



2023 VERMONT BLACK BEAR SEASONS



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Fifty years ago, Vermont’s bear population was estimated to be less than 1,500. Over the past thirty years the population has fluctuated from 4,000-6,500. Population estimates for the most recent few years indicate the population may have increased beyond this range. The robust bear population is the result of habitat conservation and hunting regulations designed for a sustainable harvest of black bears. The *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* population objective is 3,500-5,500 bears. Incidents of bear-human interactions and bear-caused property damage have increased, especially in areas where few bears existed earlier. The ‘early season’ bear hunting regulation changes were intended to provide the Fish & Wildlife Department with information that is important in improving Vermont’s bear management program.

EARLY SEASON: September 1, 2023 through November 10, 2023.

Requires a separate early season bear tag – residents \$5, nonresidents \$15.

LATE SEASON: November 11, 2023 through November 19, 2023.

The “late season” bear tag is included on each hunting license except the nonresident small game license.

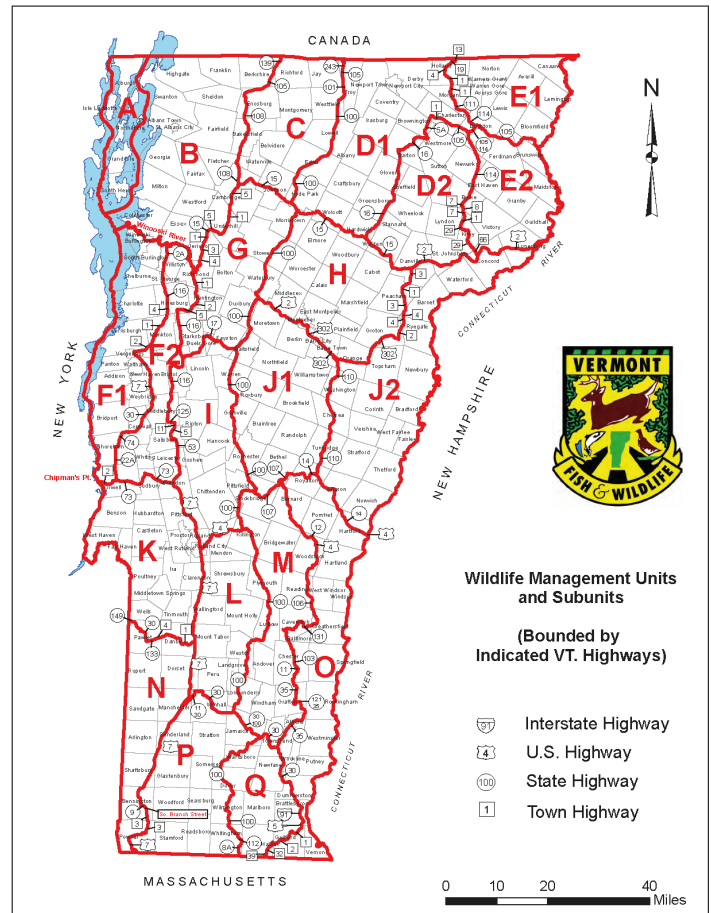
HUNTING HOURS: Hunting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

LIMIT: The annual limit for bears has not changed. A hunter may harvest only one bear per calendar year.

[Wild Game Processors](#)

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

There is a separate “early season bear tag” required for those hunters who want to hunt bear prior to the



Click WMU map to enlarge

beginning of the November deer rifle season. It costs \$5 for residents and \$15 for nonresidents. **Hunters will continue to get a “late season” bear tag along with their deer tag on their general hunting license at no additional cost, which is valid during the first nine days of the November deer rifle season.**

The additional tag will enable the department to gather essential information about hunter effort and success, as well as an idea of overall bear hunter numbers. The early season tag gives department biologists a better understanding of how many hunters are actively pursuing bears before the November rifle season.

Hunters who hunt with a *permanent license* (licenses for resident hunters 66 and older) do not

need to buy an early season bear tag no matter when their license was bought, and they will not be charged for an early season bear tag. Their tag is valid for both early and late bear seasons every year in perpetuity.

Hunters who purchased a *lifetime license* before January 1, 2013 also do not need to buy an early season bear tag. Their tag is valid for both early and late bear seasons every year in perpetuity. This includes hunters whose license was purchased before 2013 but whose license will not be activated until they take a hunter's education course, such as a license purchased for a young child.

