

# Food Preparation (Rabbit)

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All BGMA instructors ensure that food preparation instruction is carried out in a professional and humane manner. Preparing a wild animal for eating is a survival skill which you must learn without the stress and necessity of an actual situation, the procedure given here for preparing a rabbit is basically the same for all animals.

For the sake of simplicity, let's assume that we are going to prepare a young doe (Female) rabbit, as older rabbits, especially bucks, can be difficult to skin and can be tough to eat.

## Initial Preparation

A rabbit should have the urine expelled from it before gutting to avoid puncturing the bladder during gutting and thus contaminating the meat. This procedure is carried out immediately on killing your rabbit and the procedures described here are executed in the field. For gutting, the rabbit should have cooled<sup>1</sup>, or it will bleed. This does not affect the eating quality, but if the rabbit is to be carried in a game bag it will soak through on to your clothing.

## Removing the Urine from a Rabbit

### ***BGMA TIPS!***

*By far the best way to remove the urine is to hold the rabbit in one hand by the chest, belly up, and rear legs hanging down. Using your free hand, take hold of the rabbit about midway down its abdomen so that your thumb is on its belly, and in a gentle stroking motion downwards express the urine from it. This procedure not only prolongs the life of game bags, but saves the risk of contaminating the meat with urine when preparing the rabbit for the pot.*

## Gutting a Rabbit

Although techniques may vary, this method is a quick, tried-and-tested means of performing a task which some may find objectionable, but which can be accomplished with minimal contact with the yucky bits. It is important that it is carried out on waste ground, or an alternative method will need to be used.

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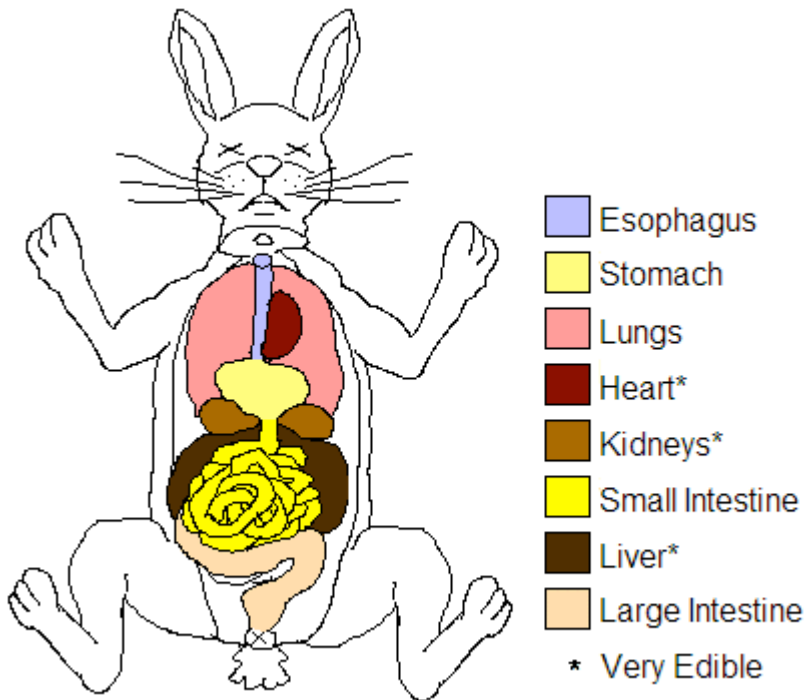
You need a knife with a sticky sharp point - a craft knife is suitable, but any small sharp pointed knife will do. Take hold of the rabbit in the left hand around the chest (belly up), and taking care not to go stabbing wildly, insert your knife just below the ribs at a shallow angle, and make an incision about three quarters of an inch long. You should be looking at going in no further than say a quarter of an inch or 6mm. Two fingers can now be inserted into the incision and it can be torn open to give you an opening about three inches long. This sounds brutal, but it is the best way to make sure that you don't contaminate the meat by puncturing the entrails with the knife.

