

FIELD QUARTERING YOUR DEER

Cleaning your harvest without gutting it

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PEOPLE INCREASINGLY WANT foods from sources they know and with ingredients they trust. Venison harvested from the wild provides a sustainable source of lean, free-range protein. When properly cared for from field to table, venison rivals any other meat in terms of versatility and flavor.

Gutless field quartering is one way to help ensure the quality of big game meat. This method allows you to field dress your deer without having to gut it.

What are the other benefits of this

method? You can quickly remove, cool and dry meat for optimal quality. You eliminate dealing with entrails. You break down big game into manageable parts, making the meat easier to pack out and process. Finally, you don't have to drag out a carcass that you have to dispose of later.

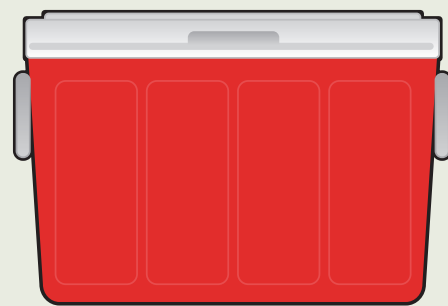
This is the method to use if you're just after the meat. If you've taken a trophy buck and want it mounted, it's best to cape out the head first. Remember that you must always telecheck your deer before removing the meat or head. ■

Tools for the Task

ESSENTIAL GEAR:



Sharp knife
3-4 game bags or clean pillow cases



Large cooler with ice

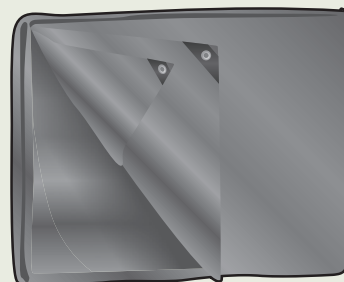


Large, sturdy backpack or rigid frame with meat shelf and heavy-duty straps

OPTIONAL GEAR:



