

# How to Butcher Cattle

Cattle butchering is mostly done in meat lockers and is rarely seen by the consumer. In recent years, more people have started to raise individual cattle, butcher their meat and make their own sausage or burger. Butchering cattle is a very lengthy process. It can take up to 2 weeks to cure and cut the meat, and it requires a number of tools. This article will tell you how to butcher a cow.

## Steps

- 1 Before a bovine is butchered, it must be slaughtered.** Please see [How to Slaughter Cattle](#) for steps on how you can humanely and properly slaughter your cattle.
- 2 Start the butchering process.** After the carcass has been hung for a few days to a few weeks, it is time to cut the carcass halves up into different pieces.
  - Make sure you have the proper equipment, knives sharpened, and clean clothes and an apron before you begin.
- 3 Quarter the carcass.** Cut between the 12th and 13th rib, first slicing with a large pointed knife and then cutting the top from the bottom with a meat saw. This cross-section of the cut should look like a rib eye steak.
- 4 Attach a gambrel to the lower half or use chains to hang these quarters from a hook.** Or, set both halves on a table at a comfortable level. Begin cutting the meat at the hind end of the carcass.
- 5 Cut off each leg with a meat saw.** You will begin at the hip and move down to the tailbone. Cut across the top to create round steaks, or cut larger portions for roasts.
  - The meatiest end of the leg is the rump roast. Cut it away from the bone or leave the bone in when you remove it.
- 6 Remove the flank steaks from the side of the carcass.** This is the muscle to the side of the belly portion. Trim away any large amounts of fat. Set your flank steaks on a table and save your fat in a pile to use for pure rendered fat, if you choose.
- 7 Remove the sirloin flat meat.** Remove the fat with a sharp knife and cut into sirloin steaks of any size. You can also cut this flat meat into pieces for fajitas or tri-tip steak meat.
- 8 Cut away the meat beneath the backbone, otherwise known as tenderloin or fillet mignon.** You can leave it intact or cut it into smaller steaks.
- 9 Choose whether you want to cut the meat from the ribs with a knife or use a meat saw to leave the bone in on your rib steaks.** You can also choose to use the area between the 6th and 12th ribs for a large prime rib roast.
- 10 Cut your steaks from the rear (just after the rump roast) forward.** They are sirloin, porterhouse, T-bone and New York strip.
- 11 Remove meat that is left on this part of the carcass and use it for ground beef or stew meat.**

- 12** **Begin butchering the front section.** Lift the leg up and cut beneath the shoulder blade until the leg comes loose from the body.
- 13** **Remove the meat on the shoulder.** This is called a blade roast.
- 14** **Remove the top part of the leg.** This is called chuck. It can be used as a roast or steaks with the bone in or out. The lower portion of meat should be used for ground beef or steaks.
- 15** **Remove the meat from the front of the leg.** This is your brisket.
- 16** **Remove the neck meat and put it with the other stew meat.**
- 17** **Cut off the lower ribs to be used as short ribs.**
- 18** **Cure your meat in a brine if you would choose.**
- 19** **Make ground beef or sausages with a meat grinder.**
- 20** **Wrap your meat separately in plastic and paper.**
- 21** **Place the meat in your freezer or in your refrigerator if you plan to use it quickly.**

## Community Q&A

### What does half a cow usually weigh?



To determine what half a cow weighs, you have to take first the carcass weight of that cow, then divide by two. "Usually" is too subjective, because it depends on the live-weight of the animal before slaughter. So, if a steer has a live-weight of 1400 pounds and has a carcass weight of about 870, then you'd be getting "half a cow" as 435 lb. To get that, multiply live weight by 0.62 to get an estimated carcass weight, then divide that by 2.

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### My bull weighs 1100 lbs. How much pkg meat should I expect to get?



You can expect about 517 pounds of packaged meat (assuming you'd get a dressing percentage from the live weight as 47%), if the bull is in good condition and has a good amount of muscle on him.

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### What is the usual percentage of processed butchered weight to gross weight on the hoof? Thanks.



The retail butcher weight of a carcass is about 40 to 50% of the animal's live weight.

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## Tips

- Do not be worried if a greenish liquid seeps from the neck. This was the cow's cud.
- Always cut away from your body when you are slicing the cow.
- Ask a friend to help you through the butchering process. You will often need help to move or position the beef in order to cut it.

## Warnings

- Be very careful when working with knives or lifting a cattle carcass. Both can cause serious injury. Safety and sanitation

should be your first priority.

### Things You'll Need

- Meat saw
- Gambrel
- Come-along hoist
- Small, pointed knife
- Skinning knife
- Large, pointed knife.
- Knife sharpener
- Large bucket
- Clean bowl
- Hose
- Apron
- Chilled compartment or freezer
- Plastic wrap
- Butcher paper
- Large table

### Sources and Citations

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHOBGoYrXVQ>
- <http://www.backwoodshome.com/articles/geissal23.html>
- <http://www.finecooking.com/articles/dry-aging-beef-pays-off-big-flavor.aspx>

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