Take the rabbit by the back feet with one hand, round the chest with the other, raising it shoulder high, and using a motion similar to emptying a bucket whose contents are stuck to the bottom of it, swiftly swing the rabbit downwards. This will remove most of the entrails, they will still be attached at front and rear, however. The part attached to the rear can easily be pulled and broken without risk of contamination, as the only thing you will encounter here are rabbit droppings, which are usually very dry and hard. The front is a different matter, it is attached to the stomach, up beneath the ribs. Take the rabbit round the ribs in the left hand and grip the stomach, and remove it, it is about the size of a golf ball and providing you didn't puncture it with your knife, it will come away cleanly leaving you with a gutted rabbit, as it would be, if you acquired it from a game dealer.

The chest cavity is normally left intact as it carries little risk of going off, thus contaminating the food. If you have managed so far, and want to finish the job, look inside the body cavity and you will see a tight membrane. This is the diaphragm which separates the thorax from the abdomen. Puncture this and the heart and lungs are easily removed by taking hold of them and pulling them out. Quite often this is unnecessary as, unless the rabbit is being cooked whole, the rib cage is often discarded due to the fact that there is very little meat on it.

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The rabbit should be gutted promptly on cooling as the meat can become tainted, especially if the rabbit has been shot, as on occasion, the gut will be punctured allowing the contents to come into contact with the meat.

This is for right-handed people, if you're left-handed then use your right hand to hold the rabbit.

It is not the end of the world, but easier if you don't stab the stomach or puncture any of the intestines.

While it is possible to control the direction in which the entrails travel, it is advisable to carry out the task alone until you become proficient.

If you did puncture the stomach, or it bursts on removal, the fouling should be washed out immediately as it taints the meat.

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## Skinning

As this part of the operation *can* be messy, you can elect to do it outside (weather permitting), and it should be carried out on an impervious surface such as polythene or a worktop. *Do not* use newspaper as the print is very difficult to remove from the meat. A plastic 'builders rubble' type bag can be used.

Lay the rabbit on its back, head towards you and on the left side of the opening that it was gutted through, start to separate the skin from the meat - it's not that dissimilar from opening a book. Work round to the other side until you have separated the meat from the skin right round.

Put your left hand under the skin and grip the rabbit. It should be quite easy using the other hand to peel off the rest of the skin.

You will find that it is still attached at the head, legs and tail. These can be removed with a pair of kitchen scissors or a sharp knife. Do be careful, as unless you remove the legs at the joint not only the knife, but the bones will also be very sharp. The head is best removed by cutting round the neck with a sharp knife, then dislocating the vertebrae with a twisting motion.

You should now wash your rabbit to remove any blood and fluff that is sticking to it, and finally dry it using kitchen paper or a cloth.

## Butchering

You can now put your washed and dried rabbit on a prepared log or neutral green leaved area, and you will notice that there are two flaps of loose skin either side these which can be removed and put to one side. Run a sharp knife round the back of the rabbit just below the ribs, and you can quite easily separate the two pieces by twisting in opposite directions. Next remove the front legs, you will find that the front legs aren't in fact connected to the skeleton and can be removed with your knife, without resorting to bone breaking.

If you now take the rear half and lay it on your log belly up, legs facing you, you will see a hole where the connections from the rabbit's insides got to the outside. Your knife should be laid along this and, by pressing on top, you should be able to break through it, and any remaining yucky bits can be removed.

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Run your knife round the back just in front of the rear legs, and once again this can be removed using a twisting motion. Finally, the rear legs can be separated down the centre using your knife. Watch your fingers.

You should now have six pieces of rabbit. However, the rib cage can be put with the pieces removed earlier. If you want to use these pieces they can be boiled to make stock, but for the methods used here the amount of meat on them is minimal and they can be discarded leaving two rear legs, two front legs and a section of back.