Gut-hook knife
Disposable surgical gloves



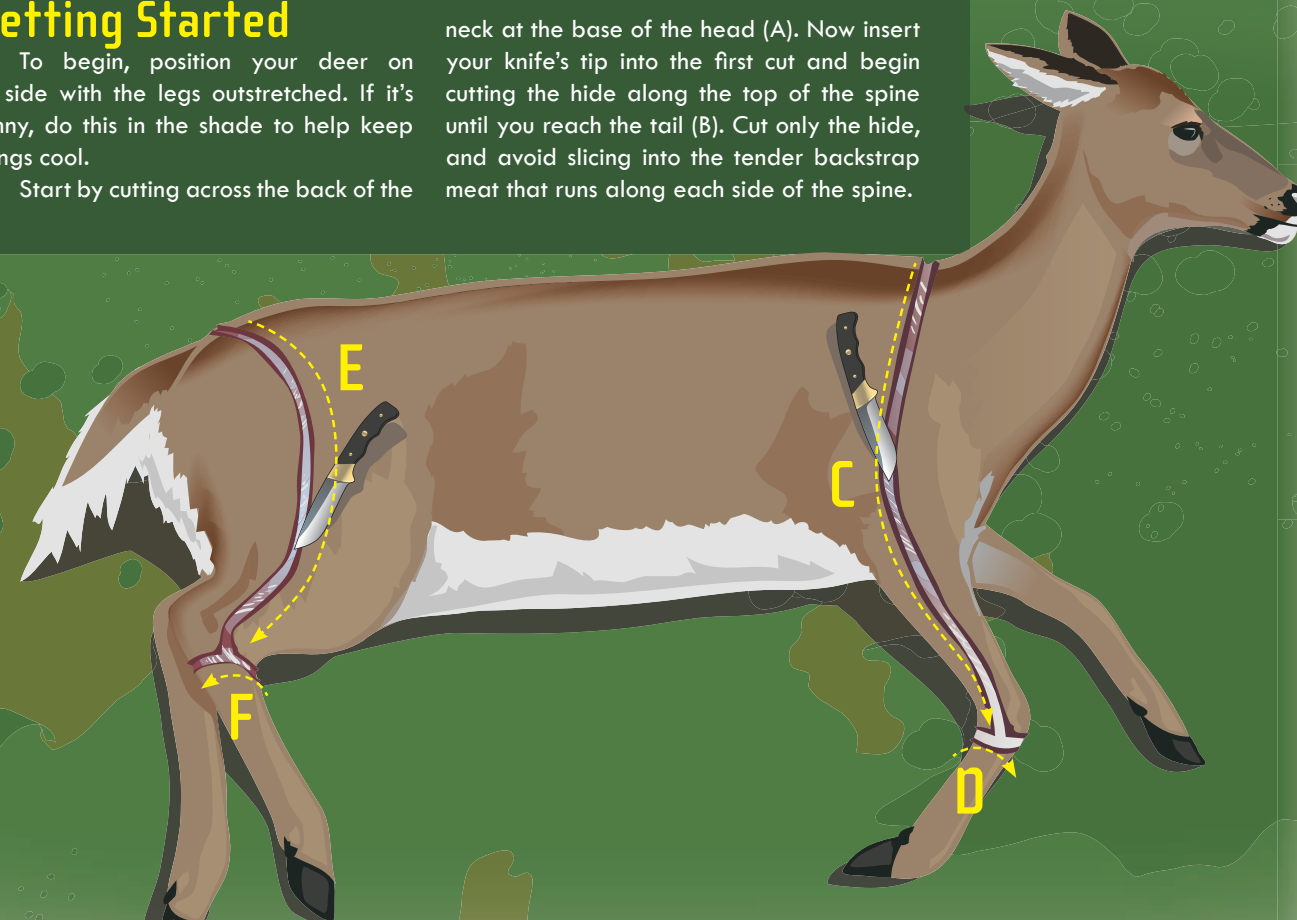
Tarp for keeping meat off the ground

Getting Started

To begin, position your deer on its side with the legs outstretched. If it's sunny, do this in the shade to help keep things cool.

Start by cutting across the back of the

neck at the base of the head (A). Now insert your knife's tip into the first cut and begin cutting the hide along the top of the spine until you reach the tail (B). Cut only the hide, and avoid slicing into the tender backstrap meat that runs along each side of the spine.



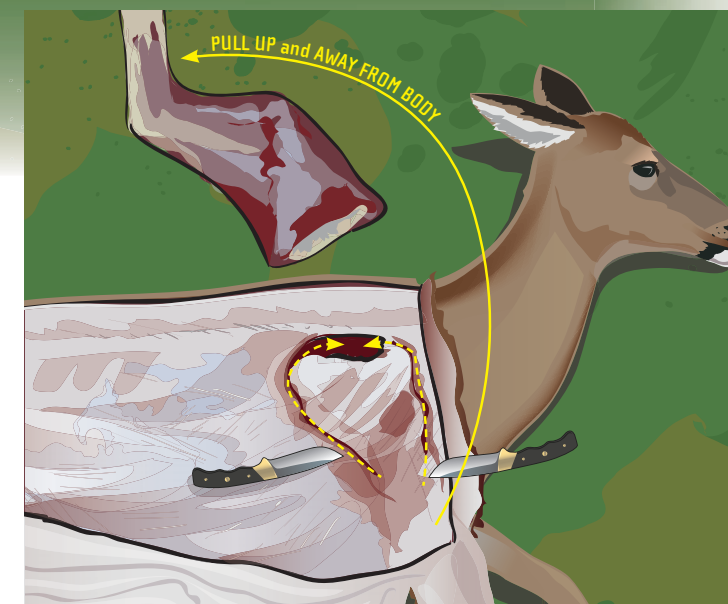
Main Body of Work

The following steps are taken first on the side of the deer that faces up. Repeat later for the other side.

FRONT SHOULDER:

Slice the hide from the spine down the front shoulder (C). Keep your blade facing up, carefully guiding it with your other hand to keep the knife from slicing into the meat. Continue cutting past the knee joint. Just below the knee, cut the hide all the way around the joint (D). Pull the hide off the shoulder, tugging it with your hand and peeling it with shallow cuts of your knife until the shoulder is free of hide.

Once the shoulder is skinned, firmly grasp the leg with your off hand. Pull the leg up and cut through the muscles holding it to the chest. Place the shoulder into a game bag, leaving the lower leg out. Carefully cut around the entire knee joint until the lower leg detaches. It helps to flex the joint backwards as you cut to help break it. Discard the lower leg, tie off the bag and place it in the shade.



