

Rabbit Processing

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INTRODUCTION

Most areas of the United States are highly populated with wild game, including rabbit. Also, domestic rabbit production is increasing in many locations. Maximum use is not made of this meat because most individuals/ sportsmen are not knowledgeable about meat processing. This publication presents guidelines for handling rabbits from the time the animal is sacrificed until it is consumed.

WARNING: Proper precautions should be taken when handling and processing rabbits. Rubber or other non-porous gloves should be used when handling wild rabbits. Wash the animal as soon as possible to remove Tularemia spores from the fur. Tularemia is a disease of wild rabbits which is transmissible to humans. It occurs in the United States in every month but especially in the autumn. Additional information under "Eviscerating Procedures" is provided.

Equipment/Supplies required:

Rubber or plastic gloves

Sharp knife

8 penny nail

Disinfectant

Stunning Procedures:

Generally, rabbits are stunned mechanically from a blow on the top of the head (Figure 1-a). Humane slaughter electric stunning devices produce anesthesia by passing an electric current through the brain of the animal. One electrode is placed on the animal's skull and the other on the thoracic, abdominal or perineal region of the body. **NOTE:** Excessive electri-

cal dosage will electrocute the animal with an immediate stoppage of the heart and respiration. Carcasses from animals killed by electrocution should not be processed for food.

The Humane Slaughter Law (Manual of Meat Inspection Procedures of the United States Department of Agriculture, Section 380.1) requires that animals stunned by mechanical, electrical, chemical, gunshot or other methods shall be unconscious before they are shackled, hoisted or cut.

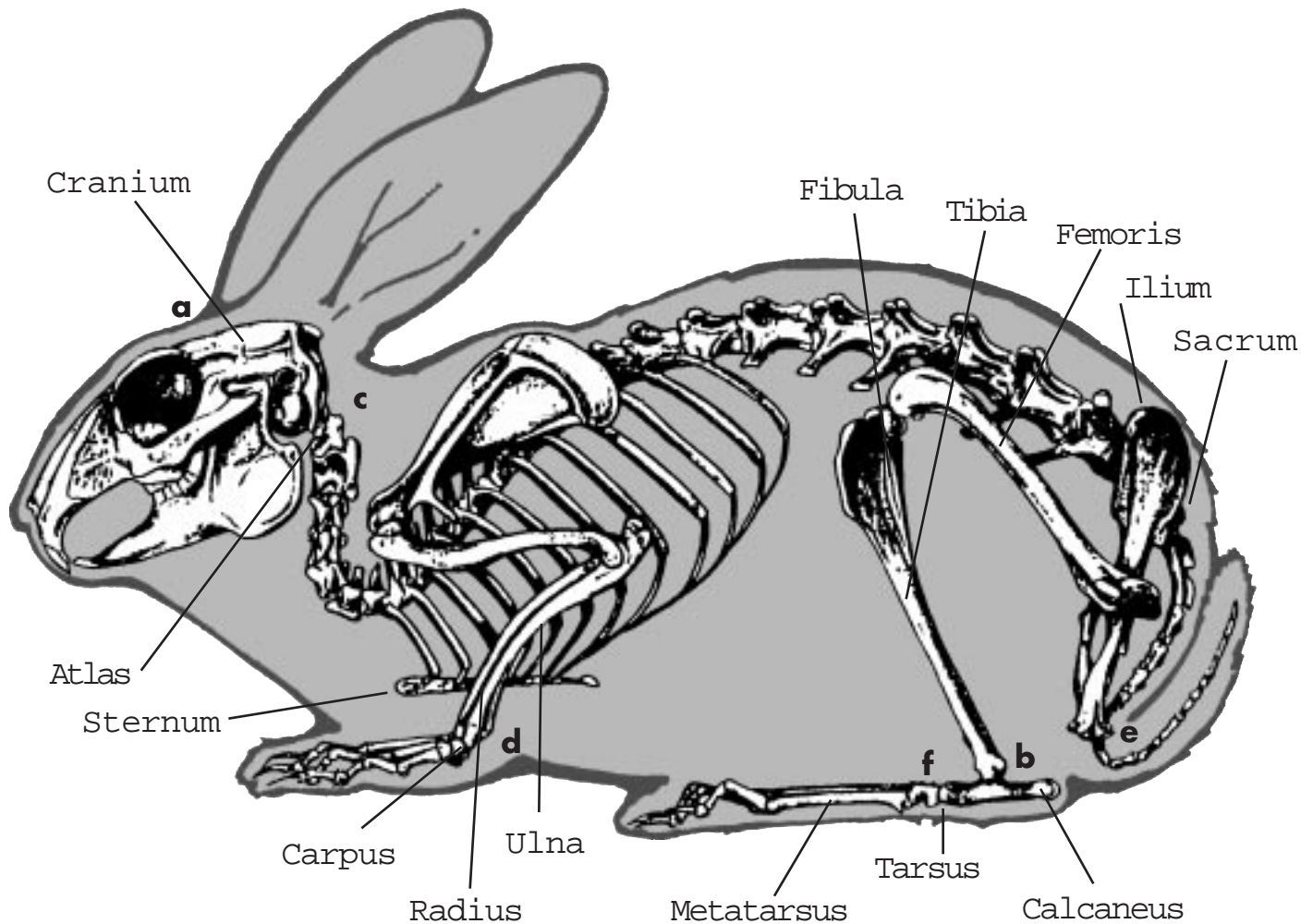
Dressing Procedures:

Rabbits should be skinned and eviscerated as soon as possible after sacrificing and while the carcass is warm.

