

Game Commission offers warm weather venison tips

Improperly field-dressing a deer and warm weather can impact the quality of venison warns Dr. Walter Cottrell, Pennsylvania Game Commission wildlife veterinarian.

"The first step in making sure that the venison reaches the table in the best possible condition is sighting in and practicing with your sporting arm," Dr. Cottrell said. "Coupling that with knowledgeable shot placement ensures a clean kill and minimal damage to edible parts of the animal."

"After properly tagging their deer, hunters should wear latex or nitrile gloves to remove the entrails. Care should be taken to remove entrails without rupturing them, and hunters should drain excess blood remaining in the cavity. Do not wash out the deer with water or in a creek. Wipe down the cavity with a dry cloth or paper towels, being careful to remove all visible blood and hair."

Once entrails are removed, the deer should be taken from the field and cooled down as soon as possible. The cool-down process begins when you field-dress the deer. To hasten the cool-down process, skin the deer and hang the carcass in the shade, refrigerate it or place

a bag of ice in the body cavity. Never place a deer carcass - with or without the hide on it - in direct sunlight.

For those who process the deer themselves, the first step - after tagging and field-dressing the deer - is to remove the hide, which comes off easier if the front legs are cut off at the elbows, and the rear legs are removed just below the knee joint, with a saw. Use a knife to cut the hide from where each leg was sawed off at the elbow, back to the body trunk. Cutting the rear legs just below the joint also makes it easier to hang a carcass on a gambrel or meat hooks. Hang the carcass by the large tendons on the back legs.

Next, the hide is pulled from the carcass, starting at the rear end and working downward toward the head. Peel it from the hind quarters first, then cut the tailbone and pull it down to the shoulders. Work the hide over the shoulders and pull it away from the legs. Finally, pull the hide down the neck as close to the base of the skull as possible, and then cut the head from the carcass with a clean saw. Remove all of the trachea or windpipe.

The remaining hide-free carcass should be wiped off immediately. If you use water to clean the cavity or carcass, dry the meat immediately. Wet



These two whitetail bucks definitely show the difference between "native" deer (left) and those who are a product of "selective breeding". Photo courtesy of 700 Springs.

or damp meat spoils more quickly and is more prone to nurture bacteria. Rinsing meat with water also can hasten the spread of bacteria. Inspect the carcass again for any blood and hair. It's also a good idea to remove large fatty deposits to improve the

quality of your meat. It helps lessen that "game taste" some people dislike about venison. Please note, though, that fat is removed from the carcass with greater ease after it has cooled.

Following these steps will prepare your carcass for

hanging in a meat processor's refrigerator, or quartering and placing it in your refrigerator. If the air temperature is above 50 degrees, hunters should get their carcass refrigerated as soon as possible.

"The bacterial load of a deer harvested in warm weather will

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