



Donated by Allen & Myra Charleston

HOME PROCESSING

If you are not concerned with USDA or State Inspection of the meat and have more time than money to pay for a custom slaughter, home slaughtering may be a viable alternative. You cannot sell home slaughtered meat, but you can sell the food by-products.

It will take 2 people 3 to 4 hours per bird to do a 'complete' processing of the bird. By that I mean saving all the food by-products for future sale or use.

Items To Have On Hand

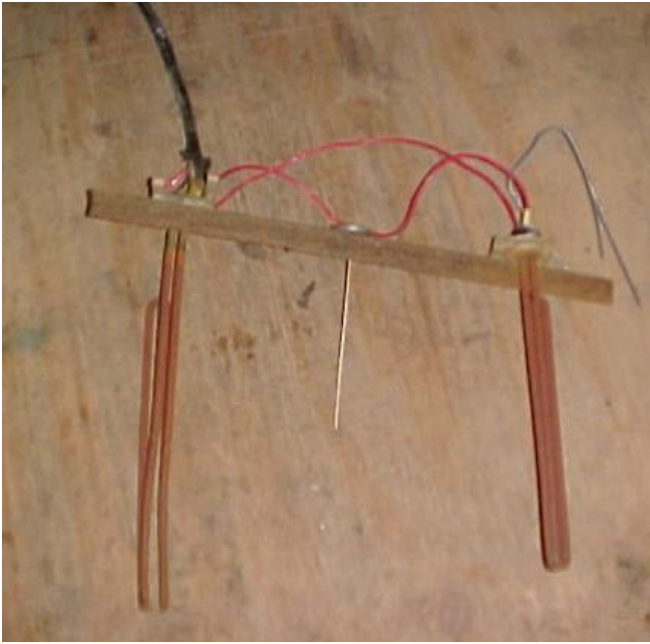
- rope
- containers for meat
- containers for fat
- containers for offal
- sharp knives
- scissors
- garbage bags
- salt
- water
- hacksaw
- 2 gallon freezer bags with zip lock

After you have humanely killed the emu, hang it upside-down to bleed. Some farmers do this outside from a tree, others work inside a shed. If you have a front end loader which will raise and lower the bird, it will save you some backache.

We use a tag team approach and butcher two at a time. One thing that we have learned is that if you dip the birds in 80°C water, the feathers will practically wipe off. It does not hurt the fat.



Allen converted an old swing set made out of schedule 40 pipe to accommodate butchering two emu at a time. He extended the center using additional schedule 40 pipe. He then welded three feet of angle iron to the bottom of each leg and then added full swivel castors to the bottom. Despite the weight this unit carries (in addition to the weight of the unit itself, you are talking about 200 plus pounds of emu), the wheels make it fairly easy to move it around. Pulley and winches on each end make it easy to raise and lower these 5 to 6 foot tall birds.



We found that a 55-gallon drum was not quite tall enough to use, so Allen welded another ring off another drum. In order to heat the water he made an insert by putting two hot water heater elements on a bar that suspends down into the drums.

The drum sunk into the ground one ring to make it easier to raise and lower the birds. Normally we fill the drum the evening before we butcher and heat the water the next morning. It takes two hours to bring the 55 gallons up to temperature. If it is going to freeze that night, we find it is best not to fill the drum.

Put a washtub under the bird to catch the blood and offal. After the birds have bled out, we swing each one around, dip it in the hot water for one minute and then

swing back to pluck and process.

Feathers: While the bird is bleeding out, pluck it. Get as many of the pin feathers out as possible - this will make hide removal easier later. Put the feathers in a garbage bag and set aside. These can be **washed and dried** (see below) for later sales or your own use. There is about 1 1/4 pounds of feathers on an emu. Of these, 3/4 pound can be used in crafts or fishing. If you must store these for several days, be sure they are out of reach of rodents, dogs, cats, etc. If the feathers are bloody, it is possible for them to be 'blown' by flies. You will end up with lots of fly eggs on the feathers.

Fat & Hide: At this point we are going to introduce a controversial subject: the use of air to ease removal of the hide. Some people have remarked that this is a lazy way to do it. Personally, I am in favor of anything that speeds up the process. Make a small slit in the skin. There is a membrane between the fat and the skin. Using your knife or finger, make a space between the skin and the membrane. Insert the air hose and begin pumping. If you have done this correctly, you will see the skin separate from the fat as air fills the space. You may have to do this in several places.

Using a sharp knife, cut around the legs and make a long cut down each leg meeting in the stomach area. Do not cut too deep. Emu skin is very thin and you just barely want to cut through it. Cut up to the vent and around it. Also make a slit down the neck. Get your hand between the skin and the fat in whatever area you want to work in and start fisting off the hide. If you have used air, this will be much easier. Leave the fat on the body if at all possible. If you remove the hide with fat on it, it will have to be scrapped off later - a very time-consuming project.

After the hide is removed, toss it into a bucket of salty water. When you are finished processing the emu, you can either cure your own hide or make arrangements to have it tanned. Most tanners require a batch of hides at a time, so dry it off, add plenty of salt, fold the hide with the edges inside, roll it up and freeze it in a kitchen garbage sack until you have enough or are ready to try it on your own.

