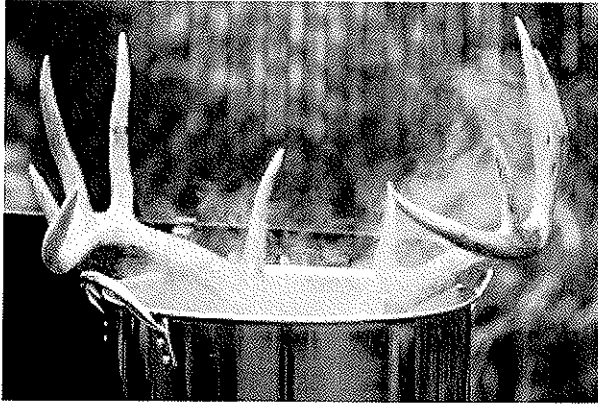


Commentary Eric Barker **NEEDED: 1 head, 2 hands, strong stomach**

It's not difficult to preserve your trophy in the European style, but you need to be prepared



Tribune/Steve Hanks

By Eric Barker of the Tribune The Lewiston Tribune | [0 comments](#)

I learned there are about as many ways to preserve a deer skull and antlers in the European mount style as there are ways to hunt deer.

But like hunting itself, all of the methods are pretty similar and follow a basic pattern: Remove the hair, fat and sinew from the skull, boil it clean and bleach it bone white.

A European mount, also known as a museum mount, is nothing more than a skull and a set of antlers. It's a bare-bones form of taxidermy with a classic look that can be done by do-it-yourselfers with relatively little investment in time or equipment. You just need to be willing to fiddle with some gross stuff like brains and eyeballs, not mind spending an afternoon toiling over a simmering pot of deer-head stew and be unafraid to work with some semi-astringent chemicals.

After a successful whitetail hunt earlier this fall, I decided to take it on. But first, like any good do-it-yourselfer, I consulted the all-knowing Internet. After reading several outdoor blog posts and watching maybe a dozen or so YouTube videos on the subject, I felt ready to give it a try.

The reporter in me wasn't quite satisfied, though, so I started making phone calls. I reached Scott Baldwin of Lewiston, an avid hunter who estimated he has done European mounts of five or six elk and perhaps 20 deer. I also talked to Deanna Schroeder of

Bovill, who recently retired after running a small business specializing in the method. She has done thousands of European mounts.

I soon came to the conclusion there is more than one way to get the job done and I could kind of pick and choose between methods, which fits my personality. When I cook, I like to have a recipe but I don't feel bound to follow it with precision. I often consult the Internet, get a vague idea of what needs to be done and then wing it. I decided to do the same with the deer mount.

Both Baldwin and Schroeder said I should cut as much of the hair and hide off the skull as possible. This includes removing the eyeballs - not a job for the squeamish. In fact, I was impressed at how difficult it is. There is lots of fat and sinew behind the orbitals, which I assume protects the eyes. It takes a good deal of effort to remove them.

It also takes some time to cut and scrape the fat and tissue from the rest of the skull. There are some tricks of course.

"If you submerge it and let it sit in water for a couple of weeks, let it get real rotty and icky, all of that stuff will just about come off," Schroeder said.

As I found out via the Internet, some people use dermestid beetles, which feed on just the type of stuff I needed to cut away. I didn't want to spend the time or money to acquire a colony so I whittled away at the skull with a pocket knife.

The next step, according to most methods, is to boil the skull to get every last bit of tissue off. Baldwin uses a mixture of about one part hydrogen peroxide to two parts water. This requires wrapping the base of the antlers in plastic and tape to prevent unintended bleaching. Other people just use water, which is the method I chose.

Baldwin advised me to bring the pot to a boil and then back off the heat until the water simmers.

"If you leave it boiling, all the bones will start coming apart and all the joints and teeth will start coming out."

Schroeder uses zip ties to hold problem areas together and puts her heads in pillow cases to catch any bones or teeth that fall out. If it does happen they can be glued back in.

This is the part where the brains need to be removed. It can be done by sticking a screw driver into the brain cavity and swirling it around, followed by a good hose rinsing.

"It's not a pretty process," Baldwin said.

A coup de grace shot during the hunt made this part unnecessary for me.

Schroeder advised liberal use of Dawn dishwashing soap during the boiling to help cut the grease.

Baldwin said it would take about four hours.

"A lot of that time is just watching football while your deer skull is in the pot," Baldwin said. "It takes that long from start to finish but you are not really working that long."

I started boiling and scraping and found it to be a slow process. After another call to Baldwin, I added about 3 percent hydrogen peroxide to my soup and kept at it. The tool I used most was my pocket knife, but I also used some small wire brushes. It took me about six hours but I was probably a bit too timid in my early scraping efforts.

Baldwin whitens his skulls through the boiling process. When it's all done, he sprinkles the nasal cavities and backside of the skull with borax to make sure it doesn't smell, just in case there are any bits of tissue that didn't get removed.

Schroeder allows the skulls to dry and then soaks them in a vat of industrial-strength hydrogen peroxide. I went with an Internet method and purchased a bottle of 40 percent hydrogen peroxide from a beauty supply store and painted it on. High-percentage peroxide is a powerful liquid and will burn skin. Those who work with it should use rubber gloves and safety glasses.

All that remains is to mount the skull and antlers on a piece of wood. Baldwin suggested something weathered, like barn wood or driftwood.

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