

Freezing Tips

- Cut and package the meat into meal-size portions.
- Use heavily waxed paper, freezer wrap, heavy-duty aluminum foil, or plastic freezer storage bags for meat storage.
- Wrap meat tightly, and remove all air from the bag before sealing.
- Label packages with contents and dates.
- Space packages in freezer to allow proper air circulation for cooling and freezing.
- Once packages are solidly frozen (within 24 hours), you can restack them within the freezer.
- Properly wrapped game meat will store in the freezer for 9 to 12 months. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, it is legal to have venison in home freezers year-round.
- To avoid quality deterioration, do not refreeze thawed products.

For more information about food safety, contact Penn State's Department of Food Science at (814) 865-5444.

Prepared by Catherine N. Cutter, assistant professor of food science.

Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research, extension, and resident education programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This publication is available from the Publications Distribution Center, The Pennsylvania State University, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802. For information telephone (814) 865-6713.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Pennsylvania Legislature. T. R. Alter, Director of Cooperative Extension, The Pennsylvania State University.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

The Pennsylvania State University is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. The Pennsylvania State University does not discriminate against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status. Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to the Affirmative Action Director, The Pennsylvania State University, 201 Willard Building, University Park PA 16802-2801; Tel. (814) 865-4700/V; (814) 863-1150/TTY.

2C5/00PSDocu

PROPER CARE AND HANDLING OF

VENISON

From Field to Table



To reduce the risk of food-borne illness, hunters need to handle, process, and prepare deer properly, being careful to prevent contamination from the field to the table. This publication contains guidelines and helpful hints to help you make sure that the food you're providing is safe.

PENNSTATE



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Bring These Items When You Hunt

A sharp knife

A small hatchet

A whetstone or steel for sharpening

Several feet of rope or nylon cord

Six-inch rubber bands

Clean cloths or paper towels

Sealable storage bags

A large cooler full of ice or snow

Ground pepper and cheesecloth

Disposable plastic gloves for dressing

Clean drinking water

Field Dressing

- To reduce the risk of exposure to disease, wear disposable plastic gloves while handling deer.
- Use clean water, premoistened wipes, or alcohol swabs to clean the knife frequently or between cuts to avoid dragging bacteria into the meat.
- Place the deer on its back, elevate its front legs, and spread its hind legs. Support carcass in this position with rocks or sticks.
- Cut around the anus to loosen the bung so it will come out when the entrails are removed. Tying off the bung with rope, cord, or rubber bands will prevent feces from contacting the carcass during removal.
- Using a clean knife, cut along the midline from the breastbone to the anus (to keep from dragging feces). Make the cut by lifting the skin and muscle together.
- Avoid cutting the paunch and intestines, since bacteria associated with food-borne illness may be found in these organs.
- If the organs smell offensive or exhibit greenish discharge, black blood, or blood clots in the muscle, do not consume meat from this carcass. Discard the carcass properly.
- Cut the diaphragm free from the rib cage.
- Cut the windpipe and gullet at the base of the throat.
- Pull out the lungs, heart, and entrails. Place variety meats in a plastic storage bag and store on ice or refrigerate as soon as possible.

Hints for Field Dressing

- Dress the carcass as soon as possible.
- Remove all visible dirt, feces, hair, and bloodshot areas.
- Wipe out the cavity with individual paper towels. Prop the cavity open with a clean stick to aid in air circulation.

- If you wash the cavity with water, dry the area quickly to prevent spoilage.
- To prevent bacterial growth, quickly cool the carcass to 35–40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- After cleaning the cavity, you can add ice or snow sealed in plastic storage bags and pack them in the cavity. Secure the bags in place by tying the cavity shut with rope or cord.
- Keep the carcass out of direct sunlight and allow for adequate air circulation.
- If the carcass is skinned in warm weather and flies are a problem, keep surfaces clean, sprinkle ground pepper on them, and cover them with cheesecloth.

Transporting and Processing Game

- Keep the carcass cool during transport. Keep it out of sunlight. Do not tie the deer across the hood or roof of a car. Do not put a deer in the trunk while it's still warm. Allow for adequate air circulation.
- Transport the carcass to the processing facility as soon as possible. Processing should be done only by businesses with fully refrigerated facilities.
- If you are processing your own game, hold the carcass at 40°F or less. Freezing the carcass before processing may toughen the meat.
- If aging the carcass, do so at 40°F or less for two to three days
- If you are using the meat for sausage, aging is not necessary.
- During processing, frequently clean your knife between cuts to avoid contaminating the meat.
- Wash your knife, hands, and cutting boards often with warm, soapy water

Kitchen Processing

- Store any unfrozen meat in the refrigerator, and use it within two to three days.
- Keep raw meat separated to prevent cross-contamination in the refrigerator.
- Marinate all meats in the refrigerator.
- Thaw all frozen meats in the refrigerator or microwave and use immediately.
- Heat all game meats, including jerky, to 155–160°F to reduce the risk of food-borne illness. Use a calibrated meat thermometer to ensure proper cooking.
- Do not can meat unless you have a calibrated or recently tested pressure canner. Proper pressure and time are critical to ensure safe canned meat.