

Field dressing



A STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR BIG GAME

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“Now the work begins” are words often spoken by hunters standing proudly over their harvest. Field dressing can definitely be work, and depending on the animal and location, an arduous task, but with the proper tools, skills, and preparation it can also be relatively quick and simple. Here's all you need to know to get the job done.

SET UP

Position the animal in an open area, belly up, with the head slightly inclined if possible. Have a buddy hold the rear legs open or if you're alone, tie them off to a tree to keep them spread and firmly in place.



Skip to the video

STEP 1

Starting at the rear end, disconnect the anal alimentary canal and remove the rectum. To do this, insert a Butt Out tool and make a few slow twists until you feel tension, and tissue starts to tear. Slowly remove the tool and anal canal by tearing the connective tissue. (If using a fillet knife, carefully cut the connective tissue all around the anus, until you can pull the canal out of the body cavity.

STEP 2

Use a zip tie or string to seal the remaining end off, so no waste gets into your animal. Then, cut the anal canal.

STEP 3

Make a small, shallow incision in the chest area at the ribs, not lower into the area of intestines. This cut will allow you to get your knife or gut hook underneath the hide.





Use a gut hook or a short bladed knife. Be careful not cut deeper than the the hide.

STEP 4

Insert a gut hook (or knife of preference) into the incision you just made, and run it up to the neck, then all the way down to the rear end. It may take a few passes to cut through the hide, fat, and connective tissue. Cut slowly and steadily to expose the organs, keeping the hide pulled taut and staying shallow enough to avoid puncturing the intestines.

STEP 5

Using a saw or heavy knife, cut through the ribs, starting at the bottom of the sternum, being careful not to nick the intestines. Saw through the middle of the sternum, or use a solid, sharp knife to cut through the ribs along the edge of the sternum on deer and bears.

Cut the ribs all the way to the neck and spread them, exposing the chest cavity.



Note: Skip this step if you want a shoulder mount. Cut no hide above the bottom of the ribs.



STEP 6

Find the windpipe, follow it as high into the neck as you can go, and try to separate the tissue below it with your hands. Use a small knife to cut the windpipe as high up as possible (this helps remove bacteria that can increase chances of spoilage). Take hold of the windpipe and adjoining tissue and slowly and steadily pull it towards the rear of the animal. The connective tissue should start to tear. The tissue holds the organs to the top of the chest cavity, so the heart, lungs, and other organs should all separate from the body and come out together. Stop at the diaphragm wall, the wall of tissue separating the upper organs from the intestines.



STEP 7

Cut the diaphragm wall carefully. Having a second set of hands helps, with one person holding the organs out of the way as you cut. Start at the upper edge of the cavity wall and work down to the spine. The bottom portion is often more difficult, as the organs are in the way, and there is often pooled blood. Be slow and careful here, so you don't cut yourself or the intestines.

STEP 8

After cutting both sides of the diaphragm wall, you should be able to take hold of the windpipe and start tearing again, pulling steadily towards the rear, with the organs and intestines coming out together. Pull the organs out onto the ground. Cut or tear any connecting tissue around the pelvis until the anal canal (which you tied off in step 2) pulls up through the pelvis. You should be left with the organs, intestines, and anal canal all connected and outside of the animal.

STEP 9 (optional)

Cut the pelvis. If you've already sealed off the rectum (see step 2) you can skip this step, but cutting the pelvis may make things simpler. Some hunters like to cut the pelvis and some don't. To split the pelvis, find the low point in the pelvis between the rear legs and cut through the meat with a sharp knife until you hit bone. Use a bone saw to carefully cut through it, ensuring you don't let the saw push through the bone and nick the bladder.

Once it's cut through, you should be able to lean on the pelvis to split it open. Carefully pull the bladder out while cutting away any connective tissue. Remove the bladder and the animals' private parts, cutting the hide around these as needed.

The animal will now be relatively clean, with nothing left inside and minimal loose hair. Elevate the front legs briefly to let the blood drain. It's now time to get your harvest out of the bush and back to your home or camp to be skinned, hung, and butchered.



When pulling on the windpipe, the animal can be turned onto its side. This lets gravity help with organ and intestine removal.



When cutting the pelvic bone, be very careful not to nick the bladder underneath.

FOLLOW ALONG

