



Home Poultry Processing

Using Tools You Already Have or Can Make

by Patricia Foreman



There are many ways to process meat birds. Described here is just one version.

You will eventually develop your own set up and techniques.

Some of the methods below are not approved for US commercial processing; but can result in more tender, flavorful meat.

The old way of hacking heads off is the worst way to kill a meat bird!

- Puts bird into instant flight or fight.
- Lactic acid builds = tougher meat.
- Feathers stiffen for fight = plucking harder.
- Heart stops = blood pools in bones & in meat.
- Birds thrash wildly = bruised meat.
- Extreme or long-term stress bio-factors travel up the food chain = xeno-hormesis hypothesis.
- Mega-stress = tough meat.
- Decapitation & spasm body = violent horror show.

Advantages of Shackles over Table Top

- Carcass off table: out of offal (guts, waste & poop).
- Safer to make cuts: carcass not sliding around.
- Easier to eviscerate: gravity assisted.
- Easier to clean: hose down while hanging.
- Less strain on your back: standing upright.
- Line processing: pass carcass.
- Adjust height of shackle: kids or adults



Shackles from Premiere 1

Evisceration (Gutting) Only 3 or 4 Cuts

Easier while still warm; before rigor mortis sets in.

1. Make a slit in the neck from the shoulders up.
2. Remove the oil gland at the tail base (optional).
3. Pinch the skin above the vent and make a small slit. Put your knife down.
4. Loosen the crop, windpipe & skin around the neck.
5. At the other end of the bird, put your fingers in the slit above the vent and tear the skin apart to make an opening for your hand to enter the abdomen
6. Use your hand to loosen the viscera from the rib cage and backbone. Get a hold on the gizzard and pull all the innards out as one mass, including crop.
8. Remove the lungs from both sides of the spine.
9. Rinse & preen.

Giblets

1. Separate the heart, gizzard and liver from the innards. Discard in to an offal container.
2. Carefully remove the gall bladder from the liver. If it breaks, bile, a green bitter liquid will stain.
3. Gizzard (optional). Sever the intestines from the gizzard. Make a shallow cut along the top curve of the gizzard, open up and peel off the inner sac that contains grit, grain and other matter eaten by the bird.

Part of the Chick Start America Project of The Gossamer Foundation

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Setting Up & Bird Management

1. Withhold feed (but not water) for 8 to 12 hours before processing. Keep poop out of processing.
2. Catch the birds with little stress. Best at night because they are night blind.
3. Sharpen cutlery. Super-sharp kill knife.
4. Restraint - kill cone is best, traffic cone okay, hand holding is bad. No restraint = bruised meat.
5. Get scald water heating.

1. The kill cut—pull feathers back, turn head slightly to the side so the jugular vein is visible. Slice down just behind the lower jaw with a short, clean cut. The cut does not have to be big or deep, just accurate cutting the jugular vein and carotid artery. Blood will spurt out. Do not cut the windpipe.

2. Bleed out. Takes about 3 minutes for chickens, 6 minutes for turkeys. There will be convulsions (death throws) at the end. The bird is dead when breathing stops and the neck feathers drop.

3. The Scald for feather removal.

Hard scald between 138°F and 148°F.
45 to 75 seconds.

Soft scald Common in Europe.

123°F to 130°F. for 90 to 120 seconds.

Skin & color remain intact, Gourmet look.

Avoid temp range 131°F to 138°F. Too high to keep skin intact; too low to remove outer skin layer.

4. Pluck by hand or with a plucker. Ready when wing & tail feathers pull out easily.

5. Remove head and feet.

Chilling

Water Chilling. Quickly cooled down all carcasses together in a tub of ice-cold water. Chlorine or peroxide in water optional. Required commercially in US.

Air Chilling. Preferred process in many countries. Slower & less efficient but better meat. Carcass individually and slowly chilled. Can take up to 24 hours to reach 40°F. Results in better flavor & tenderer meat. No communal water bath with other carcasses. Saves water.

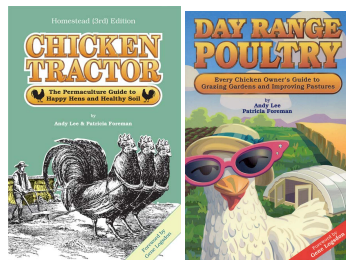
Freezer Bags

Use Freezer bags. 2ml food-grade plastic in correct size. Prevents freezer burn & meat stores better and longer in freezer. Not expensive; only a few cents/bag.

Vacuum Pack

Bucket of water technique. Submerge bagged meat into bucket of water to get air out. Close & seal bag without getting any water in.

Workshop wet/dry shop vacuum with a small nozzle sucks air out giving a good presentation. Sanitize nozzle before & after use. Use a tight, secure bag tie.



Step-by-step processing details with 50 home photos in *Chicken Tractor* chapter 9.

Small-scale commercial processing in *Day Range Poultry* chapter 14.

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