

## **Rabbits**

By Errol Corry

Domesticated rabbits arrived in Australia with the First Fleet. The first feral rabbit population was reported in Tasmania as early as 1827. On the mainland, Thomas Austin freed about a dozen on his property near Geelong, Victoria, in 1859. They reached the Queensland – New South Wales border by 1886 and covered most of their present range by 1910. This was despite the Western Australian Government's 1700 kilometre rabbit-proof fence, built between 1901 and 1907. Today, feral rabbits occur throughout Australia, except in the northernmost areas.

Feral rabbits can be found in many different habitats across Australia, ranging from deserts to coastal plains — wherever there is suitable soil for digging warrens. They are scarce in areas with clay soils and abundant where soils are deep and sandy, such as in the north-east of South Australia. In arid areas, feral rabbits need access to water, but elsewhere they can often obtain enough moisture from their food.

Feral rabbits can breed from the age of four months and can do so at any time of the year, particularly when food is in good supply. In favourable conditions, they can produce five or more litters in a year, with four or five young in each litter. Even in unfavourable conditions, they can produce one or two litters a year.



Control methods for Rabbits include chemical (e.g. 1080 poisoning, fumigation), biological (e.g. myxomatosis, calicivirus disease), mechanical (e.g. ripping warrens, fencing) and shooting/trapping – I will speak of the shooting control method as it applies to hunters.

Many hunters tell of their early days of hunting alongside their Father/Uncle/big Brother in search of rabbits. It most likely involved a .22 rifle; it may have involved a shotgun. In any case it may well have been the learning of the craft of hunting, it certainly was for me.

Rabbits can also be taken at longer range with something like a .22/250 or .243 though these animals will not usually be for the pot as these heavier calibres will usually destroy the carcass.

Rabbit meat can be used for a variety of delicious meals & the rabbit was a staple of many of our early Australian settlers. So, although the rabbit was destructive on the Australian environment, and alongside many other introduced invertebrates, it helped to keep many a family fed in the last century or so.



#### To skin a rabbit - From WikiHow

Cut a ring around each leg of the rabbit, just above the leg joint. Only cut enough to get past the hide. Do not cut deeply into the skin of the rabbit; it is unnecessary and inefficient.

On each leg, make a single slice going up from the ring cut to the backside of the animal. This will make the skinning easier in the end.

Start pulling away some of the hide, working from the ring cut at the foot joint down to the backside or genitalia of the rabbit. The hide should come off relatively easily.

Cut your way through the bone of the tail, making sure not to sever or puncture the bladder. The tailbone juts out and is relatively easy to locate

With both hands, start pulling the hide from the body. The hide will slip off very easily at this point. It should be like peeling a banana.

Work your fingers into the sleeve of the hide where the arms are, removing the arms from the hide.

Work the hide down from the upper torso to the head. Pull the hide down until it rests at the base of the skull.

Sever the head from the spine. With it, the skin should entirely detach from the remaining meat.

Dress and clean the animal, saving the hide as needed. Make sure the animal is clean before you eat it. If possible, check its liver to gauge the safety of the meat. Save the hide to tan or for other uses.

Cooking with rabbit.

When taking rabbit for the pot look for healthy young rabbits ideally, the older they are the tougher and more gamey they will taste, particularly old buck rabbits. Though the older rabbits can be soaked in a salt brine which lessens the gamey taste.

Discard any with eye sores (myxomatosis). Calicivirus - **There is an increase in the size of the liver, spleen and kidney though animals with this disease generally die within 72 hours.**

Rabbits are found on most of our Club properties and need to be dispatched as you come across them.

## Rabbit Stew

### Ingredients

**Serves: 4**

- 1.35kg rabbit meat, cleaned and cut into pieces
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons plain flour
- 225g streaky bacon, diced
- 80g finely chopped shallots
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 250ml Green Ginger wine
- 250ml water
- 1 tablespoon chicken stock granules
- 1 tablespoon redcurrant jelly
- 10 black peppercorns, crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed
- 1/8 teaspoon dried thyme, crushed
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons water
- 2 tablespoons plain flour

## Method

**Prep:30min > Cook:1hr30min > Ready in:2hr**

1. Place bacon in a large, deep frying pan. Cook over medium high heat until evenly brown. Drain on kitchen towels and set aside. Sprinkle rabbit with salt and coat with 5 tablespoons flour, shaking off excess. Brown rabbit in remaining bacon fat. Remove from frying pan, along with all but 2 tablespoons of the fat and reserve.
2. Sauté shallots and garlic in frying pan for about 4 minutes, until tender. Stir in wine, 250ml water and stock granules. Heat to boiling, then stir in jelly, peppercorns, bay leaf, rosemary and thyme. Return rabbit and bacon to frying pan. Heat to boiling, then reduce heat to low. Cover and let simmer about 1 1/2 hours or until rabbit is tender.
3. Remove bay leaf and discard. Place rabbit on a warm plate and keep warm while preparing gravy.
4. To make the gravy, stir lemon juice into frying pan with cooking liquid. Combine 3 tablespoons water with 2 tablespoons flour and mix together; stir mixture into frying pan over low heat. Finally, stir in thyme. Pour gravy over stew and serve or pour into a gravy boat and serve on the side.

## GRANTS RABBIT CURRY

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 rabbit – cut into six pieces
- 2 tablespoons gram flour – for dusting
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 Tablespoons of curry powder and/ or premade jar of paste.
- 2 onions – finely chopped
- 2 tomatoes – finely chopped
- 2 carrots
- 250ml green ginger wine
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional coconut cream

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oil until quite hot over medium high heat.
2. Now dust the rabbit pieces lightly in the flour and add them to the pan.
3. Brown the rabbit pieces.
4. Once lightly browned, add the onions and coat the meat with them.
5. Allow to fry over medium heat until the onions are translucent and soft and then add the tomatoes and curry paste.
6. Sprinkle the curry powder into the pan and stir well to combine. Depends on the amount of heat you want to give your curry.
7. Pour in the wine –coconut cream if using – Chopped Carrots - the bay leaf and just enough water to cover the meat and simmer for about 40 minutes.
8. Check the meat to ensure it is tender. If not, cook it a little longer. Don't rush things! Also good in a slow cooker.
9. Garnish with the chopped coriander and season with salt and pepper to taste."

References for this article

Australian Government – Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

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Wikihow

University of Adelaide