However, hunters who purchased a lifetime license on or after January 1, 2013 must purchase an early season bear tag to hunt bear prior to the November deer rifle season.

A bear hunter using a bow or crossbow must have either a bow license or a certificate showing completion of the bow hunter education course in addition to a hunting license.

Purchase a License Online	Hunting Black Bear FAQs
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LIFETIME AND PERMANENT LICENSE RENEWAL

If you intend to hunt, fish, or trap in 2023, you must update your lifetime, permanent disability, or permanent license regardless of whether or not you used your tags. This is a statutory requirement which was put in place to allow the department to collect accurate harvest and licensing information for lifetime license holders.

This updated license will include current year tags. You may update your license at no cost on-line at our [website](#). If you are unable to go on-line, you may go to any authorized license agent or Fish & Wildlife Office and request to have your license updated. You can also call us at 802-828-1190 to be updated. A license agent may charge you up to \$1.50 for a reprint.

Update a Permanent License
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BEAR TOOTH COLLECTION IS REQUIRED

The Fish & Wildlife Department needs your help. Knowing the age of the bears that are harvested by hunters is a very important part of Vermont's scientific bear management program. A pre-molar tooth is now required by regulation to be submitted by the hunter from every bear harvested in Vermont.



A person who takes a bear shall collect a premolar tooth from the bear and submit it to a game warden, official Fish & Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the commissioner to receive it **within 30 days** of taking the bear.

No bear carcass shall be transported out of state without first being reported.

A hunter must take a warden to the kill site of a bear if requested to do so by a warden.

Bears must be field dressed prior to reporting.

Removing the bear's pre-molar tooth is easy and does not affect the mounting quality of the bear. Please ask the reporting station operator for a white bear tooth envelope so you can fill out the information, remove the tooth, seal it in the envelope, and deposit it in the green tooth bucket at any reporting station. **Remember to clearly print your name and Conservation ID number on the envelope.** If you don't put it in the reporting station bucket, you must give it to a warden within 30 days. Every tooth we receive from hunters is needed to accurately estimate the size of Vermont's bear population.

The age of your bear will be available on the [department's website](#) in the spring after it is returned from the lab.

BEAR TOOTH	
CID#	
NAME	_____
PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY	
DATE OF KILL	__/__/__ VT F&W

Bear Tooth Removal Instruction Video	Check the Ages of Black Bears You've Harvested
Find a Vermont Game Warden	

PRE-HUNT PLANNING

Bear hunting is a physically demanding activity, especially removing a harvested bear from the woods. Pre-hunt planning is very important to a successful and rewarding bear hunting experience.

Long before harvesting a bear, the hunter must decide how the meat will be processed and how the hide will be used. Hunters should arrange to have help available for all aspects of handling a harvested bear and have plans made ahead of time to ensure that the meat and hide are properly processed.

Bears have a tremendous amount of fat and a thick hide that provide great insulation. Both the meat and the hide can spoil quickly especially at temperatures above freezing. A dead bear can be large and cumbersome. Skinning, processing, and transporting a bear can be a difficult task and may be physically demanding without assistance.

As a result, it is imperative that the hide be removed as soon as possible to prevent meat spoilage. In temperatures above freezing, if there is going to be a delay in getting your harvested bear to a cooler, you should consider quartering it to allow the heavier portions to cool more quickly. To help with the cooling process pack bags of ice in the body cavity or around the quarters. You may dismember the carcass to pack it out of the place of kill as long as the identity of the sex is not destroyed.

Know Your Capabilities. To help ensure the future of bear hunting, and all hunting, it is important to instill respect for the outdoors and acceptable hunting ethics for all hunters. Making a clean kill as humanely as possible is a fundamental component of ethical hunting. Incorrect shot placement on a black bear can lead to unnecessary suffering, wounding, and failure to retrieve the animal.

Making a clean kill should be the top priority for hunters who decide to shoot a bear. An animal that is harvested humanely shows more character in a hunter than just a lucky shot. Especially if you are taking a youth or apprentice hunter bear hunting, help it be a positive experience by emphasizing ethics and making a clean kill.