- 1) Skinning Procedure -
 - a. Hang the rabbit by inserting a nail or hook near the hock joint between the tendon and the bone of the right rear leg (Figure 1-b).
 - b. Remove the head at the atlas joint (Figure 1-c).
 - c. Remove the front feet at the carpus/radius ulna joint (Figure 1-d).
 - d. Cut off the tail (Figure 1-e).
 - e. Sever the left hind foot at the first joint (Figure 1-f).
 - f. Cut the pelt around the right rear leg at the hock (Figure 1-b).
 - g. Slit the pelt inside the leg from the hock to the base of the tail.
 - h. Cut fat away from pelt and pull (using both hands) pelt down off the carcass.

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SKELETON OF THE RABBIT



- i. Rinse the carcass with high pressure cool (<math><40^{\circ}\text{F}</math>) water.
- 2) Eviscerating Procedure-
- a. Check for scent glands. These small, waxy-looking glands are located under the front legs at the natural seam where the legs join the body.
 - b. Avoid cutting the scent glands or bringing them in contact with the edible portion of the carcass. Flavor of the meat is affected to varying degrees by these glands due to physiological changes in animals with seasons.
 - c. Slit the belly from the anus to the breast bone (sternum). Avoid cutting the viscera by making a small cut in the flanks between the rear legs, inserting two gloved fingers to hold the viscera and guide the knife, and cutting from inside the body cavity outward.
 - d. Carefully cut through the center cartilage of the aitch bone (ilium) and free the bung (anus).
 - e. Remove the entrails with minimal handling using a gloved hand.
 - f. Wash the carcass inside and out with cool (<math><40^{\circ}\text{F}</math>) water.
 - g. Place the carcass in 50ppm chlorine 36° F water to chill. The chilled carcass will have a residue of 15-20ppm chlorine and maintain acceptable quality for 14 days under refrigeration.
 - h. Check liver for cysts (visible white spots). If none are visible and the liver is dark blood-red, the rabbit does not have evidence of Tularemia.
 - i. If cysts are present, place the carcass and the gloves in a solution of bleach or other disinfectant (200ppm chlorine or mix according to manufacturers direction on the container) prior to burying/discarding.
 - j. Wash your hands thoroughly and rinse them in an appropriate chlorine bleach or other hand sanitizer according to manufacturers directions on the containers.

NOTE: Sportsmen who bag wild rabbits should handle them with nonporous gloves and eviscerate them in the field soon after harvesting. Pelts should be left on to prevent drying. Complete the dressing procedure and refrigerate carcasses as soon as practical.

3) Cutting the carcass -

Rabbit carcasses are usually classified as “fryers or young rabbits” and as “roasters or mature rabbits.” A fryer is usually a domestic rabbit weighing 1 1/2 to 3 1/2 pounds (<12 weeks of age). Its flesh is fine grained, a bright pearly pink color and tender.

Roasters usually weigh 4 pounds and are from animals at least 8 months old. The flesh of a roaster is more firm and coarse grained than that of a fryer. Roaster carcasses may contain a cream colored fat, have a slightly darker colored flesh, and be less tender than that of a fryer.

The following cutting diagram and description yields portions for individual servings.

A. Remove Rear Legs and Tail

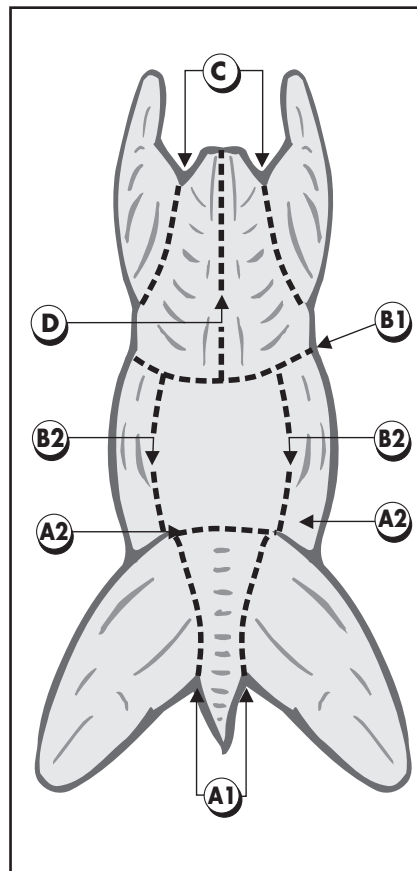
1. Cut parallel to and on each side of tail forward until knife contacts leg bones.
2. Cut perpendicular to spine in front of hip joint on each leg.
3. Remove by twisting to separate joint.
4. Cut through spine to remove tail and tail head.

