TAKING CARE OF GAME MEAT

TIPS FROM THE POSSE

BY MARK RACKAY

Jen Prock of Kinikin Processing offered these tips for taking care of your game meat before it gets to the processor. *Photo by Mark Rackay.*

I HEAR every hunter make comments about when the game animal is down, that's when the real work begins. I learned just how accurate that phrase is the first time I had a bull moose on the ground. A guy can feel pretty helpless when he is looking at 1600 pounds of animal on the ground in front of him.

The truth is, how tasty your game animal will be on the table, is directly related to how it is cared for in the field. Complaints about gamey, wild, strong and tough can usually be eliminated with proper handling.

The most important thing in hunting is to make the shot. Ethically, you owe it to the animals to make a clean kill. I do not want my game to suffer in any way. I respect the animals I hunt too much for that.

Aside from the ethical reasons, it is much better for table fare when an animal is killed cleanly. A gut-shot animal, or one who takes off after being shot, is in for a slow and agonizing death. It's body will pump adrenaline into the meat, not to mention bacteria from nicked or torn digestive organs. All of this leads to wild, strong and gamey tasting meat on the table.

I had the opportunity to discuss field care of game with Jennifer Prock. Jennifer owns Kinikin Processing here in Montrose. Kinikin Processing has been taking care of game animals for hunters for over 16 years. Jennifer estimates that they process around a thousand deer, elk and pronghorn annually. Jennifer offered the following tips for hunters.

GET THE GUTS OUT QUICKLY

Few people can argue this point. The sooner you get the entrails out of the animal, the better. Getting them out as soon as possible starts the carcass cooling down. On an animal such as elk, the heat is held in the cavity, so skinning as much as possible will hurry along the cooling down process. Even if you can't completely remove the skin, splitting the hide along the back, to allow air to reach the carcass, will help.

COOL IT DOWN

The body temperature of a live deer is 101

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degrees. Bacteria grow best at 70 to 100 degrees in an animal, so cooling it quickly is key. If it is cold outside, simply hanging the animal carcass in the shade will usually work, especially when the skin is removed.

You can also quarter up the animal and place it in coolers. Don't use ice, as moisture promotes bacteria growth. Instead, use frozen water bottles or Arctic Ice, pre-frozen.

HANGING AND AGING THE MEAT

Everyone knows that aged meat is best, but few know how to do it properly. Game meat should be dry aged for at least 5 to 7 days at a constant temperature of 34 to 37 degrees. Since few of us have this ability, it is best to get it to your processor as quickly as possible.

CHOOSE YOUR MEAT PROCESSOR CAREFULLY

There are many fly-by-night processors around these days. Look for one that has been around awhile and watch for

cleanliness. If the processor can't keep his shop clean, how careful will he be with your animal? A good processor will give you a cut order to fill out, whereby you select the type of cuts, portion size, and number per package. The processor can also make sausage, jerky and snack sticks from your wild game.

These tips should assure that you have many tasty dinners from your game animal. Last thing any of us want is something that tastes gamey, especially if you can avoid it. Going to a reputable processor is one way to be sure and get your animal back, and all of it.

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