

# Oregon

## How to Rabbit Hunt

Rabbit hunting is the third most popular type of hunting activity in the U.S., behind wild turkey and deer hunting. Few people take advantage of it in Oregon, but they should—rabbits and hares are abundant and there is no closed season or bag limit. And, they taste good!

### License requirements

You need a valid hunting license to hunt rabbit on public or private land. No other tag or validation is needed. If you are hunting on your own property or as the agent of a landowner, no hunting license, tag or validation is required.

### When to hunt

There is no specific statewide season for hunting rabbit, so they can legally be hunted at any time of year in many places. Check your hunting area for any date restrictions or season closures. If hunting with dogs, keep in mind that dogs may not be trained or permitted to run at large in game bird nesting habitat from April to July 31 every year.

Early spring is one of the best times to hunt rabbits, as grasses and forbs are growing and rabbits are on the move. Hunting anytime after the first frost (or late fall) is also ideal because unhealthy rabbits won't have survived the colder temperatures. Hunters with dogs find early morning is an ideal time to hunt; rabbits move around at night and dogs can easily find scent in the morning.

### Hunting techniques

**With a dog:** Beagles are a popular rabbit hunting dog because they are small and can get through brambles and brush. A dog will force a rabbit out of the brush and then follow it by scent. Rabbits generally travel in circles, usually counter-clockwise, and will attempt to return to the same spot. Position yourself to cut the circle off.

**Without a dog:** Try hunting with one or more partners—one or two beat the brush while the other watches from a good vantage point for the rabbit to run and for the opportunity to take a shot. Also try hunting in snow—look for tracks to identify high-use areas or follow fresh tracks. Or, quietly still-hunt and look for rabbits before they bolt. This method is challenging, but a rabbit holding still can offer the opportunity for a clean shot with a .22, thus preserving the meat for the table.

### Where to hunt

Rabbits can harm crops so you may find a landowner willing to grant you access; remember you must ask permission to hunt on private land.

**Eastern Oregon:** Hunt around alfalfa circles on private land and sage-brush covered BLM lands. Find cottontails in rimrock and boulder areas in sage-brush country. Jackrabbits are more often found in sage-brush and greasewood flats.

**Western Oregon:** Rabbits like thick cover (Himalayan blackberry, snowberry, wild rose bushes) and forage (mowed grass, legumes). Look for areas that have these two in close proximity. The edges of working farmland are often good spots to work in the spring; mowed crops and grasses will provide the fresh green-up rabbits like. ODFW's EE Wilson Wildlife Area (near Corvallis) is a popular public hunting area for rabbits and is open from Nov. 1 through the last day of February each year. Sometimes rabbits and hares can also be found on national forest and BLM lands in western Oregon.

### Which rabbits can I hunt?

Hunters can pursue three species of rabbits and two species of hare in Oregon: brush rabbit (westside Ore.), Nuttall's cottontail (eastside Ore.) and eastern cottontail (Willamette Valley), snowshoe hare (found at high elevations), black-tailed jackrabbit (found everywhere especially central and southeastern Ore.).

**Protected species:** Due to their low abundance, the white-tailed jackrabbit (eastern Ore.) and the pygmy rabbit (southeast Ore.) cannot be hunted. The white-tailed jackrabbit can be identified by its entirely white tail; it tends to live in grassland habitat. The pygmy rabbit is small (it usually weighs less than a pound), appears to lack a tail or has a uniform colored tail (usually buffy brown) and lacks the white undertail of most other rabbits.



**Pygmy rabbit**  
Photo courtesy of Lakeview BLM



**White-tailed rabbit**  
Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Equipment

Shotguns are often used for rabbit and hare hunting, because one rarely sees the animal before it is off and running. Rabbits are generally considered to be “thin skinned” so the smaller shot sizes of #6 to #8 can be effective. Open chokes such as improved cylinder are good choices in the brushy areas where rabbits and hares are often found. Any shotgun can be used; 12 and 20 gauge are the most popular. Open chokes, and #6-#8 shot in lead, or #4-#6 in steel. The shooting distance will depend on your choice of weapon and shot, but generally do not take a shot beyond 35 yards. Marksman can use a .22 rimfire long rifle. When using a rifle, aim for the head so as not to spoil the meat.