B. Remove Back and Flanks

1. Cut through spine and along ribs.
2. Remove flanks by separating thinner flank from thicker muscles of back.

C. Remove Front Legs through the natural seam between the foreleg and ribs

D. Split the Rib with a cleaver or large knife by cutting through and parallel to the spine.



4) Smoking meat -

Marinate or apply seasoning to both the outside and inside of the body cavity. Some individuals prefer to marinate for 8 hours in a dry red wine before smoking. Others apply seasoning liberally.

Example of a seasoning mixture -

- 1 lb.10 ozs. table salt
- 1 tablespoon onion salt
- 2 tablespoons celery salt
- 1 tablespoon garlic salt
- 2 tablespoons paprika
- 4 tablespoons black pepper
- 4 tablespoons white pepper
- 2 tablespoons dill salt
- 3 tablespoons monosodium glutamate*
- 4 tablespoons white sugar

* Persons sensitive to MSG should omit this ingredient

Mix thoroughly, let stand in a covered jar at refrigerated temperature for several days before using.

Cold-smoke for 1 to 2 hours at 75-85°F.

5) Cooking procedures -

Roast in a 225-250°F oven to an internal temperature of 160°F. Because some meat contains little fat, one may need to baste with vegetable oil, butter, or cover with bacon strips.

6) More Recipes...

Wild rabbit is a very versatile meat and if properly handled in the field it should be a welcome addition to the menu. Most people find the flavor of wild rabbit to be quite pleasant.

Mature domestic rabbit and most wild rabbit tend to lack tenderness, therefore one should pre-cook it, regardless of the recipe. This should be done at low to medium heat while covered with water.

Don't over-cook! When the flesh can be easily pierced with a fork, it's time to stop pre-cooking and move on to your favorite recipe.

As a general rule, wild or domestic rabbit may be used in any recipe which calls for "skinless chicken." While rabbit does not "taste just like chicken," it does make a delicious and healthy substitute. For example, a popular "healthy" dish is "chicken & rice." Rabbit & rice can be prepared in exactly the same way, simply by substituting rabbit for all or part of the chicken that the recipe calls for. Another favorite is Rabbit Tetrazzini.

Most housewives have a favorite Fried Chicken recipe that can be put to good use with rabbit. A good one is listed below.

2 or 3	dressed, cleaned & cut wild rabbits
3	chicken bouillon cubes
2	large or med. eggs
1/2 cup	whole milk
3/4 cup	shortening
1 cup	*Big Spring Mill® Seasoned flour

Place rabbit & bouillon cubes in a kettle of accommodating size and cover with water. Place over high heat until water boils, reduce heat, cover and simmer until precooked (normally 15 to 35 min.). Remove from heat, drain and cool thoroughly (save the broth and use it later to make an excellent gravy or white sauce).

Preheat skillet and melt shortening. Break eggs into a shallow bowl and add milk. Stir with wire whisk, fork or mixer until well blended. Dip each meat piece into the egg/milk mixture, and then coat thoroughly with seasoned flour. Place coated rabbit pieces in melted shortening and cook until golden brown over medium heat. For a real Sunday "Preacher-Pleaser," serve with gravy, potatoes, hot biscuits and fresh garden vegetables.

For someone cooking rabbit for the first time or for anyone trying to stretch one rabbit into a meal for the whole family, use the following inexpensive and very simple recipe.

1	dressed, cleaned and cut wild rabbit
1	can vegetable soup
2	chicken bouillon cubes
pinch	black pepper

Place rabbit, bouillon and pepper in a kettle of accommodating size and cover with at least 1 quart of water. Bring contents to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until meat is tender (normally 20 to 40 min.). Remove from heat and drain rabbit pieces through colander, returning broth to the original container. When the rabbit has cooled well enough to handle, separate the meat from the bone by hand (easily accomplished if rabbit is thoroughly cooked). Discard bones and place the meat back into the broth that it was cooked in. Add the entire can of soup (do not add more water) and reheat to a boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally.

Serve as a soup, with cheese & crackers or ...

Thicken by slowly adding, while stirring, a thorough mixture of 3 to 5 tbs of flour and a 1/2 cup of cold milk into the boiling soup. Served over rice or egg noodles.

Excerpts from *Butchering, Processing and Preservation of Meat*. 1955. Frank G. Ashbrook, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. p. 122-123

The Meat We Eat. 1985. John Romans, W. J. Costello, K. W. Jones, C. W. Carlson and P. T. Ziegler. The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc. p. 230-233.

Home Book of Smoke-Cooking Meat, Fish & Game. 1988. Jack Sleight and Raymond Hull, Stackpole Books. p. 102.

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