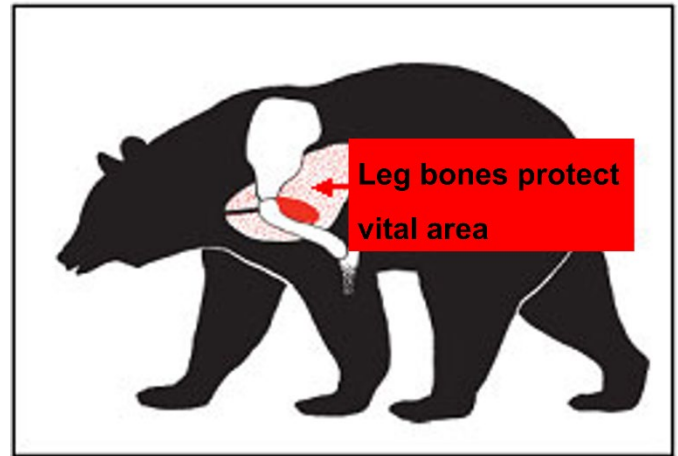
To be ethical, all hunters need to be proficient with their firearm or bow, understand their personal effective range, and have an understanding of basic bear anatomy for lethal shot placement. This will help lead to a quick and effective kill and minimize the chance for wounding the bear.

Planning the Shot. The following are some general tips to help ensure correct shot placement:

- 🐾 Hunters must understand that bears are built differently than deer and other big game animals. The chest of a bear is compressed compared to that of a deer when looking at it from the side.
- 🐾 If you make a poor shot, a wounded bear can run for considerable distances before dying. Heavy bones, hides, and fat layers may prevent quick-clotting blood from dripping and leaving a good trail, making an injured bear hard to track.
- 🐾 **KNOW YOUR CAPABILITIES AND KNOW YOUR SHOT!**
- 🐾 A bear's most vital area is an 8" circle behind the front shoulder.
- 🐾 The best shot opportunity is a broadside shot or "quartering away" for penetration into the vital organs.
- 🐾 To take your shot, wait for the bear to step forward with the near side leg exposing the heart/lung area.
- 🐾 Shots directly in the shoulder bone are not recommended. Bears have massive, muscular shoulders and heavy bones. A hunter who shoots ahead of the front shoulder may miss or injure the animal.

- ❖ A head shot is not recommended since a bear skull is very dense. The blunt, rounded shape may cause bullets or arrows to glance off or become lodged in the skull without penetrating.
- ❖ Frontal shots or shots from directly overhead (like might occur from a tree stand) are not recommended because they offer little opportunity for penetration of the vital organs (especially with archery equipment).
- ❖ NEVER take a shot you are unsure of, at a bear that is not clearly visible, or one that is positioned in such a way that you cannot cleanly hit the vital area.

The [National Bowhunter Education Foundation](#) has created an excellent document called *Advanced Black Bear Anatomy and Shot Placement Guide* for both archery and firearm hunters (including muzzleloaders); the following photos have been adapted from the NBEF publication.



Shoulder and leg bones protect the heart and lungs when the rear front leg is behind during stride. Wait until the rear front leg is in front or ahead during stride.

CROSSBOWS

A crossbow may be used as a means of take by any person during any hunting season that permits the use of bow and arrow.

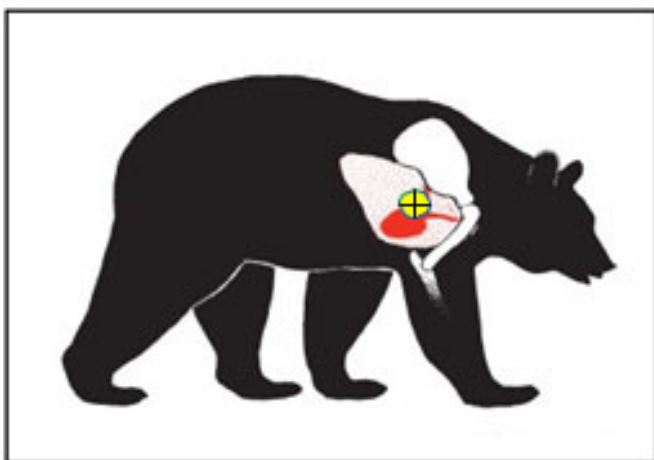
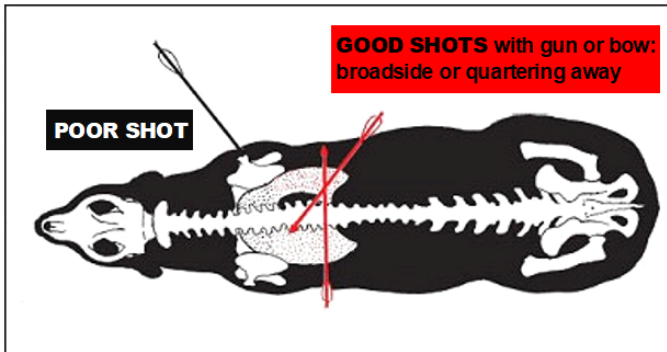
Unless otherwise provided, any game which may be taken by shooting may be taken by use of bow and arrow or crossbow.

