

# Deer and Wild Hogs - Harvesting and Dressing

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## Before the Hunt

Planning ahead will ensure that you have a rewarding and enjoyable experience on your deer or hog hunt. Wear appropriate clothing and shoes; in many states, including Mississippi, this includes 500 continuous square inches of hunter-orange. If you hunt in unfamiliar surroundings, pack a compass, map, small flashlight or headlamp, and strike-anywhere matches or a lighter.

Field dressing and getting the game home are important parts of the hunt and require some preparation as well. Gear should include a sharp hunting knife, 15 feet of 1/4 inch rope or nylon cord, clean cloth or paper towels, a couple of plastic bags, and some disposable latex gloves.

## The Hunt

As a sportsman, it is your responsibility to be familiar with your surroundings. Know the locations of any nearby residential areas, public roads, and hunting partners. Be sure of your target and shoot only if you have a good, clear shot. A well-placed shot just behind the front shoulder will puncture the heart or lungs without damaging the choice cuts of meat. If a shot deer or hog runs out of your sight, wait about 10 minutes before attempting to trail the animal. Regardless of whether the animal falls

immediately or runs away, always be cautious when approaching the animal and make sure it is dead before handling it. It is not necessary to slit the throat or bleed the animal. This could ruin the cape if you want to mount the animal.

## Field Dressing

Roll the deer or hog over on its back with the rump lower than the shoulders. Spread the hind legs. Make a cut down the center of the belly from the breast bone to the base of the tail (Fig. 1). First, cut through the hide. Next, cut through the belly muscles, being careful not to cut or puncture the stomach and intestines.

Cut around the anus. Draw it into the body cavity so it comes free with the intestines. Roll the animal on its side, then loosen and remove the stomach and intestines. Again, be careful not to puncture or tear them. Save the liver if desired (Fig. 2).

Cut around the diaphragm, which separates the chest and stomach cavities. Reach into the chest cavity and sever the esophagus and windpipe just in front of the lungs. Remove the heart and lungs and drain any excess blood from the empty chest cavity (Fig. 2). If the stomach or intestines have been shot or punctured, wash out the body cavity with water as soon as possible.



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Figure 1



Some hunters prefer to cut the pelvic bone and breast bone when opening the animal. You can use pruning shears or a handsaw to separate them. If you are experienced, you can do this with a knife. There is less danger of cutting the large intestine or the bladder if the pelvic bone is separated, and it is easier to remove the liver and heart if the breast bone is separated.

**Note:** Deer and wild hogs can be infected with various pathogens that pose human health risks. When you dress or butcher deer or wild hogs,

- wear disposable latex gloves when handling the carcass;
- clean up with hot water and soap after butchering;
- cook meat thoroughly before eating.

Wild hogs can be infected with swine brucellosis. When you dress or butcher wild hogs, follow the above recommendations and

- minimize handling the reproductive tracts of either sex;
- burn or bury gloves and remains from butchered wild hogs.

For more information about potential public health risks associated with deer and wild hogs, call the USDA Help Desk for Meat & Poultry Processing, toll free at (877) 374-7435 or visit these sites:

<http://www.mdwfp.com/Level2/Wildlife/Game/Deer/Articles.asp?article=57>

[http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/wildlife\\_damage/content/printable\\_version/feral%20pigs.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/wildlife_damage/content/printable_version/feral%20pigs.pdf)

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/brucellosis\\_t.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/brucellosis_t.htm)

## Cooling

A walk-in cooler is ideal for storing field-dressed game until it can be processed. If a walk-in cooler is not available to you, pick a cool place out of reach of scavengers to hang your deer or hog. Propping the body cavity open with a clean stick will insure air circulation and speed the cooling process of your field-dressed game. According to the Department of Food Science Nutrition and Health Promotion at Mississippi State University, the temperature range for storing meat safely is between 28 °F and 40 °F. Because meat naturally contains salts and various minerals, it does not begin to freeze until it reaches temperatures below 28 °F. Meat should hang no more than 3 to 4 hours at temperatures above 40 °F. To age meat before processing, skin the carcass and allow it to hang 14 to 18 days at a temperature of 32 to 40 °F. For more information about food safety and proper handling of meat, visit the site below:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food\\_Safety\\_Education/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/index.asp)

## Skinning

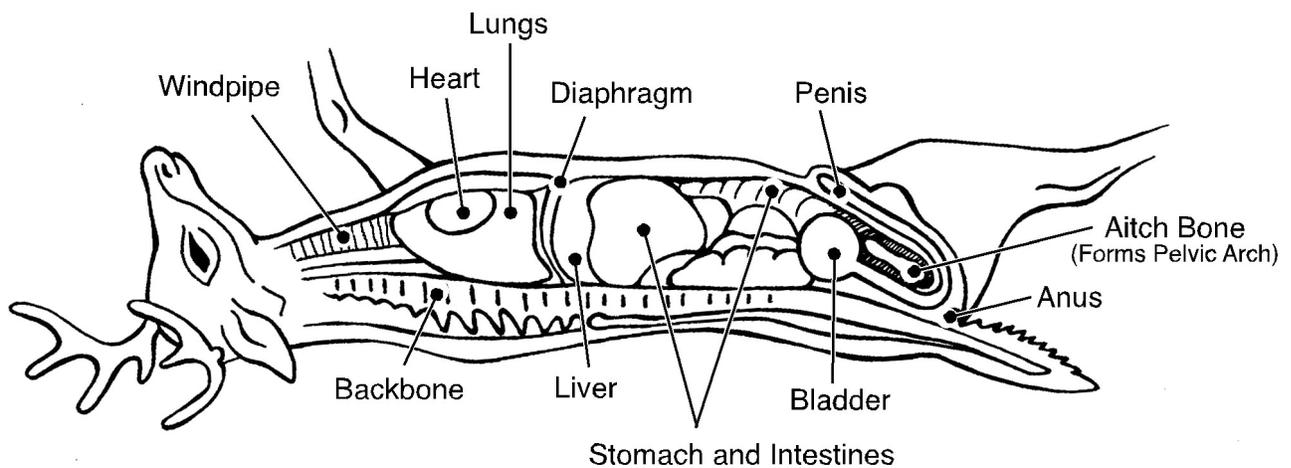
When skinning your deer or hog, it is common to hang the animal from a gambrel stick inserted at the hocks (Fig. 1.). Ring the legs at the knee and slit down the inside of the legs. Peel the hide away from the carcass by pulling the hide with one hand and separating the skin from the carcass with the other. Use a knife as little as possible to save both time and the edge of your skinning blade. As long as temperatures remain within safe ranges, it is common to hang a deer or hog overnight or over a weekend before skinning and butchering the carcass.

Note: If the animal is to be mounted, do not make any cuts on the hair side of the hide past

the front legs. Peel the hide down to the base of the skull and remove the head by cutting between the base of the skull and the last vertebrae. After the head has been removed, place the head and rolled-up skin in a plastic garbage bag. Tie the bag up around the antlers and freeze it as soon as possible. If you do not have freezer space, take the head and hide to your taxidermist immediately.

Hides should be frozen or taken to a taxidermist as soon as possible after skinning. If refrigeration is not available, hides can be salted. Salting slows the activity of the bacteria that can ruin the hide.

Figure 2





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