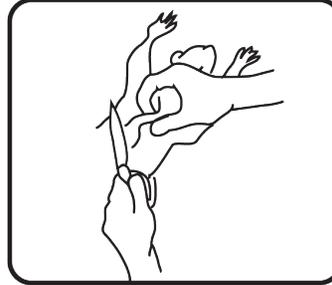
## Dressing your rabbit

Rabbit is truly great table fare if handled properly in the field. Field dress (e.g. remove the guts) immediately after killing it. This will help keep the meat safe and is easier to do before the animal gets cold. Also, remember to keep the rabbit clean. Don't use dirty water and keep the carcass away from mud, dirt and leaves. Use a clean knife and wear latex or rubber gloves. Steps to field-dress your rabbit:

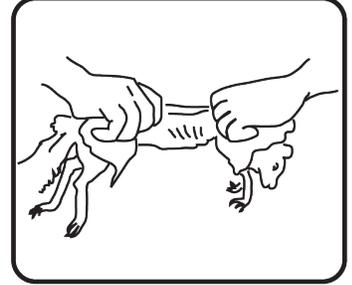
- Remove the head, then cut at the ankles to remove the feet of the rabbit.
- Holding the back skin of the rabbit with your fingers, make a cut through the skin and over the back (not into the meat).
- Peel back the skin/hide of the rabbit in both directions with your fingers. Take care not to let the fur side of the hide touch the carcass.
- Remove the complete skin of the rabbit, including the tail.
- Remove the complete entrails. Insert an appropriately sized knife blade at the bottom of the sternum and make a cut all the way to the tail. Then insert the knife blade just under the bottom edge of the sternum and make a cut up to the rabbit's neck. Be careful not to insert the knife so far into the body cavity that you puncture any of the organs. You only want to “unzip” the rabbit at this point.
- Inspect the liver for any spotting which is a sign of Tularemia or “rabbit fever.” See side bar.
- Grasp the back feet in one hand and the chest above the incision in your other hand. Lift the rabbit to about your shoulders, and thrust it downward quickly to release the innards. They may still be attached at the front and back so you'll need to carefully pull the organs out with your hands. To prevent contamination, be careful not to smash or break anything.
- Put your rabbit in a cooler or a game meat bag to keep it cool until you get home and refrigerate or freeze it.

- Be sure to thoroughly cook your rabbit to at least 165 degrees F; use a meat thermometer to ensure the inside of the meat reaches that temperature. This is important to kill any bacteria still in the meat. Some people dip the carcass in boiling water before cooking it.

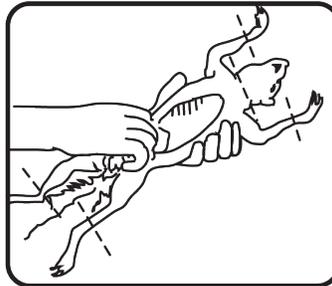
## Small game



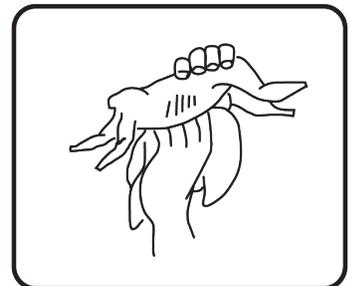
Pick loose skin on back and cut slit across the back



Grasp hide on bottom sides and pull away in opposite directions



Cut open abdomen and remove entrails - cut off head and limbs



Wash carcass and dry - keep cool while transporting home

## Rabbit fever

Rabbit fever, or tularemia, is not commonly seen in Oregon but it does occur in rabbits and rodents. It can be spread from infected animals to people through tick bites, handling an infected animal, eating or drinking infected material, and even through inhalation. Tularemia is identified through inspection of an infected animal's internal organs, so when field dressing your animal look for any light spotting on the liver. If you even suspect you see white, yellow or any other liver spotting, place the animal in a plastic bag, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer, and contact an ODFW office. State veterinarians will run tests on the liver to determine if the animal was infected. Do not consume meat.