All arrows, including crossbow arrows, must have an arrowhead of at least 7/8 of an inch wide and at least two cutting sides.

A crossbow may not be transported cocked in a motor vehicle.

Any person wishing to hunt **turkey, bear, or deer** with a bow and arrow or crossbow must hold proof of having held an archery license or a certificate of satisfactory completion of a bowhunter education course from Vermont or another state or province in Canada.

[Hunter Education](#)



Best shot placement for gun or bow.

CROSSBOW SAFETY

Keep these tips in mind when using a crossbow to ensure a safe and enjoyable hunt.

USING A CROSSBOW:

- Keep the string waxed and lubricate the rail periodically.
- Make sure your fingers are well away (below rail) from the path of the string and cables.
- Never dry-fire a crossbow.
- Make sure the limbs are free of obstructions before firing; be particularly careful if you are hunting from a ground blind.
- Never use a cocking device to uncock unless you have a model that is specifically designed to do so. Most are not.
- To uncock, shoot a specially-designed unloading point or a field tip into soft ground; or shoot a field tip into a target.
- Practice often and avoid shots at game that are beyond your effective range, generally less than 40 yards.

TREE STANDS AND CROSSBOWS:

- Always cock the crossbow without a bolt on the ground before climbing into the stand.
- Once seated and secured, pull up your unloaded crossbow with a haul line.
- Do not place bolt on the crossbow until you are safely secured in your stand.

ARCHERY HUNTING

In addition to a hunting license, a bear hunter using a bow or crossbow must have a previous or current bow license or a certificate providing completion of a bow hunter education course.

PROHIBITIONS

- An early season tag is required from September 1 through the day before the first day of the November rifle deer.
- A hunter may take only one black bear in a calendar year.
- Bears may not be taken alive.
- Bears may not be trapped.
- Hunters may not use bait or a baited area to take a bear. A “baited area” is defined as an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or other substance capable of luring or attracting bear has been placed or deposited.
- It is illegal to shoot a bear that is visiting a bird feeder.
- It is illegal to feed bears, even when not hunting for them.

DON'T SHOOT SOWS WITH CUBS

Bears are normally solitary animals and any groups of bears seen in the autumn are most likely females and their young. Bear cubs are still dependent on their mothers this time of year and will stay with her until the following spring. The department recommends not shooting sows accompanied by cubs or a bear that is part of a group of bears as bears seen together in the fall are most likely a female accompanied by her cubs.



Improved Selectivity:

- Be patient before taking your shot. Black bear cubs may be a short distance behind their mother. Whenever possible, observe the bear to make sure it is unaccompanied.
- Take time to assess the size of the bear. Adult female bears in Vermont typically weigh between 115 lbs. to 180 lbs. Take extra precautions before deciding to harvest a bear in this size range.

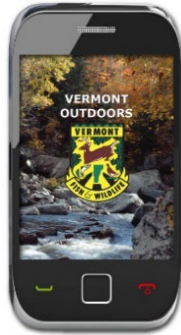
Adult sows are unaccompanied by cubs every other year and therefore still offer opportunities for harvest.

TAGGING BEAR

Bear must be tagged immediately when taken. The tag must be placed on the carcass open to view and remain there until the carcass is cut up for consumption.

VERMONT OUTDOORS – MOBILE APP

Vermont Outdoors, our new mobile application, will connect you with department lands, and fish and wildlife regulations. The app will help new and existing recreationalists find opportunities to hunt, fish, trap, or view wildlife on public lands and waters. Additionally, you will have easy access to fish and wildlife law digests, bait fish dealers, department news and current events, and reporting fish or wildlife violations.



The app can be downloaded at the [Apple App Store](#) for iPhones and [Google Play](#) for Android phones.