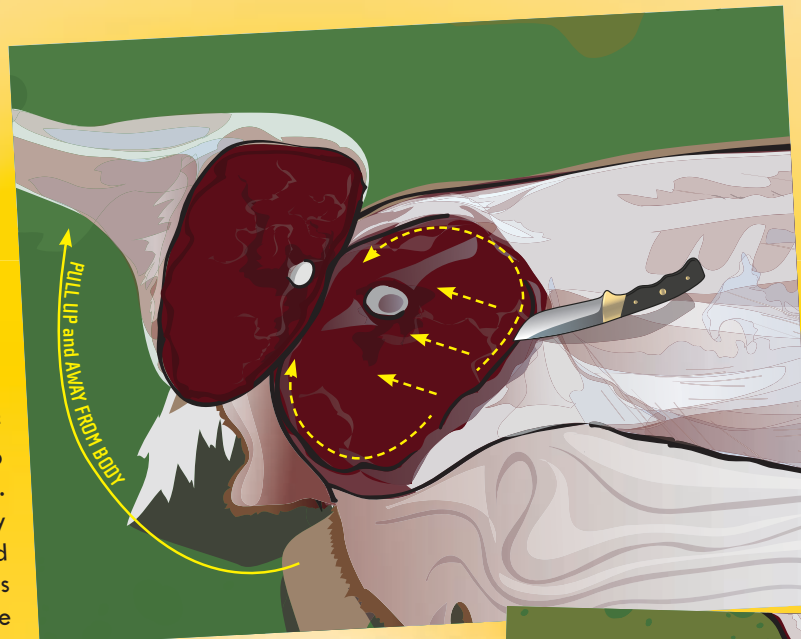
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HINDQUARTER:

Removal of the deer's hindquarter is similar to removing the shoulder. However, you must free it from the pelvis and spine.

First cut the hide down the leg (E) and then ring the hide below the knee (F), like you did on the front leg. Peel the hide off the ham. Begin cutting the base of the rump where it joins the spine and outer pelvis. Cut with shallow teasing strokes all the way around the base, working inward toward the hip ball-joint. Lift and rotate the leg as needed to access the muscles and connective tissues at the hip.

When you find the ball-joint, sever the joint by cutting directly into it. Keep cutting the connective tissues to free the hindquarter from the rest of the deer. Once freed, place the hindquarter into a game bag and remove the lower leg at the joint as before.



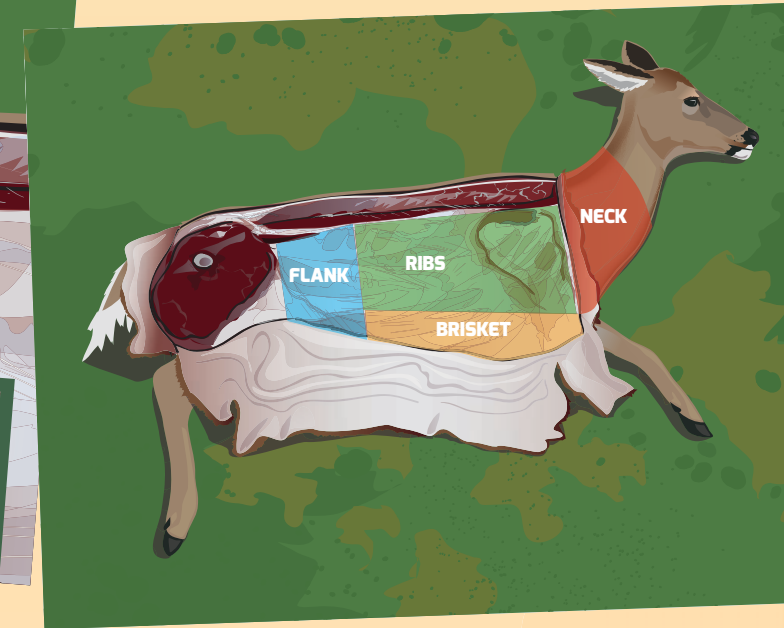
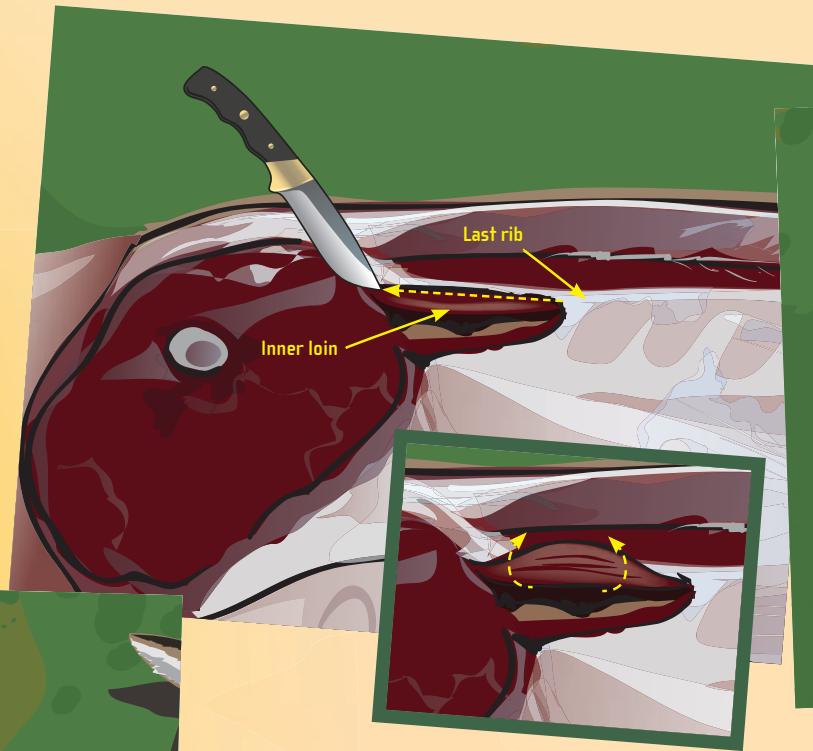
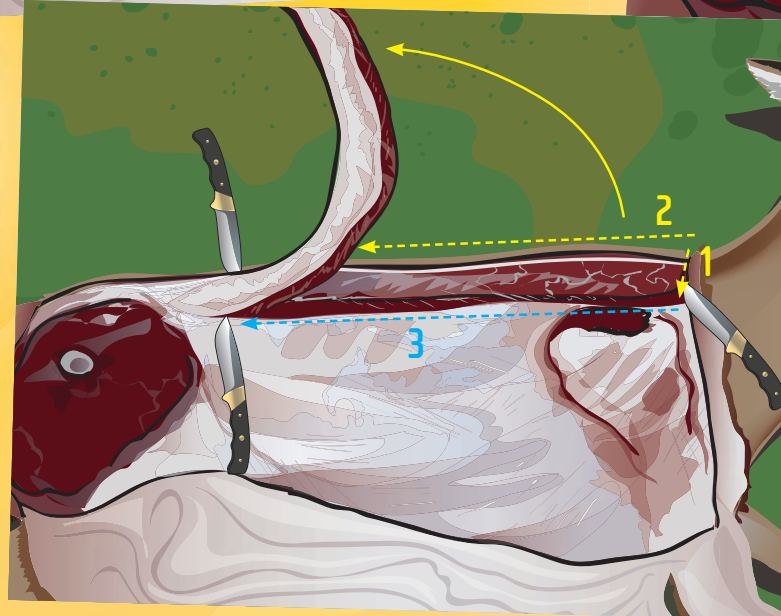
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BACKSTRAP:

