

Wild Game: From Field to Table



Life Skill: Wise use of resources

Project Skill: Cleaning and preparing fish and game

Objective: Properly handle, store, dress, and prepare wild game or fish

Success Indicator: Participants show respect for harvested game and avoid waste by properly processing and using the meat and other parts

Provisions Needed

- Large scissors or cleaning shears
- Sharp butcher knife
- Knife with dull blade (for scaling fish)
- Paper towels
- Vinegar
- Wild game cookbook (see Suggested Reading and Internet Resources)



Trailhead

You have waited for this moment all your life. You've killed your first game animal or caught your first fish. Knowing what to do next can mean the difference between the animal going to waste or

becoming delicious table fare. The thought of processing your game or fish can be intimidating. **But if you use care and follow a few simple steps, it can be both fun and rewarding.**



Trailblazing

Dress and prepare one of the following game animals.

Mourning Doves Although doves can be plucked and dressed like other game birds and waterfowl, many hunters simply "breast" the birds because they have so little meat on the rest of their bodies. To do this, cut off the wings close to the body with large scissors or cleaning shears. Next, place your thumb between the anus and the breastbone. Try to tear the breast from the back with one motion, twisting it away from the rest of the body. You should then be holding only the breast covered with skin and feathers. Finally, skin the breast with the feathers by simply tearing the skin away with your fingers. If you prefer, you may choose to pluck the feathers, leaving the skin intact. Keep the meat clean and cool. If the breasts are not to be eaten right away, package and freeze them. One method of freezing dove breasts is in a block of ice. Place the breasts in a freezer bag, plastic container, or cardboard milk carton, completely cover the meat with water, and then freeze. This method also works with fish and small animals.

your first game animal or fish can become

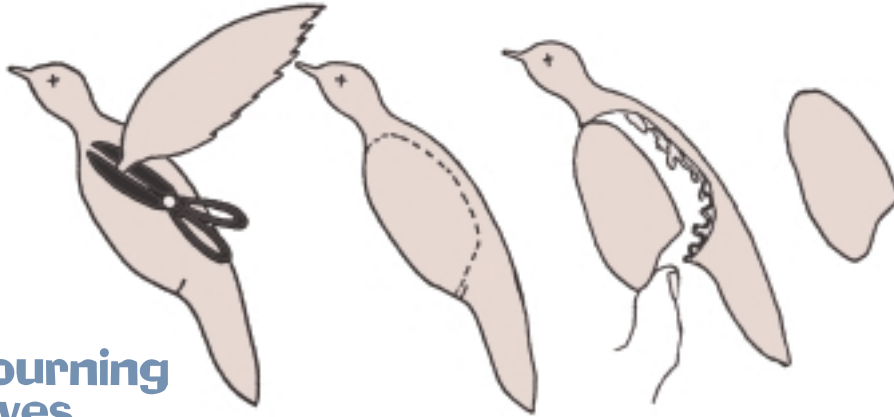
delicious table fare



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mourning doves



vinegar and water. Vinegar is an acetic acid solution and acts as a disinfectant.

If the animal is to be dressed at home or camp, you may find it easier to skin it before removing the entrails.

To prepare the carcass in six serving-size portions: Remove each front leg by lifting the leg away from the chest wall and cutting around each shoulder blade. Remove each hind leg by splitting the pelvis along the backbone on each side. The flanks and ribs can be left in place or trimmed away. Next, cut the back into two sections by cutting behind the last rib. Cut off the bony tail section of the back where the hind legs have been removed.

Squirrels and Rabbits To dress small animals, cut down the middle on the underside of the animal from the pelvis/ anus to the rib cage, being careful not to cut or puncture the entrails or the gall bladder (this can taint the meat or give it an "off" flavor). Then, grasp the chest contents with the fingers and pull them toward the tail, stripping the entrails from the animal.

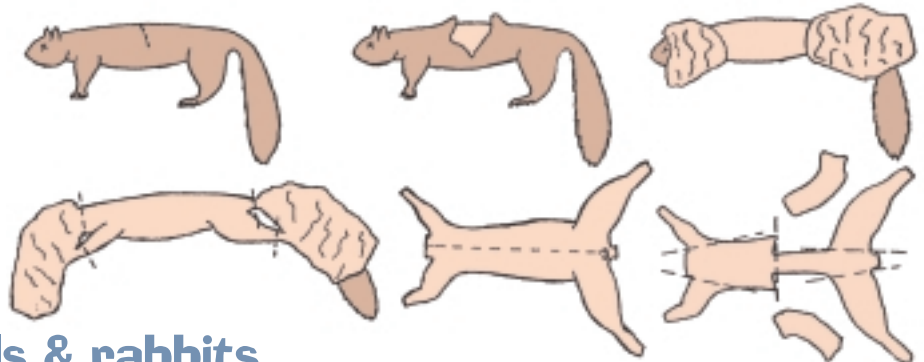


To skin the animal, start by removing the head, feet, and tail. (Consider preserving and saving the tails of squirrels. Squirrel tails are a popular item for tying flies and making other fishing lures.) Next, make a small cut perpendicular to the animal's backbone. Insert the fingers of both hands in the opposite sides of the cut and pull in opposite directions, removing the skin. Try not to get hair on the meat while skinning. Oils associated with the hair or substances trapped on hair follicles can taint the meat. If hair does get on the meat, remove it with a cloth dampened with

Fish Fish may be dressed by heading, gutting, and scaling (or skinning, depending on the species). Larger ones may be filleted or cut crosswise into steaks. Remove scales by scraping with a dull knife, working tail to head. Use pliers to remove skin from selected species, working head to tail. Remove the head with a sharp knife. Then cut along the belly from vent to head. Remove viscera. Wash fish in cold, running water to remove any debris or slime.

fish

squirrels & rabbits



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Field Guide

■ The three major factors in **meat spoilage** are dirt, heat, and moisture.

