

Preparing a hare

Contributed by Cab

Cab shows you how. Warning: The photographs are graphic, so don't look if you're squeamish.

How to Skin and Paunch a Hare

So, you've got a hare eh? Big, isn't it? Bigger than a rabbit, tastier too. And rather more daunting; where do you start with such a big critter? If you're squeamish, if you don't cope well with innards and gorey bits, stop reading now. And whatever you do, don't look at the pictures. If you're more hardened to gibbles, then read on...

The first thing to do is to hang it. How long to hang it depends on a lot of things (how gamey you like it, what the weather is like, how the hare was shot or caught, etc.). I like mine fairly gamey, but not overwhelmingly so, I think you lose a little of the distinctive hare flavour if it gets too gamey. If it's been shot then inspect the wounds; it could be fairly badly damaged in the hind quarters, and then you're probably best doing the job straight away. But if it's a cleaner kill in the fore parts of the animal (ideally a head wound) then hanging is certainly the way forward. If you like, tie a plastic bag round the head to catch any of the blood that comes out of it. You'll be wanting that for jugged hare, and it'll stop it dribbling out and making a mess.

I've found that a good way of judging game hanging is simply to smell it; when it's just beginning to smell gamey, its time to deal with it. Other people say that with hare you want to cut it when the fat on the belly starts to go just a little green. Take your pick.

But whether the hare is gamey or not, this is how it'll look when you're ready to go:

Now, a hare is rather too big to get the fur off all in one go, so you'll not be doing the whole single cut in the belly, off over the back legs and pull over the head that you might do with a bunny. The best way (that I've yet found) has been to go for a cut round the middle, back half off, then fur off the front half, just like in Jonnyboy's article here:

http://www.downsizer.net/Projects/Finding_Food/Paunching_%26_Skinning_a_Rabbit/

So, get a good sharp knife out, and make a tentative, gentle cut (more gentle than I was in the following step!) in the belly, a little slit. Continue round the animal, till you're all way round (scissors work) and start pulling the fur off over the back legs.

I've found with hare that a good hard pull and you end up with the tail and back feet still attached and hairy; you can cut them off later so don't worry over it.

Next, pull the fur off over the head. You can see here that I was a bit too eager with my first cut, so there are a few guts spilling around, but unless it's bleeding you don't need to worry too much about that. Try not to damage them though, or things will get very messy. That isn't why I'm wearing rubber gloves, you understand, that was to keep blood off the camera and my lovely assistant who was helping with pictures.

Can you see the blood clots in the front end there? This hare ran a couple of yards in front of a friend of mine, which wouldn't have been such a bad career move if he hadn't been shooting at pheasants at the time. Clean kill to the head, with just two stray pellets in the body, and there is the result.

It's easiest just to cut the head off when you get there, but the skin will pull off the front legs, again leaving the feet.

Now, on to those feet. If you've got a cleaver you could use that, but if you haven't then simply score them, put a good groove in them, with a sharp knife, and then snap them off. Dead easy.

And then you've got innards. Get your knife, and score from the bottom of the rib cage down to the naughty bits. Lots of nasty gibbly bits will just sort of flop out (this is the stuff horror films never get right), put your hand in and gently pull out the rest of them. You're going to get a chance to give the insides a good wash afterwards, but do try to get as much out now as you can.

Just 'cos you don't want the horrid wormy bits, that doesn't mean you don't want anything from the abdomen. You want the kidneys and the liver, they're gorgeous fried off, or in a terrine, or chopped in jugged hare.

Obviously the liver will be a bit bloody, so let it drip down into a bowl... but you're about to hit blood paydirt, because next comes the thorax. Make a cut in the diaphragm (the membrane that separates the bit under the ribcage), and hold the body over a bowl, let the blood flow out. This one here is my favourite picture:

Pull out the heart and lungs (and wind pipe), give it all a little squeeze into the blood bowl, and put the heart with the other offal you've saved. Lots of good blood in there usually.

Last, bit of skinning coming up, remove the tail!

I like to give it a good wash now, especially around the back end, just to be sure of getting rid of the last of the innards. Make sure that all the gibbles are out, and you're ready to portion it up.

Jointing a hare is a straightforward business; if you can do a rabbit you can do a hare. And we've got instructions for jointing a rabbit here:

http://www.downsizer.net/Projects/Processing_Food/How_to..._joint_a_rabbit/

Start out by cutting off the front legs, you can feel where they're joined, cut through the joints where they join the body, then portion the saddle into two or three good sized joints. If you like you can leave the saddle whole (cut off the front of the ribcage), wrap it in fatty bacon and freeze it as a handy little roasting joint for two. However you choose to do it, you're done now. Enjoy your hare!

Recipes for hare and rabbit can be found here:

http://www.downsizer.net/Projects/Processing_Food/Things_to_do_with_rabbits_and_hares/

But for me, the ultimate way to use a hare is to jug it. And here's how.

You will need:

1 hare, with the blood, heart, liver and kidneys.

6 rashers of streaky bacon

Plain flour to coat the hare

2 or 3 onions, or one big onion

1 carrot

1 stick of celery

2 squares of good dark chocolate

Oil for frying off

Most of a bottle of red wine

To marinate

Splash of olive oil

4 cloves of garlic

6 good sized shallots, sliced

1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

Handful of herbs (thyme, parsley, couple of bay leaves)

Good sized glass of red wine

Mix up the marinade, coat the meat in it, leave it sitting in the juice overnight.

Next day, dice up the onion, carrot and celery. Slice up the bacon, brown it in some oil, add the diced veg and get it somewhat browned off. Take it out of the pan, shake the excess marinade off the hare, coat in flour and seal it.

Pack the hare into a good sized casserole that has a lid that fits well, de-glaze the pan you've been using to brown things off, and just cover the hare in the marinade, diced browned veg, and the rest of the bottle of wine. Chop up the offal and add that too. Put this all into a warm oven, 160°C or so, and go away for three hours.

When it's good and done, remove the meat joints and leave them to drain. Get a ladle, and add just a bit of the gravy to the blood. Just a bit. Stir it in carefully, you don't want it to curdle. Add the blood slowly to the gravy, finally pouring it all back into the casserole, along with the two squares of chocolate. The blood and chocolate will enrich the sauce. From this point on you can heat the sauce but don't boil it.

I like jugged hare with mashed spuds and roast veg, but you can eat

it with nearly anything. The leftover meat can be stripped from the bone and put back into the gravy, making a close approximation of the classic hare sauce for pasta.