## Hunting safely

Always know the location of your fellow hunters, including your dog, and follow these safety precautions when hunting:

- Keep your firearm's muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
- Keep your finger outside of the trigger guard until ready to shoot.
- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
- Be sure of your target and what is in front of it and beyond it.
- Wear blaze orange.

# Rabbit Recipes

Remember to cook your rabbit to at least 165 degrees F, which kills any bacteria still in the meat. Use a meat thermometer to ensure the inside of the meat reaches that temperature.

## Hasenpfeffer (a traditional German rabbit stew)

**2 rabbits**  
**½ cup + 3 Tbsp flour**  
**Salt and paper to taste**  
**1 Tbsp sugar**  
**1 cup nonfat plain yogurt**  
**Cooking oil or clarified butter**

**Marinade:**  
**1 cup dry red wine**  
**1 cup water**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**1 tsp dry mustard**

Mix ingredients for marinade. Cut rabbit into serving size pieces and marinate overnight, turning pieces occasionally.

To cook, remove pieces from marinade and pat dry with clean towel. Save marinade. Mix salt and pepper with ½ cup flour in covered bowl or paper bag. Add rabbit pieces to flour mixture and shake until all pieces are coated.

Heat enough oil to cover the bottom of a large pot or Dutch oven. Brown rabbit pieces on both sides. Reduce heat to low and cover with juice from marinade. Slowly bring to a boil and simmer 45 minutes. Add sugar. Make paste with water and 3 Tbsp flour. Thicken gravy with flour paste. When desired thickness is reached, take dish off heat. Add small amounts of gravy to 1 cup yogurt to equalize temperatures, then add yogurt to dish.

Serve over egg noodles. Serves 4.

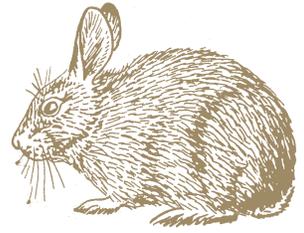
*From "Recipes from the Wild Side," ODFW cookbook printed 1993.  
Contributed by MaryLou Keefe.*

## Baked Stuffed Rabbit

**4 cups of fine bread crumbs**  
**2 Tbsp onions**  
**¼ cup margarine**  
**3 or 4 thin slices of salt pork**  
**½ tsp salt**  
**2 Tbsp savory**  
**¼ tsp pepper**

**Gravy:** 2 Tbsp flour, dairy sour cream

**Pastry:** 1/3 cup margarine, 1 cup flour, 1 tsp baking powder, 1/2 tsp salt, 2 or 3 Tbsp cold water.



**Dressing:** In a mixing bowl, mix together 4 cups of bread crumbs, 2 Tbsp of chopped onion, 1/4 cup of soft margarine, 1/2 tsp salt, 2 Tbsp savory, and 1/4 tsp pepper.

**Cooking:** Stuff the rabbit with the dressing and fasten with skewers. Place in roasting pan and lay four or five slices of fat pork across the top. Add a little water and cover the pan. Bake at 350 degrees F or until the meat is tender (about 25 minutes per pound). Remove from oven and make gravy.

**Gravy:** Skim fat from cooking liquid, reserving 2 Tbsp. In a saucepan, heat the 2 Tbsp fat and blend in 2 Tbsp flour. Gradually stir in 1 cup of the liquid remaining in the roasting pan from the meat. Cook, stirring until thickened. Mix in 1 cup of dairy sour cream and heat thoroughly.

**Pastry:** Cut margarine into flour, baking powder, and salt until the mixture resembles bread crumbs. Sprinkle in water, 1 Tbsp at a time and mix. Gather the pastry into a ball and place on lightly floured board. Roll out the pastry to the correct size to cover the rabbit.

Pour the gravy over the rabbit and cover with pastry. Return to oven. Bake at 450 degrees until the pastry is browned. Serve at once.

