

Herd Management – Home Butchering

Butchering your own goats.

I wrote this article for a goat magazine. The same methods of hanging, skinning, gutting, and cutting up the carcass can be used on just about any smaller livestock. The photo illustrating the angle to shoot is *just* an illustration, I do not pull the trigger with my other hand in that position. It was just to hold the buckling still for the picture. The angle is the correct one for a quick kill. Please do not shoot goats or sheep through the forehead. The skull plate is too thick and it may take many shots to put them down. Through the back of the skull is the correct place and only uses one shot.

We have raised our own beef for as long as I can remember, but up until a couple of years ago had never eaten our own goat meat. In 2003 I started thinking about how silly it was not to eat some of my own homegrown product. After all, it tastes good, is healthy for you, and since it's homegrown, I know what went into it. I looked into having a few wethers processed for me at a local butcher's. The cost of getting a 60-100 lb. wether processed was rather prohibitive with as many as my family could consume in a year's time, so I decided to look into the best way of slaughtering and butchering my wethers here at home.

When I decided to give butchering a try, I used a most humane method that I found on the web for slaughtering, and since I also had butchered chickens and the occasional deer, I just adapted what I already knew to fit butchering a goat. I have since butchered about 30 wethers, bucklings and cull does, and have been very satisfied with the results. My method is very simple, you need no "butchering equipment", and one person can do it alone if need be, although two people are handy to hang the carcass, and load up the offal.

Now, I am not just writing this for those of us that raise "meat goats", because those extra little dairy wethers pack a truly surprising amount of meat too. About half or more of the wethers I butcher are dairy goat breeds. The meat is good no matter the breed. I have observed that the Nubians tend to carry a little more weight than the Lamanchas or Alpines, but all are satisfactory once in the pan. I get too attached to bottle kids and cannot butcher them, so if I plan on eating any dairy wethers, I leave them on their dams and touch them as little as possible. It is much harder to get attached to something that is wild. I butcher anywhere between the ages of 3 months to 1 year as a general rule, although I have butchered older goats too. The buckling pictured in the butchering photos was a 3-month-old Nubian.

The equipment I use is a t-post, a rope, a handy tree limb, a .22 pistol if the goat is a young kid (if it is an older goat, a larger shot is in order) a sharp knife (preferably bigger than a paring knife), and a wheelbarrow. Here is my method:

Slaughtering and hanging: Shoot the goat through the back of the head, right behind the poll (or right behind the horns), angling the shot toward the lower jaw. (See Photo 1.) **NOTE!!** The photo illustrating the angle to shoot is *just* an illustration, I do not pull the trigger with my other hand in that position. It was just to hold the buckling still for the picture. The angle is the correct one for a quick kill.

Photo One:



Immediately slit the throat as close to the head as you can (not wanting to waste any of the neck meat) so the blood can drain. There will be a lot of blood, but that is good. (Note: To those of you who are not used to killing anything, there will usually be reflex movement of the head and legs at about this point. Don't let it un-nerve you, it is JUST reflex action. I usually rest my foot on one of the hind legs at this point to hold it still. The goat is NOT still alive, but it is a bit disconcerting the first few times.) Use your knife to make a slit in the skin between the tendon and the bone at the hock of both back legs. Don't cut through the tendon or you will have no way to hang the carcass. (See Photo 2.)

Photo Two.



Slide the t-Post through the slits in the back legs. Now run a rope over a tree branch about 2 feet out from the tree and tie one end to the middle of the t-post between the goat's legs. One person can pull on the other end of the rope while the other person lifts the goat up by the t-post till it is hanging at the desired level for skinning and gutting. Then tie the rope off to the tree. (See Photo 3.)

Photo Three.



Skinning and gutting: With the knife, finish cutting off the head until you get to the spine. When the only thing holding the head on the body is the spine, then twist the head until you hear a pop and the head will come off. Next, the knee joints: just cut and twist them like you did the head and the lower leg will come off. Now take your *sharp* knife, and gently slit the hide down the belly; I say gently because if you don't you might puncture the guts, which will get on the meat and taint the meat. Gently pulling on the hide with one hand and using the knife to separate hide from meat with the other, skin the entire goat. When you come to the tail and anal cavity, keep pulling the hide outward, and cut right through the anal canal that is pulled outwards with the hide, cutting through the tail, and continuing skinning down the back. When the hide is off (See Photo 4),

Photo Four.



I always position a wheelbarrow or tub beneath the goat so that the guts fall directly into it (that way there is no picking them up after I'm finished), and then I start the gutting process. First, use the tip of your knife to cut all around the outside of the anal canal until it comes loose and drops back into the body cavity. Then gently slit the stomach open (again, the key word is *gently*) and gut the goat. I like to use two fingers of my free hand to keep the stomach wall away from the guts as I slit down the stomach, to be sure not to puncture any of the organs. (See Photo 5.)

Photo Five.



I'm very careful not to cut open any of the stomach or digestive organs as that gets very messy. It's important to carefully cut out the bladder first, because you don't want any urine to contaminate the meat. Right at the top of the stomach cut (between the hind legs) you'll find the bulbous bladder, and you must take hold of it carefully at the top, while you cut it loose, and drop it in the wheelbarrow/tub carefully. I barely even use a knife for the rest of the gutting, because most of the guts will just fall out with a little persuasion and the rest can usually be pulled out by hand. You'll usually have to strongly tug on the windpipe to pull it out.

Cutting up the meat: After the gutting is done, I get some help to carry the carcass into the house where we lay it on the table (any large, flat surface; a chest freezer in our basement is my favorite place) on top of a clean sheet and start cutting it up for the freezer. I separate the legs from the body, and then cut each leg again at the middle joint so the pieces will fit into large freezer bags. Some people wrap the meat in freezer paper; I just use large freezer bags. I then cut out the backstrap and the neck meat and any other pieces that there are and bag them up. You can grind and make sausage out of any of it. My family likes the leg roasts the best.

Now all that's left to do is clean up the mess. I'm sure there are more sophisticated methods of butchering, but this is the way I do it and it works for me. I hope it may come in handy for you. I do not fatten or "feed out" my butcher wethers/bucklings. They have protein blocks, fresh water, and lots of browse or hay if it is winter. They might get a small amount of grain if they are in with my does. The meat is tender and flavorful. Feeding out a goat on grain is

not needed, in my opinion, if the goat is in good health and has plenty of good hay or browse, but whether to fatten your goat before butchering is simply your choice. It's your goat, it's your choice. If I butcher them younger than five months, I just pull them straight off of their dams.

Two tips to make this job easier: 1) If your going to haul the hide and guts off very far (I dump them on the back side of our 100 acre property), instead of using a wheelbarrow to hold the guts, I use a 30-gallon round tin tub with handles on either side. When I am finished butchering for the day, one or two people can lift that tub into the back of the pick-up and I can haul it off and dump it myself. If you have just a short way to go, a wheelbarrow may work better. 2) When you slide the t-post through the slits in the hind legs, prior to hanging the carcass, position the post so that the knobs on the post are toward the goat's back. That way you can pull the goat's legs farther apart and the t-post knobs will hold the carcass in the desired position. The farther apart the legs are held, the easier it is to skin and gut.

Added April, 2010 by request:

I had someone ask for photos specifically of the cutting around the anus area. My sister Sarah took those pictures for me as I butchered.

Skin to this point:



Then this. You can see the anal canal:



Cut through like this:



It should look like this after cutting through the anal canal:



After cutting through the tail and everything.



You pull the anal canal out through the stomach slit when you gut the animal. With goats having nice neat berries, you can see that meat contamination is not an issue if done properly.

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