

## **Dos and Don'ts of Field-Dressing**

**Don't** tie the carcass to the hood of your car.

**Do** cool and maintain the carcass at 40 degrees F. or less as soon as possible to avoid deterioration or spoilage.

**Don't** hold the carcass outdoors, unrefrigerated until it can be processed.

**Do** take the carcass to a commercial processing plant as soon as possible, if you are not processing it yourself.

**Don't** handle or eat the brain, spinal cord, spleen or lymph nodes.

### **Be Aware:**

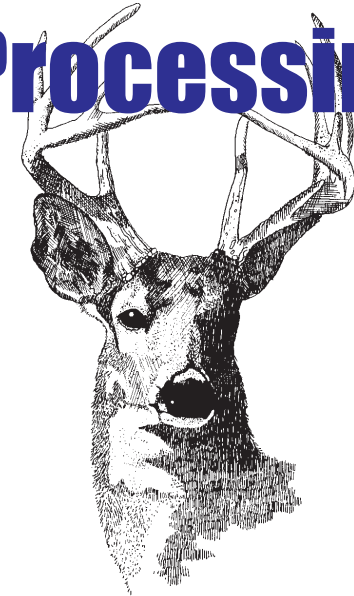
Every hunter should watch for ticks on deer that may cause Lyme Disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. These ticks can crawl off the carcass and attach to humans or pets.

## **Tips for Selecting a Commercial Processor**

If you plan to use a commercial processor for preparing your deer, here are a few questions to consider:

- Does the processor have a receiving cooler adequate to hang your deer?
- Are skinned deer stored separately from unskinned carcasses?
- How will the carcass be stored? Cooled air cannot circulate properly around carcasses stored in a pile on the floor.
- Does the processor have a "reconditioning" area where the carcass can be skinned and visible contaminations can be trimmed away?
- Are carcasses washed thoroughly in an area equipped with clean running water and a floor drain?
- Is wash water prevented from contacting any other food products or processing equipment?

# **Deer Processing**



**Indiana State Board  
of Animal Health**

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*Safeguarding Indiana's animals,  
food supply and citizens  
for over 100 years.*

## Before You Begin

Use caution as you approach a downed deer. Be sure it is dead before you get within range of its feet or antlers.

## Field Dressing

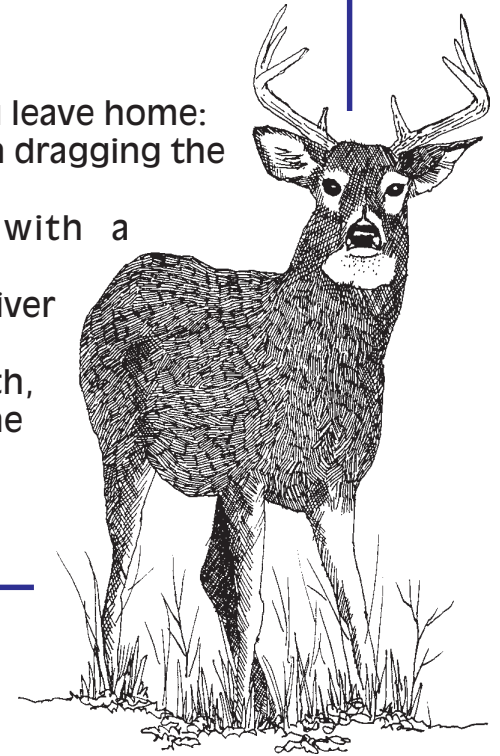
**1.** Field dress the deer as soon as possible to reduce body heat and prevent possible tainting of the meat from intestinal gasses which can migrate into the muscle. Try to place the deer where you will have plenty of room to work. Prop it on its back and brace the animal with a rock or log. Placement on a slight slope will help drain blood from cavities.

**2.** Open the abdomen near the breast bone. Cut through the hide along the center line of the belly from head to tail. Use two fingers of your free hand to guide the blade. To avoid cutting the intestines or paunch, cut through the muscles of the belly with the sharp edge of the knife pointing outward. Meat contaminated by intestinal contents or feces should be trimmed away and discarded. Wear rubber or latex gloves during the process, then wash hands with soap and water when finished.

## Preparation Checklist

Don't forget these important items before you leave home:

- Strong rope, 10 feet to 15 feet long, to aid in dragging the deer from the kill site.
- A sharp hunting or skinning knife with a 5-inch to 6-inch blade.
- A clean, sturdy plastic bag for carrying the liver and heart.
- A large towel or piece of absorbent cloth, approximately 1 square yard, to wipe out the body cavities and to dry your hands.
- Rubber or latex gloves.
- String for tying the plastic bag and gullet.



**3.** Cut deeply around the anus, leaving it attached to the intestines. If possible, split the pelvic bones with a heavy knife or hand axe.

**4.** Open the chest cavity by cutting the ribs loose from the breastbone at the cartilage attachment near the midline. Split the diaphragm which separates the chest cavity from the abdomen.

**5.** At the farthest-most possible point in the neck area, sever the esophagus (gullet) and trachea (windpipe) from the attachments. Pull the entire contents of the chest and abdominal cavities out onto the ground in one piece. Avoid spilling ingesta, feces or urine onto edible portions of the carcass.

**6.** Remove the heart and liver if these are to be saved. Place in a clean plastic bag.

**7.** To speed the cooling process, prop open the rib cage and abdomen with sticks to provide more air circulation. Hang the carcass for about an hour, if possible and time permits, to allow some cooling before transport.

**8.** The carcass is now ready to drag back to camp or to your vehicle. The deer should be kept as clean and as cool as possible during transport.