*Recipe provided by Mary's Peak Hound Club*

## Buttermilk Fried Rabbit

**1 rabbit cut up into 6 pieces**  
**1 small onion, cut-up**  
**salt and pepper to taste**  
**1 cup or more buttermilk**  
**Shortening and flour**

Salt and pepper rabbit, dip in buttermilk, then in flour. Dip in buttermilk again, then in flour again. Fry in very hot fat until brown. Remove rabbit from fat. Brown flour for gravy. Add onion and simmer about 1 minute. Add 1/2 to 3/4 cup of buttermilk and enough water to make the gravy as thick as you like it. Put rabbit back into gravy and simmer for 35 minutes. Let cool normally, remove rabbit from gravy and serve.

*Recipe provided by Mary's Peak Hound Club*

## Colonial Rabbit

2 rabbits, sectioned  
Flour  
1 Tbsp olive oil  
1 can chicken broth or stock  
½ onion, diced  
3 carrots, peeled and coined  
3 bay leaves  
1 clove garlic, pressed  
1 small can tomato paste  
¼ cup very cold water  
2 Tbsp flour  
4 Tbsp currant jelly  
½ lb. mushrooms, sliced

Flour meat and brown in skillet with oil. Remove meat from pan. Add chicken broth and bring to a boil. Stir in onion, carrots, bay leaves and garlic and simmer for 20-30 minutes. Add tomato puree and continue to simmer. Remove ¼ cup broth from pan and combine with water and flour, mixing until smooth. Return rabbit to pan. When rabbit is cooked through, remove from mixture. Strain the mixture to catch bones. Sauté mushroom and add to broth or serve on the side. Yields 4-6 servings.

*Recipe provided by Mary's Peak Hound Club*

## Rabbit Casserole

2 rabbit fryers (about 2 pounds each) -- cut up  
4 slices bacon  
3 medium onions -- quartered  
2 green peppers -- cut up  
1 clove garlic -- crushed  
1/2 cup white wine  
1 can (16oz) whole tomatoes  
1 can condensed cream of mushroom soup  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp marjoram -- crushed  
1 tsp thyme -- crushed

Sauté bacon until crisp. Drain on paper towels and set aside. Brown rabbit a few pieces at a time in bacon drippings, then arrange in a 10-cup casserole dish. Add onion, green peppers, and garlic to same skillet and add wine. Cook, stirring, and crushing tomatoes until slightly thickened (about 5 minutes). Then stir in cream of mushroom soup, marjoram, and thyme. Heat to boiling, stirring frequently. Spoon over rabbit in baking dish and cover. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour until rabbit is tender. Just before serving, crumble reserved bacon and sprinkle over the rabbit and vegetables. Serve with hot buttered rice or noodles.

*Recipe provided by Mary's Peak Hound Club*

## Peppered Poached Rabbit

2 quarter sections of rabbit, poached  
1 large or two medium onions, diced  
2 cups of peeled eggplant diced 1/2" thick  
4 large tomatoes diced (1/2" thick with stem & skin removed)  
2 Tbsp minced garlic  
1 Tbsp olive oil  
2 cup bell or banana pepper diced  
2 cups of diced zucchini  
1 tsp sugar  
2 tsp celery salt  
1 tsp salt

To poach, place the quarters in a pot with a half gallon of water, 2 Tbsp of salt, and 1 tsp of Rosemary. Cover and simmer 20 minutes, then shred meat from the bones and add to other ingredients.

Place all ingredients in a 3-quart saucepan; cover and simmer 20 minutes, then uncover, slow simmer, and stir for 8 minutes. If desired serve over rice or noodles.

*Recipe provided by Mary's Peak Hound Club*

## Barbeque Rabbit

2 rabbits, quartered  
1 cup olive oil  
¼ cup vinegar  
¼ cup red wine  
1 small minced onion  
2 cloves minced garlic  
Juice from ½ lemon  
5 Tbsp catsup  
4 Tbsp A-1 sauce  
¼ tsp cayenne pepper  
Dash of Tabasco  
¼ tsp black pepper

Combine all ingredients except the rabbit in a medium saucepan. Mix well and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring frequently. Place the quartered rabbits on a medium-hot grill. Baste the rabbits generously every 5 minutes with the sauce mixture, turning frequently. It will take about 40-50 minutes until they are done, make sure you have used all of your sauce. With this recipe the sauce is the key!!

*Recipe provided by Mary's Peak Hound Club*

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