

How to Butcher a Duck

Getting Started

To butcher your duck, you will follow the same process for Butchering a Chicken or a Turkey. I find that ducks are cuter and a bit more intelligent than chickens, and it was harder to kill them. In this way I found the process to be similar to killing a turkey.

What You Will Need:

- sharp paring knives
- container of bleach water for sanitizing
- hatchet or ax
- container for offal
- scalding pot and a means for heating it (I use an electric burner, but a propane burner works well too)
- a table is very helpful
- pot or large bowl for carcass
- ice or refrigerator for chilling carcass

For the newbie butcher, I would suggest that you catch your ducks the night before and put them in a cage or stall with water but no food. This will help clear out the digestive system so it is less likely that feces will leak out onto the meat.

Killing Your Duck

There are several ways to dispatch your bird. Some people prefer to make a small incision on each side of the neck, cutting the main artery and bleeding the bird to death. Others use a sharp pick or knife inserted into the bird's mouth and then into the brain. I prefer to decapitate the bird with my hatchet or ax. I feel it is fast, efficient, and humane. It doesn't look pretty and some people feel that bleeding the bird to death drains more blood from their carcass. I have never had a problem with excessive amounts of blood in the carcass and this method works well for me.



I use an old feed bag with a hole cut in one corner to hold the duck still while I kill it. The duck's head is poked through the hole, allowing me to gather up the bag and hold it around the feet. This prevents the animal from moving and messing up the decapitation. When I was still new at this I did have a few botched decapitations and needed to chop twice. If this happens, get over it and make the second chop as quickly as you can to prevent any more suffering than necessary.

Dispatching the duck.

Once your duck is dead, the rest is pretty easy. You want to work quickly and keep your table and tools clean to prevent the growth of bacteria on the meat. I keep a hose with a shut off valve at the ready to wash the carcass, table, and knife.



When the bird has bled out and stops flapping (don't worry, it can't feel anything and is dead once the spinal column is severed) give it a good hosing down. Wash the feet and press down on the abdomen while rinsing with the hose to force any feces in the vent out and wash it away. Washing the carcass.

Plucking vs Skinning

At this point you will either scald and pluck the bird or skin it. I chose to skin these ducks because they were about 5 months old and are very difficult to pluck at that age. The best age to butcher your ducks, for ease of plucking, is at 7 to 8 weeks old. If you choose to pluck them, you will need to dunk the carcass into scalding hot water (145-150 degrees F) for about

one minute. Ducks are much harder to pluck than chickens and may need to stay in the hot water longer. Pluck the feathers as best as you can and dunk in scalding water again if you have trouble removing all of the downy feathers.



I've got my ducks in a row.

If you choose to skin your ducks you won't have the skin and fat on the carcass to keep the meat juicy when you cook it. Leaving the skin on also gives you the option of saving the duck fat for rendering. I decided I'd rather have a leaner meat and spend less time on the processing this time.



Skinning a duck.

To skin your bird, start at the neck and slip the knife under the skin where you removed the head. Lift the skin and slice through it along the belly, working your way toward the tail end. Pull the skin back and use the knife to separate the skin from the meat as you work your way around the whole bird. I remove the end of the wings rather than mess around with trying to pull the feathers out. There's no meat there anyway. The back, wings and legs are the toughest parts to skin.

