

# MY FAVORITE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

## PART ONE

**Successful field processing starts by going into each hunt prepared to care for your harvest from the moment you take its essence until the moment you consume it.**

There are four main ingredients to proper care that you must consider in the first moments after you harvest your game:

- Microorganisms,
- Exposure,
- Fat, and
- Temperature.

Mistakes in these first crucial hours can irreparably affect the taste and safety of the entire animal. Much of what you need to do in the field will depend on the length of time before you can get your harvest to your final processing area. If you are a short walk away from your vehicle and plan to return to your home for processing in a short time span, then you should keep the work done in the field to a minimum, as it is much more difficult to control the variables of success in the open field. The further you have to travel from your hunting area, the more difficult your field processing will be. I always have, at minimum, the necessary tools to gut my quarry. For me, this is a sharp knife, preferably with a skinning hook; three to six plastic bags for keeping offal, protecting meat from exposure, and collecting trash; a stack of paper towels; several pairs of vinyl gloves; a good length of rope.

I have found that a properly assembled

field-processing tool kit is the best measure you can take to ensure you are prepared for success. If you take this gear bag on all your hunts, the worst you will be is over-prepared. I have separate totes for each of my favorite game to hunt. If weight of gear is a concern, try packing in only the essentials for gutting and removing your game to your finish processing area. When scent control is a concern, I will pack these essentials in a carbon scent bag and leave it a safe distance downwind.

### MICROORGANISMS

Your first care after finding your harvest is to check the integrity of the meat. The safety of your harvest can be jeopardized by two major factors: length of time the carcass was at a temperature higher than 45°F and a break in the guttural integrity. Both of these factors are crucially controlled by the kill shot on the animal. When you have a quick, clean kill, not only have you been witness to the final moments of life, but typically the wound path is no where near the guttural area, so it is in your best interest to choose only the best of kill shots.

I will try to take the temperature of any harvest that has been left to expire for any length of time over six hours. Harmful bacteria, parasites, and other microorganisms thrive at temperature above 70°F and will continue to survive until 40°F; some parasites even require deep freezing below -10°F. It

is easy enough to bring a small digital thermometer when you go back to track. Once you find your harvest, you want to take the internal temperature of the meat in the deep thigh; this is the thickest part of the animal and will be the last to cool completely. The colder it is outside, the longer you can wait before tracking, but don't be fooled by mild temperatures. The hide of large game is especially prone to retaining warmth, and I have measured core muscle temperatures above 70°F four hours postmortem even in zero-degree conditions.

The contents of the alimentary canal, running from mouth to anus, should never be allowed to come in contact with the flesh of your game. There are many bacteria and parasites that live in the nether regions of the bowel, and they can ruin your harvest in no time. I gut all of the

## MORE FROM WILD GOURMET



Daniel Nelson  
CO-AUTHOR  
Wild Gourmet

animals I harvest in the field, even fowl and small game. Gutting your quarry removes a large quantity of hot organs as well as the main source of bacterial contamination. It also creates a large cavity to aide in cooling your game.

### EXPOSURE

Now that you have removed the major sources of contamination that exist within the animal, you must address the possibility of contamination from outside. There are innumerable sources of contamination in nature, from bugs, dirt—even air. I always do my best to close off the chest cavity from these bacteria sources. For large game, I prefer to put the entire

## FIELD PROCESSING TOOL KIT

- Skinning knife, boning knife, game shears, knife sharpener, hand-held zip/bone saw
- Digital thermometer
- Disposable vinyl gloves, disposable plastic aprons
- Box of paper towels that can be individually drawn out like tissue—this helps ensure you are not contaminating a whole roll of towels when trying to remove a sheet
- Several sizes of thick, plastic bags (black preferred, because exposure to light, especially ultraviolet light, can brown out the color of flesh and accelerate the development of rancidity in fat)
- Zip ties, rope, hanging pulley, gambrel
- Heavy drag-out bag designed for hauling large game from woods
- Adequately sized coolers, hard plastic freezer bricks, dry ice
- Collapsible shovel

## As soon as the last heartbeat thumps from the chest of your harvest, the natural process of decay begins, and the only way to slow it is by bringing the core temperature down.

animal in a body bag. These heavy-duty, sealable bags are great for keeping out contaminants and they really help make dragging large game easier. I will often stuff the cavity of smaller game and fowl completely with rags to help prevent any buildup of moisture and guard against dirt and germs.

As soon as the last heartbeat thumps from the chest of your harvest, the natural process of decay begins, and the only way to slow it is by bringing the core temperature down. Again, heat only travels from areas of high concentration to areas of low concentration, so the ice packs do not necessarily cool the meat;

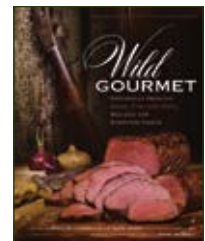
rather heat leaves the muscle to warm the ice packs. This means that you want to remove any barriers to heat energy and reduce the distance needed to travel to reach the ice packs. The empty chest cavity is an excellent place to begin to cool your game. I prefer to use hard-frozen ice packs. The dense material in these ice packs lasts much longer than ice, and the hard protective plastic makes them easy to clean and reuse. I often have a small cooler loaded with these frozen packs and topped off with a couple pounds of dry ice. The extreme cold of the dry ice will sink down into the cooler keeping the packs hard frozen. If you have a very

efficient cooler, you can even put in a completely thawed pack and refreeze it. Keep these packs pressed against the flesh of the cavity as the contact with muscle will aid in the transfer of heat. If I have a few hours' time before I begin processing the animal, I will put an ice pack in the armpit of each leg and between the thighs to help cool these muscle-dense areas more rapidly. If you are hunting in high temperature conditions (55°F and above) you should make every effort possible to get to your harvest quickly and begin removing heat as rapidly as possible.

Once you have taken control of the microorganisms, exposure, and temperature, your game is ready to drag out of the woods. You don't necessarily want to process the animal any further until you are in a cleaner, more controlled environment. If you have a lot of demands on your time and cannot finish butchering the animal in a timely manner, then I suggest you are always knowledgeable of a close and reputable butcher. If you can get your game to the butcher within the next few hours, you are all set! This is the point at which I handed my first deer over to a butcher and the quality and usefulness of the meat changed my life. Any trustworthy butcher will take great care of your game and deliver the exact cuts you ask for. Take the time to talk to your butcher

and let him know what your family will find most useful. Perhaps it will be a lot of ground venison for quick family meals, large muscle roasts for special occasions or a big pile of jerky to snack on for the next year. Many deer processors are also quite capable and willing to handle your other game meats as well. It may be the first time they have been asked to process squirrel, pheasant, or duck, but if you talk to them, establish a relationship and are clear with what you want, I am sure that you will find most eager to help you.

Next issue we will discuss fat and temperature as they pertain to processing and preparing wild game. ■



### WANT MORE?

Check out Boone and Crockett Club's award-winning cook book, **Wild Gourmet!**

Includes dozens of recipes for wild game, fish, and fowl, plus wine pairings and a detailed chapter on meat preparation. A must-have for every sportsman.

Order directly from B&C to receive your Associates discount at 888-840-4868 or [boone-crockett.org](http://boone-crockett.org).

Regular price is \$34.95.  
B&C Associates pay only \$27.95.