

ENGLAND &
WALES **BEST**
PRACTICE
GUIDES

Skinning.

Meat Hygiene





Introduction

As the name suggests, “skinning” is the removal of the hide from a deer carcass.

Skinning converts the in-skin carcass into “game meat”. If the game meat (venison) is intended for anything other than home consumption this changes its legal status as well, see the Supply of Venison guide.

The aim of this guide is to describe methods of skinning a deer carcass with the minimum of contamination.

It is assumed that initial carcass inspection checks have been carried out and that a full inspection will have been completed by the end of the skinning process, see the Carcass Inspection guide.

This guide is linked to the Larder design, Gralloching and Lardering guides.

General

There are many ways of skinning a carcass. Choosing a technique will depend on the size of the carcass, the facilities available and personal choice.

Ultimately the objective is the same, to produce a hygienic, skin free carcass with no hairs on it, no bloody fingerprints, no unnecessary knife marks and if possible a striped bacon-like appearance on the back.

This last feature is somewhat of an aesthetic feature and, although it is a marker of good technique, may be difficult to achieve in some species, depending on carcass condition.

Work area, equipment and hygiene

- The work area is often in a deer larder, but in any case should have similar structural standards and be clean and easy to disinfect, see the Larder Design guide.
- The work area must be washed and disinfected before skinning is carried out.
- Allow for a clear working space of at least 1 metre around the carcass as it is being skinned.
- The equipment required is similar to that recommended for a deer larder and should be cleaned, ready for use.
- It may be difficult to use gloves while skinning as they often tear, so clean hands and forearms thoroughly before beginning and wash them frequently in hot water during the process.

Preparation

- If a carcass is to be skinned, do so as soon as possible after culling, although in many cases where carcasses are placed in a chiller for setting/aging (usually up to a week) it is better to leave the skin on to prevent the meat from drying.
- Whilst carcasses can be skinned in any number of positions, most will be skinned suspended by the rear legs.
- In this case, it is advisable to leave the feet on and put the gambrel/hook through a knife slit above the rear feet, between the lower tendons and the canon bone, not in the hock. This will avoid having to remove the hock skin over the gambrel/hook and leaves the shank of the haunch clean, though more care is needed to avoid cutting through the tendons.
- As another alternative, use stainless steel wire “snares” above the feet.

Cuts

- In whichever position the carcass is to be skinned, the initial cuts to the skin are similar, although they may vary between practitioners.



- To prevent hairs being cut and leaving loose hairs on the skinned surface, make cuts to the skin from inside/ underneath the skin outwards.
- Every care should be made to cut through the skin only, not the flesh beneath it.
- If the carcass has been gralloched some of the cuts may already have been made.

The usual cuts to be made when skinning a carcass are as follows:

- Along the insides of the front legs to the major joint.
- Along the inside of the rear legs to the major joint.
- From the groin, over the sternum and along the underside of the neck.

Separating skin and flesh

- The key to cleanly removing the skin is to ensure that no flesh is allowed to come away with the skin.
- For cradle or hind leg suspended skinning, starting at the chest of the animal can allow the best start to be made, then progressing towards the spine, and along the legs to the feet.
- Some prefer to use a fist to “tunnel” between the skin and carcass, some prefer to “peel” the skin from the initial cuts, others a combination of both.

- Try to avoid the use of a knife but if the skin sticks at certain points (over the fan of muscle at the top of the shoulder, in the “armpit” of the forelegs, over the haunch or around the neck) it may be necessary to use a knife to ease the skin away.

Likewise certain individual deer, such as mature muntjac bucks, may require more knifework than others.

At all times the skin should separate from the carcass without taking a layer of muscle with it.

Procedure

- Use one hand to hold the skin and to apply tension. Try to minimise the number of times that this grip is changed to avoid producing too much loose hair.
- Whichever hand holds the hide should never touch the meat of a carcass and vice versa. This is known as the “clean hand/ dirty hand technique”.
- As you work try to prevent the skin from rolling, hair side first, onto the carcass; use gravity to assist you.



Take particular care in the following areas:

- When starting at the sternum- be absolutely sure that the skin is free of muscle at this point and that none is picked up as work progresses.
- In the “armpit” of the forelegs- be sure to skin both in front of and behind the web of muscle attaching the foreleg to the brisket before skinning the foreleg out completely.
- The “fan” of muscle behind the shoulder- this is best freed from the front towards the rear to avoid tearing
- Over the top of the haunches- the skin is tied to the muscle by thin ligaments at this point. Break these carefully ensuring that the skin remains free of muscle.
- Around the tail- skin to expose the tail bone, separate the tail at a joint close to the carcass, leaving it attached to the skin, then continue to remove the skin towards the back.
- Around the neck – a knife may be required but often pulling on one side and then the other will free the skin.

Complete any remaining larger tasks and the carcass inspection.

Ideally, if the carcass is warm, leave it hanging to cool slowly and steadily in the first six hours after skinning. This will ensure the full and rapid onset of rigor and will prevent cold shortening of the soft muscles in the carcass.

Thereafter carcasses should be stored between 1 and 7°C.