

WHAT LIES BENEATH

Know what resides under the hide

TIP

Familiarize yourself with this guide. Breaking an animal down properly makes the following steps easier.



1. SHANKS While fairly tough and somewhat sinewy, these are still valuable. Can be boned out, or if you want to try something a little different, leave them whole with the bone in.

2. HINDQUARTERS Large and relatively tender, this area of your animal has many potential uses. Do your best to leave the muscle groups whole so you have options when processing.

3. TENDERLOINS Some of the most sought after cuts on a big-game animal, these tender pieces of meat are located inside the body cavity on either side of the spine.

4. BACKSTRAPS These precious hunks of meat are located on either side of the animal's spine. Leave whole with as few nicks as possible.

With the exception of size, most ungulates (hoofed animals) have extremely similar builds. For instance, below is a skinned fallow deer. It looks and breaks down the same as skinned animals that are much larger than it. So,

whether you are butchering a fallow deer, antelope, mule deer, white tail deer, elk or one of the several other sought-after big-game animals, you can use the below guide and the following pages as a reference.



5. FLANKS AND RIBS

There's no need to be careful with this meat. Get it off the bone in any way possible. Clean every piece of usable meat from the carcass to ensure you're getting the most from your kill.

6. SHOULDERS This is one of the trickiest portions to bone out due to its "paddle". However, once you get it down, it goes quick and leaves you with some versatile cuts.

7. NECK Often overlooked, neck meat is valuable and versatile. We suggest leaving it in large chunks so you have more options when processing.

THE ORGANS While personal taste and family tradition vary, the most commonly consumed organs of game animals are the heart and liver.

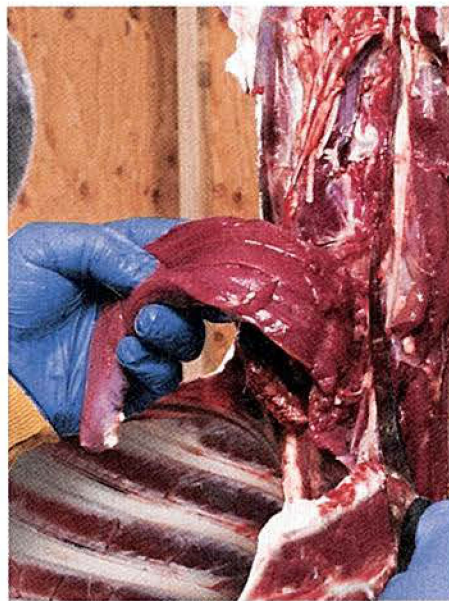
HEART - Remove the ventricles and valve openings with a slender knife (this process is similar to hollowing out a bell pepper after the top and stem have been removed). Then wash the heart thoroughly and cut it into slices approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. These slices can then be fried, grilled, seared, canned, pickled and more.

LIVER - Slice into thin slices that are $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick or less and soak in a mixture of water and lemon juice overnight, or, if you plan to fry the organ, a pan of milk for up to one hour. Soaking will help draw the blood from the tissue and result in a milder flavor. Drain the liquid from the meat and prepare the slices to your liking by frying, grilling or searing. Frying liver in bacon grease until it's brown is another way to minimize any strong, gamey flavor.

CUT TO THE BONE

Breaking down your kill in eight simple steps

While hunting is an enjoyable sport, it's important to remember that we've taken to the woods as hunters for centuries, first and foremost, to provide food for ourselves and our families. And because no one knows your preferences better than you, it makes sense that you take care of butchering harvested animals yourself. While it may seem difficult, breaking down a big-game animal can be done in just a few simple steps, and with some extra hands around to help hold the carcass, gather up scraps or transport quarters for cooling, the process will go even faster. It's a fun, exciting way for you and anyone else involved to learn more about their food, like where it came from and how each piece of meat should be cleaned, trimmed and stored. Doing the work ourselves allows us to be certain that our meat is prepared exactly how we want it and isn't tainted by unwanted chemicals.



1. Remove the tenderloins. Ideally, this should be done shortly after field dressing to prevent drying out. It's pictured here to show what tenderloins look like and where they are on the animal (under the spine, just behind the ribs).



2. One at a time, pull the front legs away from the rib cage and cut where the shoulder meets the body.



3. Since they aren't attached to any other bones (they are held in place mainly by muscle), the front legs should be quick and simple to remove. When removed, be sure to set them on something clean to make your later processing easier.



4. Remove the flanks and the meat that lies on top of the ribs. Try to take it off in large chunks. This makes it easier and more efficient to work with when processing. While it's perfectly OK to switch steps four and five, doing this first makes it easier to find the lateral part of the vertebrae when removing the backstraps.



