

Dressing Out Your Deer

(Ed. Note: This report was prepared cooperatively by R. G. Wingard, Forestry and Wildlife Management Extension and C. R. Studholme, State Supervisor, Division of Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.)

Today's hunter no longer depends on the deer for survival. But when properly field dressed, correctly cooked, and attractively served, venison can furnish a palatable and nutritious addition to the family menu.

Deer season is a time for excitement. Many deer hunters spend eleven months just waiting for the next season to roll around. And when you see the string of cars heading for the mountains the day before the season, you know the hunt is on.

Check Equipment

Before the hunt, see that you have all the equipment needed for hunting and handling deer. Include a sharp knife for dressing, a rope for dragging, a pencil to complete tag, plastic bags for heat and liver, a rag for wipe-up, and cord for fastening tag and tying off the anal opening.

Take the usual precautions to have a safe gun of legal and adequate caliber, sighted-in with proper ammunition. Wear conspicuous (fluorescent orange) clothing appropriate for the weather. A compass, map and matches add to the safety of the hunt.

When You Kill Your Deer

A well-placed shot with modern ammunition will sever enough vessels to bleed the deer. A shot in the heart, lungs, or neck region will prevent mutilating choice meat cuts and reduce chances of loss of a wounded deer.

Approach a downed deer with caution. Be sure it is dead. If your shot did not hit a vital region, or if the deer is still struggling, kill it with a shot in the neck just under the ear. When you are sure the deer is dead, unload your gun. This is a safety precaution.

Important—Attach Tag

Complete and securely fasten the big-game tag where it will not be lost while dragging deer. The position of the tag provided for reporting the kill should be filled in at the same time. Complete the tags prior to cutting your deer so you can avoid bloody hands and messy, illegible tags and reports. It is a legal requirement, according to Section 708 of the Game Law, that the tag be attached to the deer within one hour after killing, and before the carcass is transported in any manner from where the deer was killed. Remember, always, that your big game kill report must be mailed to the Game Commission at Harrisburg within five days following the close of the season for the animal killed.

Field Dressing Your Deer

Dress your deer immediately after tagging. Roll the deer over on its back, hump lower than shoulders, and spread the hind legs. Cut along the centerline of belly from breastbone to base of tail. First, cut through the hide, then through belly muscle. Avoid cutting into the paunch and intestines by holding them away from the knife with the free hand while guiding the knife with the other.

With a small knife, cut around the anus. Tie off with cord and draw it into the body cavity so it comes free with the complete intestines. In doing this, avoid cutting or breaking the bladder. Loosen and roll out the stomach and intestines along with the genital organs. Save the liver if desired. Cut around the edge of

the diaphragm which separates the chest and stomach cavities, then reach forward to cut the windpipe and gullet ahead of the lungs. This should allow you to pull the lungs and heart from the chest cavity. Save the heart if desired. Drain all blood from the body cavity.

Part of the satisfaction of the hunt comes from making a clean kill and in doing a neat job of field dressing your deer. Veteran hunters may have variations in the steps of field dressing. The important points are to remove the internal organs immediately after the kill without contaminating the body cavity with dirt, hair, or contents of the digestive

tract and to drain all blood from the body cavity.

Back To Camp Or Car

Tie a light rope or nylon cord to the base of the antlers, or around the neck of an antlerless deer. Take a half-hitch around the upper jaw and tie a short stick to the other end of the rope for a handle. Dragging is easier if the forefeet are crossed back of the animal's head and tied to keep the legs from hooking underbrush. For safety's sake, do not carry the deer.

At camp, or while waiting to transport your deer home, hang the carcass in the shade and cool it as quickly as possible. Prop the flanks open with sticks to permit air circulation throughout the body cavity.

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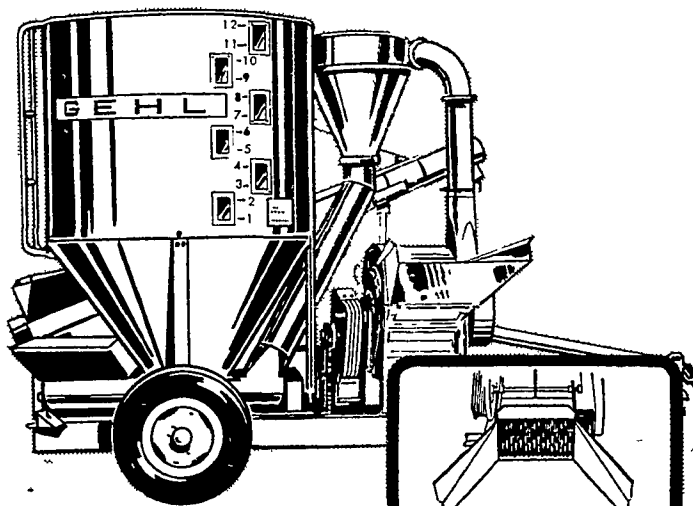
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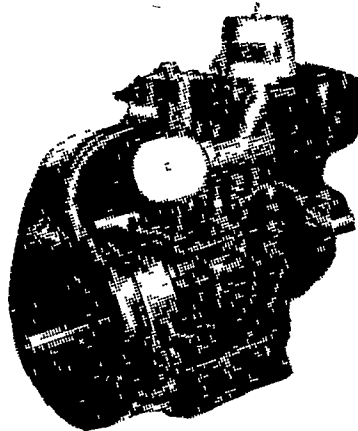
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