



## Canning and Freezing Venison

Safety of home preserved venison begins as soon as the animal is killed and continues throughout the preservation process. Use proper techniques for handling the meat from field to freezer or jar.

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### Food Safety

- Safe preservation of venison begins in the field.
  - Avoid contamination of the meat while dressing, handling, and transporting it.
  - Field dress the deer as soon as possible.
  - Quickly cool the carcass to 35 to 40°F.
  - Transport the carcass to a processing facility as soon as possible; keep it cool during transport.
- Practice cleanliness; wash your hands, knife, and cutting boards frequently with warm, soapy water.
  - In Pennsylvania Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a concern. The [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#) provides information for hunters about this disease and recommendations on safe harvesting of animals. In general, the [recommendation](#) is to avoid eating the eyes, brain, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils or lymph nodes of any deer.

## Freezing Venison

**Dr. Catherine Cutter, Professor of Food Science, Assistant Director of Food Safety and Quality Programs, Food Safety Extension Specialist at Penn State, gives the following suggestions for freezing venison, the easiest method of preservation.**

- Cut and package into meal-size portions.
- Wrap the meat tightly in heavily waxed paper, freezer wrap, heavy-duty aluminum foil, or plastic freezer storage bags.
- Remove all the air from the bag or wrap before sealing.
- Space packages in the freezer to allow proper air circulation so that the meat freezes quickly.
- After packages are solidly frozen, restack them to save space.
- Properly wrapped venison can be stored in the freezer for 9 to 12 months.
- Do not refreeze thawed products to avoid quality deterioration,
- Thaw all frozen meats in the refrigerator or microwave and use immediately.
- Cook venison, including jerky, to a minimum internal temperature of 160°F to reduce the risk of food-borne illness.

## **Canning Venison**

**Many people enjoy canned venison because the processing breaks down the muscle tissue making it very tender. Penn State Extension's [Let's Preserve: Meat or Processing of Wild Game and Fish](#) provide instructions for canning venison and other meats.**

- Venison, like all meats, is a low acid food and **must be processed in a pressure canner** at the proper pressure and time. Boiling water bath processing, even for an extended period of time, **will not** provide enough heat to destroy bacterial spores that can cause illness.
- Choose high quality, chilled meat. Remove excess fat.
- Strong-flavored wild meats can be soaked for 1 hour in brine made from 1 tablespoon salt per quart of water. Rinse the meat.
- Cut into 1-inch wide strips, cubes or chunks.
- Venison may be packed into jars hot or raw.
  - To raw pack the venison, simply pack the raw venison in hot jars allowing 1-inch headspace. Do not add liquid.
  - To hot pack venison, pre-cook it to the rare stage by roasting, stewing or browning in a small amount of fat. Pack the hot meat loosely into hot jars, leaving 1-inch headspace.

- Fill the jar to 1 inch from the top with boiling meat juices, cooking broth, water, or tomato juice. Tomato juice is especially desirable for masking the strong flavor of venison.
- A slice of onion may be added for flavor.
- Salt may be added for flavor but is not necessary for the safety of the product. If used, the general guideline is one-half teaspoon salt per pint. Use canning salt.
- Remove air bubbles; wipe jar rims; and adjust lids.
- [Process](#) according to recommendations based on type of canner and altitude of your location. Follow guidelines for meat strips, cubes or chunks.

## Ground Venison

- Ground venison may be canned, although freezing gives a higher quality product.
- Add one-part high quality pork fat to three or four parts venison before grinding.
- Shape the ground meat into patties or balls and cook until lightly browned. It may also be sautéed without shaping.
- Remove excess fat.
- Pack hot meat loosely into hot jars and cover with liquid and [process](#) the same as for ground meat.

## Fresh Venison

- Venison that you plan to use fresh must be refrigerated and used within two or three days.
- Marinate all meats in the refrigerator and not at room temperature.

For additional information, [Proper Care and Handling of Venison from Field to Table](#) and [Field Dressing Deer Pocket Guide](#) .