■ **Field dressing** is the removal of the entrails only (and the crop or gullet in birds). Game should be field-dressed as soon as possible, especially in warm weather. **Responsible hunters** show respect for animals by carrying the equipment needed to properly clean and store animals after they are harvested, such as a sharp knife, whetstone, folding saw, 15 feet of rope, cloth game bag, cooler, ice, etc.

■ **Aging meat** is the act of holding carcasses or cuts of meat at temperatures of 34° to 37° F for 7 to 14 days. This allows **enzymes** to break down some of the meat's proteins. Aged meat is usually more tender and



flavorful. Aging is a common practice with large game. Leave the hide on to prevent the carcass from drying out. But do not age any game if it was shot during warm weather and not chilled rapidly, if you plan to grind the meat, or if the animal was under 1 year old.

■ Small game generally **does not require aging** and should be eaten almost immediately or properly wrapped and frozen. Birds should be eaten within 2 or 3 days. Fish should be eaten within 1 or 2 days. If not to be used immediately, fish should be cleaned, packaged in water, and frozen.

■ To cool game on a warm day, keep it in the shade, provide good air circulation, or hang it. Use **black pepper** and **cheesecloth** to protect the carcass from contamination by flies. For larger animals, prop the body cavity open and place it in a cooler or on ice as soon as possible.

■ Remove and discard severely damaged meat. Hair, dirt, excess blood, and bone fragments can **diminish** the quality and taste of the meat.

■ Feathers provide some protection to the carcass of birds in the field. Many hunters prefer to **pluck** or skin the bird at home or camp. Most hunters prefer to leave the skin on to prevent the meat from becoming dry during cooking.

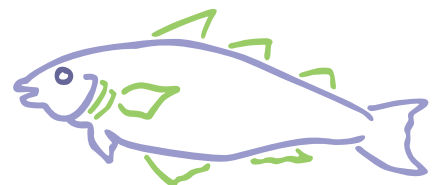
Suggested Reading

- Casada, Jim (ed.). *Campsite to Kitchen* (The Outdoor Writers Association of America). Memphis: Wimmer Companies, Inc. 1994.
- Gray, Rebecca (ed.). *Eat Like a Wild Man: The Ultimate Game and Fish Cookbook* (Sports Afield). Minocqua, Wis.: Willow Creek Press. 1997.
- Knight, Jim. *Field Care of Harvested Game*. New Mexico State University, Cooperative Extension Service, Circular 507.
- Knight, Jim. *Processing Your Deer at Home*. New Mexico State University, Cooperative Extension Service, Circular 508.

■ Most **freshwater fish** can be kept alive on a stringer or in a live well until ready to process. Saltwater fish are difficult to keep alive and require quick cooling. Be prepared to quickly cool fish in the field and keep fish on ice during transport from the field to home or camp.

■ Clean fish as soon as possible after catching. Thoroughly wash all cleaned fish and pack with fresh, clean ice. Fish may be frozen into **blocks of ice**.

■ Check state and federal **regulations** that may dictate turning in an identification mark or tag, such as a wing on a game bird or a head and tail on a fish.



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Internet Resources

- <http://ngp.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/game.html>
- <http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/wildlife/hunting/dressing/index.html>
- <http://www.afterthekill.com/default.htm>
- http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/pubs/_circulars/circ507.html
- <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod01/01600798.html>
- http://www.michigansportsman.com/Fish_cleaning.html
- <http://www.pvisuals.com/fishing/bookstore/htmls/cleaning.html>
- <http://www.reel-one.com/cookbooks.html>
- <http://martin.ces.state.nc.us/newsletters/newsarticles/wildrecipes/list.html>
- <http://members.tripod.com/~huntingfishing/fishingrecipes.htm>
- <http://hgic.clemson.edu>



The Extra Mile

Have an experienced fly fisherman teach you how to make lures and tie flies with leftover wings, feathers, fur, and tails from your game experience.



Field Notes

share

- Is processing game and fish more or less difficult than you expected? Why?
- Were you successful in not cutting the entrails when dressing your game or fish? Why?
- Did you harvest the animals to be used in this activity? If not, how did you obtain them?
- What are some helpful things to consider when processing any game or fish?
- How did you like the flavor of the game compared to “supermarket food”?

process

- How are the internal organs of the animals you dressed similar to human organs?
- Discuss the similarities and differences in cleaning a snake, a frog, a turtle, or an animal to be mounted or tanned.
- Why do some animals have a wild or “gamey” flavor? How can you minimize this?
- Other than making fishing lures and consuming the meat, how could you use the various animal parts?
- How do wild animals wisely use or process the animals they prey on?

generalize

- At what other times have you been resourceful in the way you used a product or a craft?

apply

- How can you apply what you learned about not being wasteful to other areas of your life?
- How could you clean or prepare an animal to use as much of it as possible?