



Maine Guide Tips

“Quality Moose Meat”

Complimentary Information from the Maine Professional Guides Association

Maine’s “Wanton Waste” Law

“It is unlawful for a person to waste a wild bird or wild animal wounded or killed by that person while hunting. “Waste” means to intentionally leave a wounded or killed animal in the field or forest without making a reasonable effort to retrieve and render it for consumption or use.”

In 2007, the Maine Professional Guides Association focused its legislative agenda on preventing the waste of our wildlife resources. Our “Wanton Waste” bill sailed through both the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Baldacci on May 27, 2007.

How to Avoid Wasting Your Moose

Among Maine’s big game animals, moose are king, and their meat is considered the best. It is to your advantage, and your responsibility as a sportsman, to care for your moose properly and to use it fully.

Assuring quality moose meat for the table begins before the hunt and continues right through the choice of cooking recipes. Take every precaution to keep your moose meat free of dirt, debris, hair and blood, and cool it quickly to avoid spoilage.

Cool it Down Immediately

Heat will spoil meat very quickly, and large animals like moose will retain body heat for a long time. Refrigeration or applying ice is imperative.

Edible organs must be cooled quickly and kept cool. Moose meat can spoil in the hams and shoulders within a few hours. If you anticipate any delay in getting the moose into a cooler, you should at least quarter it to allow the heavier portions to cool more quickly. Applying ice blocks or gallon jugs of ice will greatly improve the meat.

Which Moose for You?

If fine eating and ease of transportation are both important to you, consider taking a young animal. Even a calf moose is much larger than the largest white-tailed deer you are ever likely to encounter!

Trophy moose heads are expensive to have mounted and impossible to display properly unless you have a large room

with high ceilings. Don’t shoot a bull with a trophy rack unless you have a genuine interest in mounting and displaying it.

Quick Clean Kill

You should make every effort to kill your moose instantly. This requires use of the proper firearm and the ability to hit vital areas. As long as the bullet weight is at least 130 grains, the cartridge used is not as important as good shot placement in making a clean kill. Magnum cartridges are not needed.

Moose seldom drop in their tracks when shot and may not show any indications of having been hit. After shooting, it is best to wait a few minutes before beginning the search, and then do so quietly. Pursued immediately, a wounded moose may travel a great distance before dying. Follow-up every shot and follow the moose for a distance even if you don’t find blood at first.

Field Dressing

It takes patience to gut out a moose properly, but it’s a critical step in assuring good tasting moose meat. Every effort must be made not to rupture the stomach or intestines. Care must be taken to avoid puncturing the bladder or spilling its contents. The bladder is located below the anus as you look at the animal on its back, and at the entrance to the pelvic girdle.

Be careful not to pierce the internal organs. Tie a string tightly around the esophagus to prevent contents from contaminating the meat. As soon as several inches of the lower bowel are free, tie it off with a string. Split the hips by cutting to the pelvic bone with a knife and then split the pelvic bone with an axe or knife. Free the rectum and bladder from internal attachments, taking care not to rupture or spill contents. Take out all the viscera and all remaining lungs within the chest cavity, in order for moose to cool down appropriately.

Remove the head at the last vertebra. This is a good time to remove the tongue, heart and any other internal organs you intend to eat.

Skinning

There are two schools of thought on skinning moose. Some say the hide should be left on to keep the meat clean, deter flies, and prevent drying out. Loops cut into the hide of a quartered moose also provide convenient “handles.” Others say that the quicker cooling of the meat with the hide off offsets the advantages of

leaving the hide on. If you plan to have your moose butchered by a professional, contact him in advance to see what he prefers. Some want the hide on, others prefer it off.

Quartering

Depending on the animal's size, your strength, and the distance involved, you will want to cut your moose into as many as ten portions, including the head and hide. Evidence of gender must remain attached to at least one part of the dressed animal, if it is dismembered and transported in several pieces. **All edible meat and evidence of gender must be presented for registration, but it is much easier to leave the viscera, lower legs, rib cage, head, and hide in the woods.** Any moose parts that are not presented for registration **may not** be placed where they are visible to a person traveling on a public or private way.

Protect the meat from flies with game bags, cheesecloth, old sheets, and/or a liberal application of black pepper. If at all possible, hang the meat in the shade to cool. Don't put the meat in plastic bags or wrap it in blankets, tarps, or plastic. Keep it as dry as possible, as moisture increases the chance of spoilage. Don't wash the meat unless you have a way to dry it. Trim away any shot-damaged meat.

Getting Out of the Woods

Unless you can drive to the kill site or can find someone with a skidder, getting the moose out of the woods will be your most difficult task, but it will be much easier if the moose is quartered. If you do get it out intact and/or with the hide on, try to get it hung in a cool place, preferably a meat cooler, as soon as possible.

Vehicle Transportation

When transporting a moose, your main concerns should be keeping the meat cool and protecting it from dirt, dust and exhaust fumes. Snowmobile trailers are handy for transporting moose, but if you use one be sure to protect the moose from dirt thrown up by the tow-vehicle tires. This is especially important if you will be traveling a long distance on unpaved logging roads; dust and mud can make a mess of your moose.

Some hunters rig special insulated boxes in the back of pickup trucks or on snowmobile trailers. Cooled with dry ice, these are great for transporting meat long distances in warm weather. As an alternative, you can pack ice (bagged or in plastic gallon milk jugs) or dry ice in the body cavity or around the quartered pieces. Don't allow water from the melting ice to contact the meat. Don't put dry ice in direct contact with meat; use several layers of newspaper to keep the dry ice and the meat apart.

Use cheesecloth or clean sheets to protect open meat from flies and road dirt. Don't pile gear on the moose, and take particular care to avoid contamination with gasoline from ATVs and spare gas cans.

If you have a long distance to travel and the weather is warm, don't risk losing all you have invested in your moose meat by

taking it directly home. After registering your moose, take it directly to the nearest facility with a large cooler (a custom meat cutter, a common carrier with refrigerated trucks, a supermarket, etc.) where it can be hung and cooled, butchered, frozen, or properly packed in ice for the trip home. If you don't do this, at least think about traveling at night.

Aging

Young moose need no aging, but older moose should be aged. Aging time varies according to the temperature and the animal's size. The ideal temperature is just a few degrees above freezing. Temperatures in the 40s will shorten the aging period to a few days. The temperature must never exceed 50. If the hide is off, reduce aging time to prevent drying out; cheesecloth covering will help prevent drying and deter flies. Black pepper may also be needed for the latter. Meat must be aged before freezing, never after. There is no need to age portions to be processed into ground or stewing meats.

Butchering

If you don't have the time, equipment, and know-how to process your own moose, have it processed at a commercial facility. Names of processors specializing in moose are available from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife.

Freezing

Poor freezing methods can ruin your moose meat just as surely as improper field care. The most common problems are "freezer burn," unsuitable or defective wrapping paper, freezing too large a quantity at one time, and an inadequate or malfunctioning freezer.

Always use special freezer paper. Aluminum or polyethylene envelopes are also recommended. Quick and even freezing is required. Even a large home freezer cannot properly handle more than 100 pounds of meat at the same time - half that amount in an 18 cubic foot freezer.

Planning Your Hunt

Licensed Maine guides who specialize in moose hunts will be fully prepared to assure that your hunt is successful and your trophy and meat are properly preserved.

Guides will not only scout areas in advance, they will have the specialized equipment needed to retrieve the moose, and to bring it to a qualified processor for butchering and freezing.

For additional assistance in planning your moose hunt, you may want to contact:

Maine Professional Guides Association
www.maine-guides.org

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
www.maine.gov/ifw/