

Paunching & Skinning a Rabbit

Contributed by Jonnyboy

First catch your rabbit...now it's time to show respect for the not so lucky bunny by ensuring none of it goes to waste as you paunch, skin and joint it for the pot.

Through fair means or foul you've got yourself a nice, fresh, rabbit.

If you're out in the field and it's your first time shooting one then congratulations! Although you're probably feeling a bit of melancholy over taking its life, console yourself in that it lived far better than any factory farmed animal. Your part of the bargain is to despatch it humanely, cook it with respect and don't waste any useful bits.

The first thing is to pick your rabbit up, and hold it vertically with its head uppermost. Put your hand around its nether regions and give a good squeeze, you want to expel any urine that's still contained in the bladder as this can quickly taint the meat.

Following that you need to paunch the rabbit. It's usually done in the field for two reasons, firstly rabbits don't really need to be hung and leaving their innards in for any length of time causes them to spoil. And secondly, if you paunch them at home you just throw the guts in the bin, in the field they get recycled in a natural way. Try to leave them away from any obvious paths or livestock areas though.

For the purposes of the article I have paunched the rabbit at home. Carefully make a slit from between the rabbits back legs right up to the breast bone, be careful not to cut too deeply or you will pierce the innards. If you are careful you will cut through the skin and leave the inner flesh exposed, then with the point of your knife you can ease away the skin from the body, it helps to keep things cleaner and neater when skinning later.

Next carefully cut through the flesh of the belly to expose the guts.

Remove the stomach, intestines, urinary tract, etc. But be careful to keep the liver and kidneys, these are useful.

Just reach in and carefully pull them away from the cavity, checking to ensure that no pieces are left attached, especially at the back end. Your rabbit is now paunched.

You now need to remove the offal, if the liver and kidney are still there, remove them. And keep safe.

Break through the membrane into the chest cavity with your fingers and remove the lungs and heart. The heart can go together with your remaining offal, I tend to discard the lungs but your pet will probably enjoy the treat. At this stage I would recommend you inspect the offal for any obvious signs of disease. If you are unsure of identification just imagine the items you see on your butchers slab, but on a smaller scale. The internal organs of most mammals are remarkably similar.

Clear out any residual membranes etc. You should then wash out the cavity.

To skin the rabbit, continue gently peeling the skin away from the body with a sharp knife right round to the backbone on both sides. Then make a horizontal cut right across the skin so it is in two pieces. .

With a cleaver, shears or big kitchen scissors, cut off the four legs just above the first joint, then grasp the flap of skin nearest the back legs and pull it back over the legs and rear of the rabbit.

If it's difficult you can use your knife to ease the skin away from the legs.

Do the same with the rabbit at the front, pulling the skin up towards the head to fully expose the neck and release the legs. Chop through the neck - you can discard the head if you prefer, but remember that many people use it for stock.

Tidy up the carcass by cutting off any fur that remains around the tail or legs. Make sure all the area around the rectum has been cleared away so nothing remains.

Rinse the rabbit well inside and out, and then pat dry. Your rabbit is now ready to joint - see Sean's article for instructions on how to do this.