5. To loosen the backstraps, make a cut down both the lateral and vertical sides of the backbone (the backbone makes an L shape). Start up by the hind quarters and stay as close to the bone as possible. Continue these same cuts down towards the neck, loosening the loin until you're able to peel it free.



6. Trim meat from the neck and ribs. Slide your knife between each individual rib to remove the small strips of meat found there. Trim any remaining meat from the front half of the carcass. Like the flanks, this meat will be added to the grind pile, so feel free to cut and slice however you need to get it off the animal.



7. If your animal is hanging, remove the boned-out portion by cutting through the spine, just ahead of the pelvis. Work your knife in-between the vertebrae to help sever the tie. If it's being stubborn, twist the lower half. It should pop off fairly easily and leave you with just the hindquarters hanging on the gambrel.



8. Now it's time to put down your knife and pick up your bone saw. Saw between the hindquarters, directly through the pelvis. This will separate them, leaving you with smaller, easy-to-process sections.



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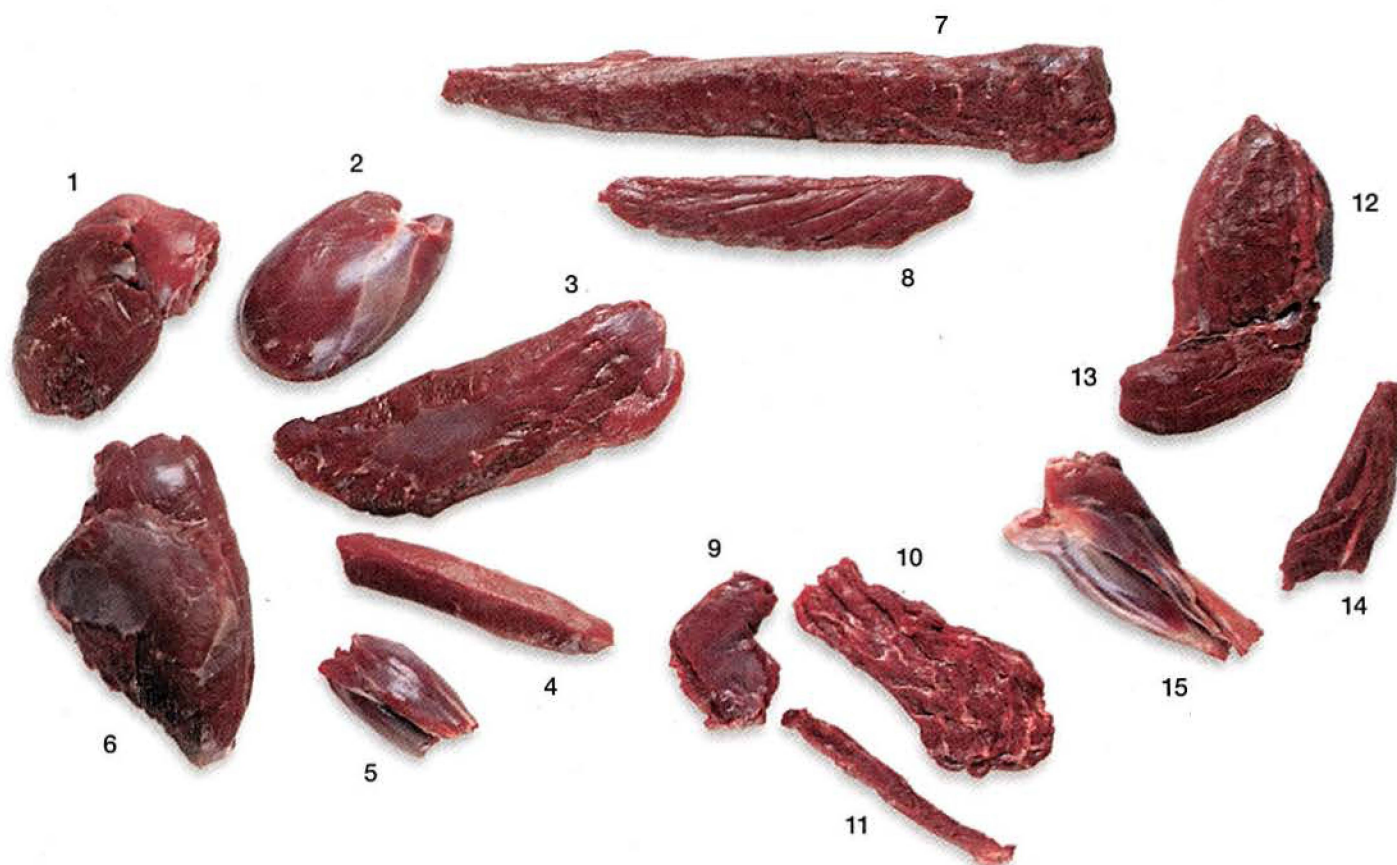
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THE CHOICE CUTS

From tenderloins to shanks, it can all be tasty



Much like domestic beef, wild ungulates have many different muscle groups, each with their own best use. While it isn't a disaster if the meat doesn't come off the bone in perfectly separated muscle groups, it does degrade the quality of the meat somewhat. By not combining two muscle groups into one cut, you limit the amount of tough gristle and inconsistencies in tenderness. Pictured above are the main muscle groups found on most big-game animals. Sizes will vary, but shape and usage will be similar from species to species.