OPTIONAL VERMONT BIG GAME TAG

Optional Vermont Big Game Tags are available free from license agents as durable alternatives to the paper tags on licenses. Optional tags may be used to tag deer, bear, turkeys, or moose. Record your CONSERVATION ID number (top left corner of your license) on the Optional Big Game Tag. A qualifying landowner may use the tag by writing “landowner” in the same space.

The existing paper tag that comes with a license may also be used. Optional Big Game Tags may only be used by a person who has purchased the appropriate license and tag for the species they are hunting.

REPORTING A BEAR

A person taking bear shall within 48 hours report the taking and exhibit the carcass to the nearest game warden, official Fish & Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the commissioner to receive the reports.

It is mandatory that the hunter provide a pre-molar tooth from the bear. Tooth envelopes for bear are white in color and are available at all check stations as well as green buckets for the envelopes that contain teeth.

No bear carcass shall be transported out of state without first being reported.

A hunter must take a warden to the kill site of a bear if requested to do so by a warden.

Bears must be field dressed prior to reporting.

It is also legal to skin the bear and cut it up in order to carry it out of the woods. Although the bear must be reported within 48 hours, Fish & Wildlife urges doing so quickly to cool the meat.

[Big Game Reporting Stations](#)

TRANSPORTING

A tagged bear may be transported only during the open season and for 20 days thereafter.

LEASHED TRACKING DOG TO RECOVER BEAR

A hunter who believes they have legally killed or wounded a bear during hunting season may engage a person who has a “Leashed Tracking Dog Certificate” issued by the department to track and recover the animal during the season or within 24 hours after the season ends.

List of Leashed Tracking Dog Handlers	Leashed-Tracking Dog Permit Application Form
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EAR TAGGED BEARS

Occasionally, bears are marked with ear tags for monitoring purposes. If a bear is harvested and has yellow plastic or small metal ear tags, then the numbers on the ear tags should also be reported.

BEAR HUNTING SAFETY TIPS

Although wearing fluorescent orange clothing is not mandatory for hunting in Vermont, hunters and others are urged to wear a fluorescent orange vest and hat while in the woods. Use caution in identifying your target as anyone hunting deer during archery season, waterfowl, or turkeys will normally wear camouflage clothing.

SALE OR PURCHASE OF GAME

BIG GAME: The only time it is legal to buy or sell big game or the meat of big game within the state is during the open season and for 20 days after the season ends. The meat of big game animals is not to be bought or sold to be transported out of the state. It is illegal to buy or sell anadromous Atlantic salmon taken in the Connecticut River Basin and/or to buy or sell wild turkey at any time.

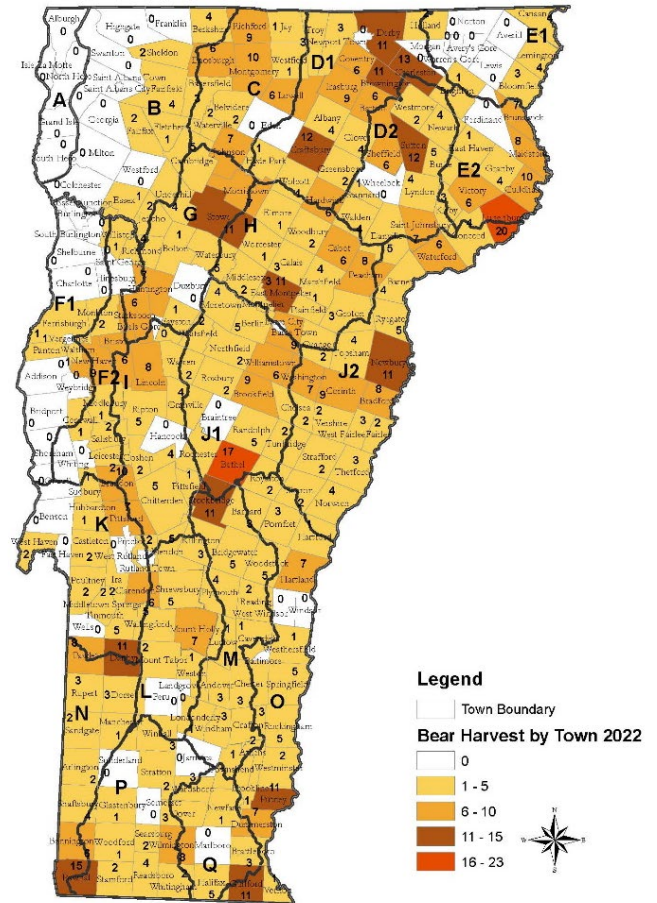
Other than the meat mentioned above, a person may buy or sell at any time:

- 🦌 The head, hide, and hoofs of legally taken deer or moose; or
- 🦌 The head, hide, paws, and internal organs of a legally taken black bear.