Body Fat: Remove the fat from the body and put it in a container.

Internal Fat: You are now ready to open the emu up. Cut a shallow slit through the skin between the legs and remove that 'panel' of thin skin. You may see a great deal of internal fat immediately. Pull this out by hand, being careful of the intestines. Saw through the breast bone (or ribs if you are saving the breastbone). Cut around the bung hole, being careful not to nick the internal organs. Pull the intestines up and out of the chest cavity enough to drop the bung end into the washtub catching the offal. Open up the emu and remove the internal organs. Using either a sharp knife or scissors, remove the fat from the organs. I do this slowly as I drop the intestine line into the washtub. Be careful not to nick the organs and contaminate the fat. You will find an amazing amount of internal fat in a well-fed bird. Add this to the body fat for later packaging.

Neck fat: Since the bird is hanging upside-down as it bleeds out, a great deal of blood will be caught in the neck fat. This fat can be cleaned if you want to take the time to do it. Cold water will help draw out the blood, but it will still appear pink. Pat it dry with paper towels. Package it separately from the rest of the fat for best price.

The fat can be packaged in 1 or 2 gallon freezer bags or kryovac'd and frozen for sale to the oil processor or products company.

Meat: The majority of the meat will be in the legs. You can debone the meat as it hangs or saw the hams apart. Chill the meat and it will be easier to cut up later. Weighing four pounds, the emu neck meat is the sweetest meat on the bird. Package it up for soup. The heart and liver can also be used.

OTHER NOTES

Bones: If you are planning on saving the breastbone, cut through side ribs instead of down the center of the bird.

WASHING EMU FEATHERS

If you have had an emu processed and got the feathers back from the slaughter facility, they are probably quite bloody. If you processed the bird yourself, the feathers are probably cleaner. In either case, before they can be used or sold to the public, they must be cleaned.

First of all, do NOT put them in a sack or pillowcase in the washing machine. You will wind up with a tight ball of feathers that you cannot separate for love or money.

Everyone has their own way of doing things, and certainly this may not work for everyone, but this is what I do when I wash feathers. I usually wash several pounds of feathers at a time in the morning and then spend the afternoon drying them.

Setting Up (Outside, in nice weather)

Washing Area

- Table or back end of pick-up
- A 2 x 4 approximately 66" long
- 3 washtubs (I use number 3's)
- Degreasing dishwashing detergent
- Garden hose with spray attachment
- Rubber gloves (I prefer latex)

You want the tubs at the front of the table, slanted so that excess water will run out of the tubs and onto the ground. Use the 2 x 4 under the tubs to achieve the slant and position the tubs accordingly.

I use a degreasing dishwashing liquid to clean the feathers. My personal preference is Dawn, but you may like something else. I recommend a degreaser because a tiny layer of fat remains coating the shaft or quill of the feather, as well as a tiny bit inside, when it is removed from the carcass. The amount of detergent you use is going to depend on the condition of the feathers. Bloody feathers are going to need extra washes. No, you do not want to use hot water. That will only "cook" the blood and make cleaning more difficult.

Starting with the first pound of feathers in tub one, squirt a couple of lines of detergent on the feathers, then hose them down good. The water coming out of the hose attachment will agitate the water a bit, but you can also swish it around with your hands. If you are careful with this and have the tubs at the right angle, the dirty water will drain out of the tub as you hose in fresh without losing feathers. When you no longer have muddy or bloody water, scoop the feathers out and put them into the next tub. If you have 'clumps' of dirt clinging to feathers you should notice them at this stage and can remove them. Squirt more soap and go through the process again. The third and final tub should already have water in it along with 1 cup of bleach before the feathers are added. Swish the feathers around in the bleach water, then remove them to the draining rack.

NOTE: Do not use too much bleach as the feathers will be eaten up.

Draining Rack

Allen made a draining rack for me from an old window screen. This is essentially a box on legs with a window screen bottom (reinforced). I put the feathers on the screen and spread them out. The excess water will drip off onto the ground.

As I wash pound after pound of feathers, I will move the dryer feathers from the screen to tubs which are taken into the house to be dried in the clothes dryer.

Drying the feathers

- Clothes dryer
- Plastic garbage sacks or cardboard box

I sit on a stool beside my clothes dryer with some reading material and a well-deserved snack (after washing feathers all morning I deserve a candy bar). I toss handfuls of feathers into the dryer at a

time, let it run for a few minutes and then open the door, reach in and fluff the feathers. Dry feathers immediately go to the door and will spill out as you open it, so have your box to catch them under the door.

I constantly add more wet feathers as the dry ones come out.

WARNING - you must open the door and physically reach in with your hand to fluff the feathers or they will clump together and be unusable!

Do NOT ever put a dryer sheet in with the feathers as they will become interwoven with the sheet.

Feather Storage

Some farmers sell zip lock bags of sorted and unsorted feathers. I store bags of feathers in large plastic containers. The just cleaned feathers that have not been bagged yet are stored in large garbage sacks that are tied at the neck.

OTHER NOTES

Dyeing Feathers

Emu feathers can be dyed using Ritt dye or any natural fabric dye. You cannot bleach the feathers white, but there are fabric paints that work like dyes which you can use.