

# How to Dove Hunt

Dove hunting seasons open earlier than many others and offer one of the first opportunities to go afield each year. The action can be fast, offering lots of opportunities to shoot and the chance to sharpen your skills for the opening of other bird seasons later in the fall.

## License requirements

Hunters need a valid Oregon hunting license and a free HIP (Harvest Information Program) validation. See current Oregon Game Bird Regulations for bag limits and other information.

## When to hunt

Many doves will leave Oregon at the first hint of fall weather so the best hunting is usually early in the season, which runs Sept. 1-Oct. 30 in Oregon. Cool and rainy days are generally poor for dove hunting.

## Where to hunt

Check out ODFW's Hunting Access Map online (<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/hunting/map/index.asp>) to find out where you can go dove hunting. Besides state and federal wildlife areas and other public lands, many private lands are open to public hunting access, thanks to special ODFW programs. Remember you are responsible for knowing boundaries and regulations for your hunting area and you must get permission to hunt on private lands. Most wildlife areas and refuges require that hunters use and possess only federally-approved, nontoxic shot. Doves are found statewide, but are most abundant in agricultural areas, especially where cereal grains like wheat are being grown. Doves are least abundant in forested areas and at high elevations. In most years, the highest numbers of doves are observed in the Columbia Basin and northern Malheur County but good numbers of birds can be found on the westside of the state or in the southern parts.



Mourning Dove – Photo courtesy of David Budeau

## Scouting is critical

Pre-season scouting is critical for a successful dove hunt. Because doves eat seed, if you have access to farmland, scout near fields of wheat and other cereals. Doves will also take advantage of naturally produced seed, especially small seeds from plants like legumes. Burned areas are another good spot to scout; burning may make it easier for doves to find seed.

Doves often perch in open areas so look for birds sitting on power lines, fences, or trees with dead limbs that lack leaves. If you consistently see doves perched in a location or occasionally see doves coming and going, you have found your hunting spot.

Doves will often use natural features like fencerows, treeline edges, and small bluffs or rims as travel corridors between roosting, watering, and feeding areas. Find the route and position yourself along it to hunt.

Doves are also attracted to small water features such as waterholes, drying ponds, stock tanks, and gravel bars in river systems. The waterholes near feeding areas are usually the most productive. Doves do not like much vegetation around their waterholes so look for areas with a large amount of bare mud, gravel or sand around perimeter. Doves using these sites will often perch in a nearby tree or other structure before dropping in.

## Hunting techniques

Pre-season scouting is important because dove hunting is a sitting game. Once you locate a feeding, watering, or travel route, sit and wait for the doves to come to you.

Decoys may improve your chances of success. The decoys can be placed on the ground at a feeding site, near the waters edge at a watering site, or on adjacent perches such as a fence. But you won't attract doves that aren't there, so scouting is still the most important thing to do.

## Equipment

Any shotgun will work but 12 and 20 gauge are the most popular. Open chokes. Use #8 or 7 1/2 lead shot, #7 or #6 in steel.

## Dressing your dove

Because the season begins in late summer, dove hunting can take place on hot days. Consider bringing a cooler into the field to preserve your doves. Once the dove is gutted, spoilage should not be a problem provided the meat is kept cool. Remember wildlife laws require that the head or one fully feathered wing be left attached while you are in the field or transporting the dove(s) home.

To remove the guts, turn the bird over on its back, pull some feathers away from the vent area, and slit the skin.

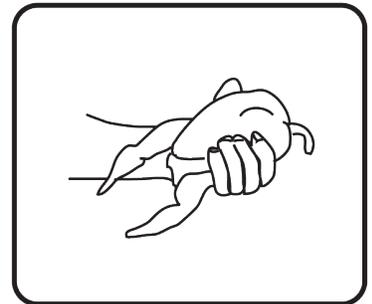
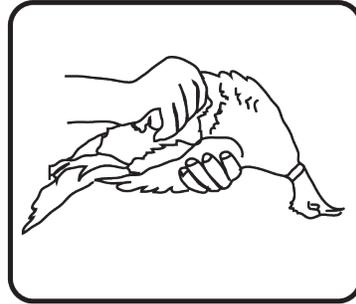
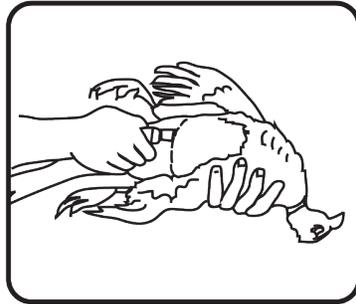
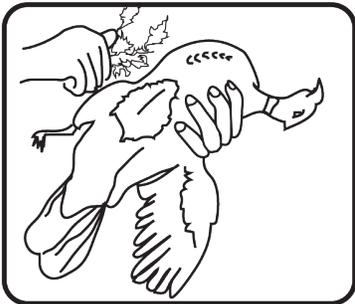
Reach a finger inside and pull out entrails. At the bottom of the breast bone you can pull the breast up and pull out most of the guts. Make sure to get at the top and front of the cavity to remove lungs positioned along backbone. Make a small cut at the base of the lungs and remove the windpipe and crop. Wipe the inside of the body cavity with a paper towel.

You have the choice of plucking or skinning the dove. Their feathers come off pretty easily; just be careful to remove only a few feathers at a time as doves are thin-skinned. Plucking will take longer than skinning but it helps retain moisture in the meat during cooking.

To skin it, wait until you get home, then cut the legs off at the first joint, cut the wings off at the first joint away from the body (elbow area), cut at the neck, and pull the skin off.

Once you have skinned or plucked the dove, rinse out the body cavity. Any remaining feathers can be singed off with an open flame. When plucked or skinned and rinsed, pat dry, and refrigerate until ready to cook.

Doves have dark meat similar to ducks, so many duck recipes will also work for dove.



## 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.

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us>

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