The outer loin or backstrap — a cut of venison treasured by hunters — is now easily removed from its V-shaped groove between the spine and ribs.

First, make a 1/2-inch deep cut along the spine. Peel away the layer of white membrane and fat lying on top of the backstrap until the meat is completely exposed. Make a second cut across the backstrap where it ends near the neck. Grasp the end you've just cut and tease the backstrap off the spine down to the hip, making another cross-cut there to facilitate its removal.

Once freed from the spine, the backstrap can be cut away from the ribs on the underside. Grasp the end of the muscle near the neck and tease it off the ribs, working your way down toward the tail until it is removed.



NECK, BRISKET, FLANK AND RIB MEAT:

The remaining cuts of meat can be small, but they shouldn't be overlooked for roasts, stews, fajitas, jerky, barbeque, burger or sausage. The neck meat can be removed and bundled together after trimming to form one or more roasts. The brisket on the front and sides of the chest can be trimmed for barbeque. The thin flank meat on the sides and belly lends itself well to jerky, plate steaks or grinding. Use rib meat for grilling or grinding.

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TRIMMING UP

If you shot into the chest or gut, you'll need to trim any venison that is heavily discolored, frayed or contains bits of bullet or bone fragments. If you hit the gut, trim the nearby meat of any green or brown contamination. Clean your knife before continuing the quartering process. While you're trimming, also cut away fat to make your butchering process easier later on.

INNER LOIN:

The small tenderloin underneath the ribs can be removed by hand without the aid of a knife. Insert your hand between the abdominal wall and the short ribs, keeping the back of your hand against the abdominal wall. Grab the tubular muscle running along the inside of the spine and carefully tease it off the bone, taking care not to puncture the abdomen if a knife is used.

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Flip and Repeat

Once you've finished with the first side, pull the skin back up to the spine to help keep out dirt when you flip the carcass. Repeat the steps used for the first side.

KEEPING IT GUTLESS

Be careful not to cut too deeply around the groin or spine as you may puncture the abdominal wall or entrails. Make shallow cuts and keep your blade parallel to the spine when you remove the backstraps.

The Home Stretch

Getting your venison on ice quickly is the key to good quality. Line the bottom of your cooler with ice. Alternate layers of meat and ice as you pack the cooler. Chilling the cuts for at least 48 hours allows the meat to go through rigor mortis and relax again, which translates into more tender venison.

If you're aging the meat in a cooler, place a thermometer atop the ice to ensure it stays below 40 degrees. Drain water from the cooler daily and top with ice until you're ready to butcher. You can also age quarters inside a refrigerator or outbuilding at temperatures below 40 degrees.