

TROPHY CARE TIP

Care on Whitetail Deer in the Field

Taking care of your trophy deer seems to take a back seat when it comes to showing it off! None of us know when we will put together the skill and luck that it takes to harvest that trophy of a lifetime. However when we do you can be sure that we will put it on tour. I cannot blame the deer hunter that shows their deer off to 20 of his closest friends and neighbors but while doing so they often forget about what kind of care should be taken for having it mounted. Here are some common mistakes that I see sportsmen do each year.

THINGS NOT TO DO:

1. Do not tie your deer on top of the hood or roof of your vehicle. Not only will this dry out the deer's lips and ears so that they cannot be skinned properly (due to windburn which is equally dangerous as freezer burn) but this is also a tacky way for a sportsman to represent himself as a respectable hunter.
2. Do not leave your deer exposed to direct sunlight. A deer with warm body temperature, in bright sunlight, laying on a black bed liner, on top of the muffler is a great formula for a big garbage can of deer later! A situation like this can spoil your deer skin and meat in about 1 hour at an outside temperature of 40-50 degrees.
3. Do not cut the throat. This is the part where your hunting partner tells you to take better aim the next time you shoot a deer. A good shot placement is always better than watching an animal suffer.
4. Do not leave your deer head at a meat locker more than 1 day. Meat lockers are in the business to cut meat; not mount deer. Every night meat lockers spray water on the floor of their coolers to clean up. Where is your deer stored that you told them to save for a mount? In most cases it is sitting on the floor waiting for you to pick it up. A skin that gets wet will swell up with water just like your fingers wrinkle from swimming. When this happens to a deer skin from excessive moisture the hair becomes loose and then falls out! Please pick your deer head up from the meat lockers AS AP.
5. Do not put deer head in a black or green trash bag and tie it shut. If sunshine hits your bag it will become like a greenhouse inside letting bacteria grow. This can cause your deer to spoil in as little as a half an hour (if conditions are right). Use a white bag or cardboard box to transport your deer. If you must use a black or green bag then please do not tie it leave it open for transporting.

Remember: A deer's skin will spoil before the meat does. Blood and guts should be known as bacteria accelerators. These two things will cause hair loss if they come in contact with your hide. Three things cause bacteria to grow on your deer skin:

FOOD: blood, guts and skin tissue

TEMPERATURE: primarily heat, sunshine, mufflers, or 4 days of hanging in the barn with warm temperatures

MOISTURE: bacteria likes damp moist places to live and grow. Eliminate any of the three sources and you can save your hide for a great looking mount.

SOLUTIONS:

FOOD: Keep hide clean of any blood and guts. If soiled wipe it off with a paper towel and remove the potential problem.

HEAT: Freeze as soon as possible. If possible take it to a taxidermist immediately. Keep it out of direct sunlight and use caution when transporting.

MOISTURE: Please do not hose off your deer with a garden hose to remove blood, mud, or dirt. This will be more dangerous than just leaving it as it was. Salting removes moisture from the skin as well as flint drying; however it is not recommended unless you are sure of the proper methods and procedures.

I would like to expel a myth about hanging your deer in the barn for a week prior to skinning it out. In beef cattle the meat is hung for several days so that the meat becomes tender (called marbling). The enzymes in the meat break down causing it to become tender. This is also the start of the decaying process. Venison and beef are two different types of meat. Venison does not have fat running throughout the meat like cattle. It is all located on the outside of the meat up against the skin. Because of this deer do not get tender when they are hung in the barn or cooler for a week. The truth is that all you do is put your family in jeopardy of food poisoning. This is also when you get comments like "this years deer sure does have a gamey taste."

Please to not take any risks cut your deer up as soon as it cools down. This does not take a week. Depending upon the weather this could be just a couple of hours after harvesting your deer. This same situation holds true for mounting your deer. Get it skinned out as soon as possible. If it has been hanging around the barn for several days the likelihood of the hide working for a mount are slim to none.

When hunting out west for elk, mule deer, bear etc. and refrigeration or freezing is not accessible then salting is the only option.

Salting a hide will do nothing if all the meat and fat are not totally removed. Salt cannot do its job if its not touching the skin. Trim the meat around the lips, nose, eyes and the bases of the ears as much as you dare (without making any holes).

To salt a hide properly the skin must always be laying on an incline. Salting a hide on a flat surface will produce puddles of moisture on the hide. Remember what moisture on a hide does. It causes the skin to swell and the hair to loosen and fall out. Be sure to lay the hide on a slope so that the liquid runs off the hide.

Please remember that salt is cheap and hides are expensive therefore use lots of salt. It is worth it. Fifty pounds of salt will only cost you \$4.00 - \$5.00 at any livestock feed store. Mixing salt is your first choice and pickling salt would be your second choice all though it is a little more expensive. Do not use rock salt or iodized salt.

Put new salt on the hide every day for the first three days, shaking off the old prior to adding the new. The old salt can hold bacteria. Do not be cheap here.