizes, and will not leech chemicals or cause off-odors or flavors.

Do NOT use plastic garbage bags or other containers not designed and approved for food-storage to store your meat. Plastic garbage bags are NOT food-safe; they are designed to hold garbage, not food, and may have been treated with scents, deodorants, or other compounds meant to reduce odors and discourage pests. These compounds can leech into your meat and cause off odors, off flavors, or safety issues. **Processors are well within their rights to refuse game meat delivered in unsafe containers,** especially if your meat will be commingled with that of other hunters to make sausages, sticks or other products.

You put a lot of time, effort and money into your successful hunt; spend just a little more to ensure safe (and delicious) results.