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Killing and Dressing Chickens

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Top quality dressed poultry can be had only from live birds which are in prime condition at the time of slaughter. A fat covering just under the skin means a flavorful bird. Too much fat means waste. Most young poultry have moderate fat.

Birds to be dressed should not be fed for several hours prior to killing, but should be given plenty of water. This allows the crop and intestines to sufficiently empty and prevent contamination during processing.

Killing and Dressing

Killing and Bleeding - Poultry is usually killed by cutting the bird's throat about one inch back of the head. This cut point severs both veins in the neck so the bird bleeds well. Sometimes birds are thrown into barrels for bleeding. This is an undesirable practice because the feathers become soiled with blood and fecal matter, and contaminate the scaldwater. Muscular spasms may also cause carcass defects.

Some people successfully hang birds from the feet on a line in an open area to prevent damage caused from splattered blood. The head is cut off (or loose) and the birds bleed from the hanging position. This prevents bruising or other damage that can occur by flipping or bouncing on the ground from muscular spasms.

Other people successfully wring off the head and almost in the same motion drop the bird onto its back. In this position little flipping takes place. Bleeding may be less complete.

A killing cone can be bought or fashioned from a piece of metal to hold the bird snugly and prevent scattering blood. It is larger at one end which allows the head to extend through the small end to make the cut. It is sized to fit and hold the bird and may be hung on a line.

Scalding - Birds should not be placed in the scald water until breathing has stopped. This prevents contamination of the air sacs by inhaled scald water.

Scald water that is between 160 and 180°F., gives best results if one works carefully to prevent overcooking. The best method is to use a container deep enough to submerge the bird while holding it by the feet. A 10 to 12-quart bucket is sufficient for scalding two or three chickens. If



Scald in a container deep enough to submerge the bird while holding it by the feet. Use hot water between 160° and 180°F. Completely submerge the feather-covered area in hot water and immediately lift it out. Repeat this process two to four times.

more birds are being dressed at one time replenish the hot water supply as it cools.

Hold the bird by the feet. Completely submerge the feather-covered area in the hot water and immediately lift it out. Repeat this process two to four times or until the feathers easily pull out. Test the large wing and tail feathers as they are hardest to pull out. Dunking the bird

prevents excess heat on the skin that can result in torn skin, or peeling which leaves a sticky surface.

If you have a thermometer and can keep the water temperature at 140°F. or cooler, the bird can be dipped into the water twice for 1 to 1½ minutes. This temperature protects the yellow outer layer (cuticle) of skin. Move the bird up-and-down and side-to-side in the water for an even and thorough scald.

The younger the bird, the more tender and sensitive the skin and the less time required for scalding.

Picking and Cleaning - Pick the birds immediately after they are scalded. Picking can be done on a table with a clean surface. After the large tail and wing feathers are pulled the other feathers can be pulled a handful at a time, be careful not to tear the skin.

Remove any pinfeathers, (Large, quill-like protrusions where feathers were rooted; not usually found in young birds). Pinfeathers can usually be removed with the thumbnail and finger or a dull knife. Light scraping may break the skin.

Singeing - After other outside cleaning is completed, most birds need to be singed to remove hairs. If working outside, a light flame, such as a burning newspaper, is good for singeing the hairs. A gas burner or an electric burner can be used with extreme caution.

Cropping and Venting

Cropping - The crop (food sac) can be removed through a small slit in the side or back of the neck. Grasp the crop, pull it out and cut it loose with a sharp knife. The crop, gullet and windpipe may be pulled out and removed in one operation.

Venting - Before other dressing is done vent fecal matter from the intestines of the picked bird. This prevents contaminating the carcass and future wash water. Press the abdomen just below the vent to force out the excess fecal matter. Wash immediately. Running water or spray is most desirable for this process.

Eviscerating

Eviscerating - Remove the entrails and internal organs as soon as possible after slaughter. This can be done while the bird is cut-up. If it is to be left whole, the entrails are removed through an opening around the vent.

Remove the oil sac located on the back at the base of the tail. Cut under the sac to the backbone and up toward the tail.

Remove the shanks and feet. Cut from the front through the outer skin at the large joint, then break back to expose the inner portion of the joint and cut the shank loose. When cut through the joint the meat does not shrink and expose the bone during cooking. Some people like to cook the shanks and feet. In that case they must be scalded so the outer skin can be removed. Cut off the toenails.