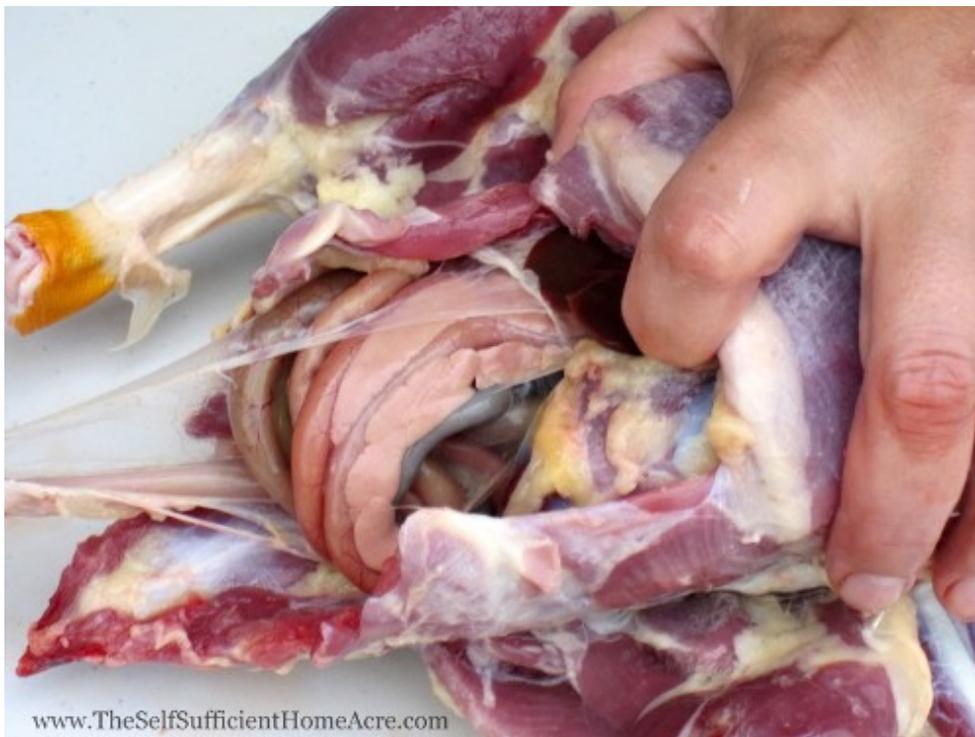
Disemboweling



Once you have the carcass skinned or plucked, you're ready to start disemboweling. Use your knife to cut around the vent, taking care not to puncture the intestines. Start on the belly side, between the rib cage and the vent and make a shallow incision into the flesh.

Use your fingers to pull this open, pulling the meat out and away from the intestines. This will allow you to slip the knife into the incision and slice around the vent without cutting into the innards. Using your fingers, pinch the vent shut and pull the

intestines out and away from the carcass to prevent spilling the contents on the meat.



Be careful not to spill the contents of the intestines when you pull them out.

The gizzard will be attached to the other end of the intestines. You'll need to stuff your hand into the body cavity to pull it out. You will most likely pull out the gizzard, liver, and gall bladder in one big mess.



The dark colored thing in the middle is filled with nasty green bile.

Do your best not to rupture the green gall bladder attached to the liver. You will want to cut this green sack of bile off along with a small portion of the liver to prevent getting bile on the liver.



Next, you should find the heart and possibly the crop and trachea. The crop usually pulls away from the gizzard and liver and may be removed from the neck area. The lungs are embedded in the rib cage and are a bit harder to pull out. You will need to sweep your fingers between the ribs and pull the tissue out.

Save the heart or feed to your chickens.

If you don't like eating the gizzard, heart, and liver, cook them up and feed them to your pets or your chickens. The gizzard will need to be cut open,

cleaned out and the yellow lining peeled away before cooking. For photos of this process, check out my post [How to Butcher a Chicken...](#) I give a more detailed description there.

Remove the neck and feet by cutting through the ligaments that hold the bones together at the joints rather than trying to cut through bone. That will just dull your knife and put your fingers at risk.



Wash the carcass thoroughly and chill as quickly as you can to prevent bacterial growth. If you plan to cook your duck rather than preserve it, let it sit in the refrigerator for 24 hours so the muscle tissue will be tender. Cooking the same day will make the bird tough.

If you are freezing your ducks, you can wrap them and freeze immediately. Remove the bird from the freezer two or three days before you plan to cook it and allow it to thaw completely in the refrigerator before cooking. This will make a much

more tender bird.

Ready for the freezer. Use vacuum sealer bags to prevent freezer burn.

Tips:

- Always sharpen your knives before you get started. A dull knife will make the job much more difficult and dangerous. You should take a moment between each bird to sharpen your knife again.
- I keep a small bucket or container of bleach water on my table to clean my hands and knives in between birds, or in case feces spills on the meat. Rinse with the beach water then cold water from your hose.
- If you are butchering in warm weather, keep a cooler full of ice to put your dressed birds in to chill quickly.
- In the fall, try to pick a very cool day to process your birds. Warm fall days are prime hunting times for yellow jackets. They will swarm around the innards and carcasses, looking for an easy meal.
- Have at least one or two helpers, if possible. You can set up an assembly line if you have several birds to process, making the job go much faster.
- The first time I butchered a chicken, it took me about 40 minutes. Now it takes about 20 minutes for each bird. Allow yourself plenty of time to set up and get everything you need ready to go.
- A big pot of water will take quite awhile to reach 145-150 degrees Fahrenheit. Get the pot of water on the burner first, then go about your other preparations.
- You might think that you can't kill your duck, chicken, or turkey. It is a tough thing to do, if you've never butchered an animal before. If you have gone hunting and think that you'll have no problem with this, just keep in mind that there is a big difference between pulling a trigger from a distance and chopping a head off up close and personal. You can do if you put your mind to it. It does get easier, but I don't think I will ever feel good about it. However, I know that this is a lot better than eating meat from animals that were raised and killed under inhumane conditions.