BEAR PARTS: International trade in hides, claws, skulls, or teeth of black bear is regulated by federal law and international treaty. If you plan to sell bear hide or parts outside of the United States, you must obtain an export permit (for a fee) from the Federal Wildlife Permit Office, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Management Authority, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203, 1-800-358-2104. These products must be shipped through one of eleven designated ports (Boston is the nearest), or through another port under special permit (for a fee) from

the same office. You do not need export permits and declarations to sell to domestic or foreign buyers within Vermont or the rest of the United States, or to sell through brokers who possess the necessary permits.

2022 BEAR HARVEST BY TOWN AND WMU



[2022 Black Bear Harvest Report](#)

WHERE CAN I HUNT IN VERMONT?

Vermont has more than 800,000 acres of federal and state public land open to hunting: **National Wildlife Refuges**, the **Green Mountain National Forest**, and all **state forests**. **State Parks** are open to hunting outside the operating season.

Perhaps the crown jewel of hunting in Vermont is the state's system of over 100 **Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)**. All WMAs are open to hunting,

trapping, fishing, and other wildlife related outdoor activities.

Information about shooting ranges is available on our [website](#):

Wildlife Management Areas	Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge	Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
Green Mountain National Forest	Vermont Shooting Ranges
Hammond Cove Shooting Range	West Mountain Shooting Range

SAFELY FIELD DRESS YOUR HARVEST

Wildlife diseases are increasingly common in Vermont. These diseases can spread to humans – but much risk is preventable with some simple steps. To help control the spread of wildlife diseases, hunters and trappers should be especially careful to protect themselves when processing game. You can protect yourself from exposure to several diseases by following these steps:

- 👣 Do not shoot, handle, or consume any animal that is acting abnormally or appears sick.
- 👣 When field-dressing game, wear disposable gloves, start with a clean knife, and minimize the use of a bone saw to cut through the brain or spinal cord (backbone).
- 👣 If you do not have gloves, wash hands and arms thoroughly with soap and water after field dressing.
- 👣 Minimize contact with brain or spinal cord tissues, eyes, spleen, or lymph nodes while field dressing.
- 👣 Avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils, pancreas, and lymph nodes of harvested animals. Normal field dressing, coupled with boning out a carcass, will remove

most, if not all, of these body parts. Cutting away all fatty tissue will remove remaining lymph nodes.

- 👣 Refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking while handling and field dressing game.
- 👣 Always wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing and processing game meat.
- 👣 Disinfect knives, saws, and cutting table surfaces by soaking in a solution of 50 percent unscented household bleach and 50 percent water for an hour. Thoroughly rinse all utensils in water to remove the bleach. Afterward, allow them to air dry.
- 👣 Wear disposable gloves when processing and packing the meat.

VENISON FOR VERMONTERS

For years Vermont Game Wardens have coordinated the donation of venison to Vermonters in need. Today, the department’s *Venison For Vermonters* program is making venison accessible to more Vermonters by coordinating the butchering and distribution of wild game meat for local food shelves and Vermonters in need.

You can help us feed our neighbors by donating today. 100% of your donation goes to covering the cost of butchering wild game meat.

An average-sized Vermont bear will provide nutritious, delicious, local meat for 141 meals. So far, more than 3,000 pounds of wild meat has been donated to the program and distributed to food shelves across Vermont.

Venison For Vermonters	Donate Today
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VERMONT HABITAT STAMP

Monies raised from sales of Vermont Habitat Stamps go to the Species and Habitat Conservation Fund, which is used to purchase and maintain Wildlife Management Areas.

Projects Supported by the Fund Include:

- 👣 Purchase lands for Wildlife Management Areas
- 👣 Improve public access to land for fish and wildlife-based activities such as bird-watching, hunting, fishing, enjoying wildlife or simply connecting with nature
- 👣 Protect and improve wetlands
- 👣 Protect and restore state-owned riparian stream banks
- 👣 Protect and enhance deer wintering areas
- 👣 Implement habitat enhancement for turkeys, bears, deer, songbirds, bats, moose, aquatic organisms, and all of Vermont's native wildlife
- 👣 Use our [online donation form](#).
- 👣 **Hunting and Fishing License Purchase:** Donate when purchasing a hunting or fishing license by simply including your contribution when applying.