To remove the entrails, make a small crosswise cut below the end of the breastbone (keel). Cut lengthwise on



Pick the bird immediately after it is scalded. After the large tail and wing feathers are loose the other feathers can be pulled a handful at a time.

either side of the abdominal area, joining these cuts to the crosswise cut down to and around the vent. The intestines are encased in a sac and should carefully be pulled free of the skeleton structure. The gizzard, liver, heart and intestinal tract are pulled out through this opening. Be careful to avoid cutting or rupturing the intestines or the gall bladder attached to the liver. Reach into the emptied cavity with the hand and remove the lungs located against the back bone and rib cage. Wash the carcass inside and out with clean water.

Remove the gizzard, liver and heart from the entrails. Split the gizzard lengthwise through the thick muscle. Peel out the lining and the contents being careful not to contaminate the gizzard fat. Remove the gall bladder from the liver. Grasp the gall bladder between the thumb and forefinger close to the liver, holding the liver with the other hand. Pull the gall bladder away. Trim the heavy blood vessels from the top of the heart and wash away any remaining blood.

If birds are to be packaged, as for freezing, the giblets should be wrapped in plastic before re-inserting in the body cavity or packed separately. The neck, with skin still



After other outside cleaning is completed, singe the bird to remove hairs. If working outside, a light flame, such as a burning paper, works well.

attached to the body, may be removed and packaged with the giblets if the birds are to be trussed.

Birds should be thoroughly chilled before freezing or before cooking.

If The Bird Is To Be Trussed, the opening for evisceration can be made by one cut crosswise below the keel and one above the vent, leaving one area of skin one to one-and-a-half inches wide; then the horizontal cuts around and under the vent to free it. All the viscera are removed from the opening of the first cut. The legs can be inserted under the section of skin left above the vent. Otherwise the legs can be tied down to the tail with a white cotton cord or similar material. Industry sometimes uses a stainless wire. In trussing, the neck skin is pulled to the back, flattened neatly against the body and either fastened with a skewer or anchored by the wings in akimbo.

Halves or Cut-up - If the birds are to be cut in half or disjointed, evisceration may be done at this time. To halve, use a sharp knife, cutting down one side of the backbone from neck to tail, being careful not to cut into the organs and intestines. Open the bird and lift out the viscera. Then cut through the breast bone making two

halves. Some people like to remove the backbone. Cut on both sides of the backbone and remove backbone, tail and neck in one operation. The rib bones can be stripped if that is desired.

Chilling - Birds should be chilled in ice or ice water in a refrigerator. They should be chilled to 40°F. as rapidly as possible for greatest tenderness and best flavor. Most home refrigerators are not cold enough to chill birds rapidly without ice. Birds will pick up odors from the refrigerator unless covered tightly or completely submerged in water.

Chilling in ice or ice water takes about four hours for birds up to 4 pounds, six hours for birds up to 8 pounds, and eight hours for birds over 8 pounds. Keep the birds at 40°F. or colder until ready to be cooked or frozen.

Cutting Up - Cut-up poultry is best when disjointed. There is also less shrinkage of meat from the bones during cooking.

For detailed information on cutting chicken, refer to F194 How to Cut Whole Chickens Into Pieces available at all University of Missouri Extension Centers.

Ducks and Geese

Ducks and geese may be dressed, cleaned and chilled as chickens. Older birds require more time for scalding, from 1½ to 3 minutes in water of about 140° to 155°F. A small amount of detergent or similar agent added to the water aids wetting the feathers.

Ducks and geese can also be picked dry. This produces an attractive carcass but is slower with greater danger of tearing the skin.

Paraffin dip - A paraffin dip is favored by many hunters of wild birds. Use a pail of hot water large enough to submerge the bird. Melt one pound of paraffin in a double boiler and pour into the hot water. Dip the bird into the paraffin-water and immediately lift it out. Paraffin will adhere to the feathers. Allow it to cool momentarily. Repeat the process enough times for a heavy coat of paraffin to cover the entire bird. Allow the paraffin to cool until it is fairly firm. Then peel off the paraffin working from the tail toward the head. The feathers will come off with the paraffin. Any remaining down and feathers can be picked dry.



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