HIND-QUARTER

1. Rump or top sirloin – Use to make stew meat, jerky or grinds. **2.** Sirloin tip – An excellent muscle group for turning into a roast. **3.** Bottom round – Great for steaks, stew meat and fajita strips. **4.** Eye of round – Can be grilled whole, depending on the size of the animal, or cut into steak medallions. **5.** Boned-out shank – Full of tough tendons and gristle, this is best turned into grinds. **6.** Top Round – Makes excellent large steaks.

BACK

7. Backstrap and **8.** Tenderloin are the tenderest, most-prized cuts. Tenderloins can be grilled whole, while backstraps are excellent when butterflied (pictured on page 25).

GRIND MEATS

9. Flank – Best thrown in the grind pile. **10.** Neck – Can be turned into a roast, especially on larger animals. **11.** Ribs – On larger animals with more meat, you can grill the ribs or even make bone-in spare ribs. Don't be scared to experiment.

FRONT QUARTER

12. Shoulder – Can be turned into stew meat or steaks. **13.** Top blade – Kind of tough. Usually best for grinds. **14.** Mock Tender – Again, kind of tough and usually best ground. **15.** Bone-in shank – Leaving the bone in gives you some fun added options. You can cure it and grill it, like a turkey leg at a carnival, or braise it to create a moist, flavorful meal.

NUTRITION FACTS

1 Low in fat

Based on USDA data, 1"-thick venison backstrap steaks – about 150 calories each – contain only 2.4 grams of fat.

2 Heart healthy

Not only is venison low in fat, the fat it does contain is high in Omega-3 fatty acids and thus, healthier to consume.

3 Complete protein

Venison contains all 10 essential amino acids, which our bodies need but cannot produce.

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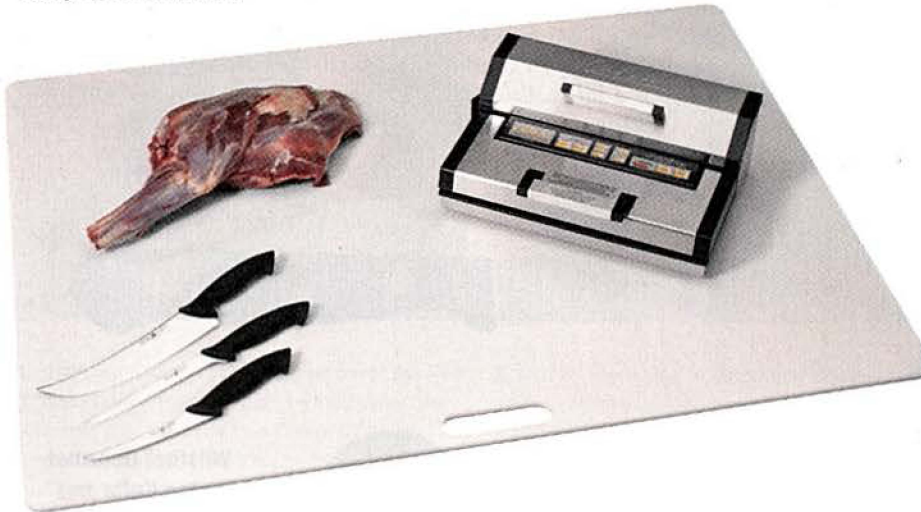
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Butterfly a Steak

To create butterfly steaks: 1) Put your knife $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{3}{4}$ " from the end of your backstrap. Then, cut $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through using a smooth rocking motion. 2) Now, move your knife over another $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{3}{4}$ " and cut all the way through the meat to the tabletop. 3) Pull the two sides away from each other (like you're opening a book), and lay the steak flat on the table. It should look like a butterfly.

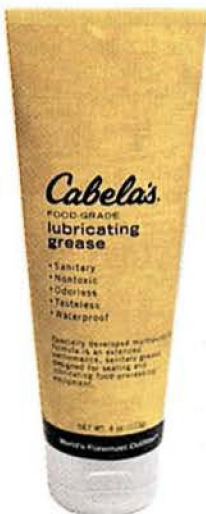
1.



2.



3.



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