When you purchase a Vermont Habitat Stamp, you help improve wildlife habitat and open land for outdoor recreation.



Please note: A stamp is not required to hunt, fish or trap, nor do you have to buy a sporting license to donate for a stamp.

[Vermont Habitat Stamp Donation Form](#)

HUNT, POST, SHARE, LIKE



Vermont Fish & Wildlife suggests the following tips to accurately reflect a positive hunting experience in social media.

- 👣 Display respect for the animal in its life and in its death. Ask yourself if your non-hunting friends would view the photo as respectful of this animal's life.
- 👣 Make sure the animal looks its best. Place the tongue back in mouth and try to minimize blood in the photo to instead focus on the beauty of the animal. Try to take a photo of a successful hunt in the animal's natural habitat. Blue sky, forest, and mountains place hunting in the context of its natural surroundings.
- 👣 Don't just post 'grab and grin' photos after a successful hunt. Show all the aspects of the hunt to give people a more complete picture of what hunting means to you. Post photos of a silent snowy forest or quality time spent outdoors with friends and family.
- 👣 Include posts from after the hunt too. A photo of you enjoying a plate of tasty venison with friends and family will help people make the connection that wild meat is a healthy, local, sustainable food source.
- 👣 If you see friends posting unethical behavior, don't be afraid to speak up. Please forward any posts that include illegal activity to ANR.FWInformation@vermont.gov so our wardens can look into it.

If done properly, social media can be a great opportunity to show non-hunters why you are passionate about hunting and to inspire conservation and spark interest.

HUNTERS, TICKS AND LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease has started to become more prevalent in Vermont during the last 10 years. Ticks that cause Lyme disease are still active in the fall in Vermont so hunters that spend time in tall grass, weed, and brushes, along

with successful hunters handling a deer, should follow a few simple tick-repelling precautions.

Treat your clothing and gear with permethrin before you hunt, making sure to follow the product instructions. Tuck your pants into your socks or boots to keep ticks from crawling up your legs. After returning from the hunt, check all over your body for ticks including your hair, and shower immediately.

Successful hunters handling a deer should remain vigilant for ticks even after they've returned from the field. Place a pan of soapy water under a hanging deer to kill any ticks that fall off the deer.



Be Tick Smart	It's Open Season on Ticks
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RECIPE

Crockpot Bear with Gravy	
<p>Ingredients</p> <p>½ tsp. garlic salt ¼ tsp. pepper 2-3 lb. bear roast 2 32-oz. cartons of beef stock 1 pack French onion soup mix 1 pack egg noodles 3 tbsp. butter salt pepper fresh Italian parsley 3 tbsp. cornstarch ¼ cup water</p>	<p>Directions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Combine garlic salt and pepper and sprinkle on bear roast. Let meat rest for 5 minutes. Combine beef stock and French onion soup mix in slow cooker. Place roast in slow cooker and cook on low for 4 to 6 hours or high for 2 to 4 hours. 2. Prepare egg noodles according to package. After straining the water off the noodles, add butter with salt, pepper, and parsley to taste. Set aside. 3. Remove meat from slow cooker and let it rest. Carefully pour stock from slow cooker into a large

	<p>cooking pot. Turn burner on high and bring stock to a rolling boil.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. In a separate bowl, combine the water and cornstarch with a whisk. Slowly pour cornstarch into stock while constantly stirring. Once the stock begins to thicken, remove it from the heat. 5. Trim bear meat of all fat and shred the meat. Combine it with the gravy mixture. Place buttered noodles on plate and pour gravy and meat on top of the noodles. Add parsley on top.
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From: https://www.penlive.com/pa-sportsman/2016/11/bear_recipes_abound_in_these_t.html

[More Black Bear Recipes](#)

HUNTERS SHARING THEIR BEAR



Successful hunters willing to share their bear can do so by donating it directly to a food shelf or meal site. Proper processing and labeling instructions are available at www.vtfoodbank.org.



VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT	
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 Montpelier, VT 05620-3702	
Phone: (802) 828-1000	
www.vtfishandwildlife.com	
www.facebook.com/vtfishandwildlife	

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