

Storing the Birds

1. Fill a plastic bag a little less than 3/4 full with doves.



2. Fill the bag with water and remove any air from the bag and carefully seal. The birds are now ready for the freezer. Tip: Take care not to overfill the container with water. The lid of the container may not seal or the plastic bag may burst.



3. Label each bag with the date of kill and the number of birds inside. Tip: When cooking and eating dove, be cautious of shot pellets that might be lodged in the meat.

All photos courtesy TPWD



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Field to Freezer

You have just finished a great dove hunt. You are standing around the truck with a few friends. You have a limit of dove sitting in front of you, and you ask yourself, "What do I do now?" This guide will take you step-by-step through the process of cleaning your birds and preparing them for cooking or long-term storage. A common method discussed here involves removing only the breast meat for cooking, called "breasting." This technique is useful for cooking on the stovetop or grill.



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Tools

Good scissors or shears, sealable plastic bags, an ice chest with ice, water and paper towels.

Cleaning the Dove in the Field

1. Pick up your first bird.



2. Start by removing one wing. Using scissors, remove one of the wings at the joint connecting the wing to the body. Repeat for other wing.



3. With a thumb on either side of the breastbone, push down and to the side to tear and peel off the skin along with the feathers. You will expose the front of the breast.



4. Next remove the crop (the seed-filled pouch below the head). Using your first two fingers, grasp the base of the crop. The front of the bird should be pointed away from your body.



5. Pull the crop away from the breast, making sure to remove the seeds. Remove any remaining seeds from the meat.



6. Use your scissors to free a portion of the breast. This makes the meat removal much easier. Begin by making a small cut below the bottom of the breast.



7. Starting from your original cut, cut carefully along one side of the body towards the head. Stop after cutting half way up the bird. Repeat on the other side.



8. Place your thumb in the original cut just below the breast meat and pull the breast off by pulling the meat up and away from the body.



9. Remove and discard the entrails. Tip: Some hunters choose keep to the heart and eat it.



pin-feathers

10. Remove any feathers remaining on the breast. Tip: Younger birds will have pin-feathers. These are small, undeveloped, and will not be seen until all other feathers are removed. Be sure to remove these.



11. Place into a plastic storage container or plastic resealable bag.
12. Repeat this process with every dove.
13. When you have finished cleaning all of your birds, place them in your ice chest. It is safe to leave them there until you arrive back home.

What to do at Home

1. Using your scissors, remove the wing joints. Rinse meat and hands with water. Note: Many hunters choose to store and cook the meat bone-in. To continue without removing the meat from the bone, proceed to Storing the Birds.



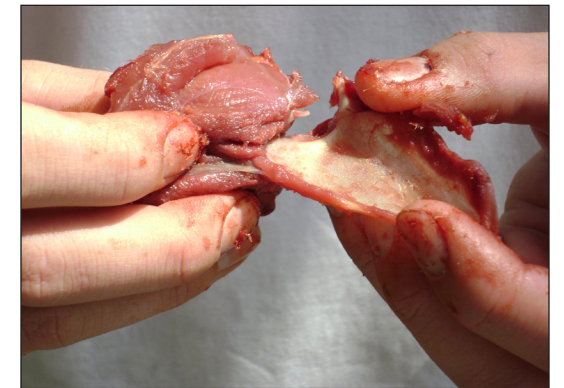
2. Using a sharp knife, separate the breast meat from the concave part of the breastbone. You should cut along the entire length of the breast.



3. With the tip of your knife, carefully detach the meat from the keel of the breast bone (the sharp ridge of the breast bone where the two halves meet). Cut down the entire length of the keel. When you reach the tip of the keel, stop, leaving the meat attached. Repeat for the other side.



4. Now you can detach the meat. Hold the keel in one hand with the thickest part of the breast facing you. With your other hand pinch the meat, where the tail would be, below the keel.



5. Starting from the tail and working your way towards the head, gently pull the meat from the keel. You are now ready to store or cook your birds.

