

Days of scouting and trudging up hills, through swamps and across creeks with a shotgun and gear-laden turkey vest have finally paid off. You bagged a trophy gobbler, but now what do you do?

Your choices here are varied and many: Do you send it off to a taxidermist for a full-body mount? Do you make a beautiful wall-mounted cape? Or do you just clean it and eat it?

This often-difficult decision has to be made with expedience, as soon after the shot as possible, to prevent your fine specimen from turning into a mess.

#### A FULL-BODY MOUNT

Creating a beautiful full-body mount of your trophy tom begins in the field, right after you shoot.

“The main thing that affects the quality of a mount is how the bird is handled before a person brings it to a taxidermist: treat the bird like a piece of glass,” says world champion taxidermist Cally Morris, owner of Hazel Creek Taxidermy in Green Castle, Mo. They mount about a thousand turkeys each year, shipped in by turkey hunters from all over North America.

“Treat the turkey delicately,” Morris says. “Handle the turkey by the legs or the body. Don’t grab it by the head or drag it on the ground. Keep the feathers from getting bent or dirty. Also, when transporting the turkey, lay it on its belly, not its back.”

If your taxidermist is local, it’s simple: just take the bird to him as soon as possible. If you have to ship your turkey to a taxidermist, there’s a lot more to consider. Following these steps will help relieve some of the anxiety about shipping your once-in-a-lifetime-turkey across the country.

#### Preparing the bird for freezing and shipping

- Pack paper towels in the turkey’s mouth to absorb any leaking blood. Roll the head in paper towels. Fold more towels over the head and tape them closed.
- Tuck the head inside the wing. Fold the wings tightly against the turkey’s body.
- Pre-cut a piece of cardboard to place over the tail feathers and feet. Do not tie the feet and feathers together inside the cardboard. (This step is most important; kinked tail feathers are difficult to repair.)



## MOUNTING DECISIONS

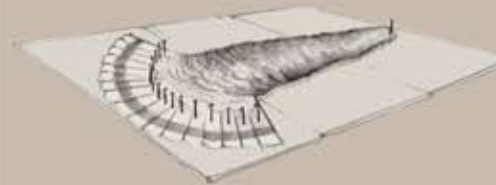
Story and photos  
by Matt Lindler

## WILD TURKEY CAPE

If a full-body mount is not in your budget or you don't have the space to display it, creating a cape of your turkey's feathers is the way to go. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, it's one of the easiest and least-expensive ways to show off your trophy.

### Follow these simple instructions for a good looking and simple way to capture the memory of a special hunt:

- Hang your tom by the head.
- Cut the skin where the feathers on the neck meet the skin of the head.
- Continue down the center of the back toward the tail. Follow the natural seams that run down both sides of the back. Be careful as you cut the skin from the body so as not to cut into the skin, which is thin and delicate along the backbone.
- Remove the skin, including the tail skin.
- Scrape the fat and flesh from the cape using a knife and spoon.
- Cover the wet skin in 20 Mule Team Borax laundry booster.
- Lay the cape treated-skin-down on large piece of flat cardboard.
- Pin the neck end to the cardboard using a straight pin or brad.
- Fan the tail feathers out, spreading them to the desired width and pin each feather in place. Don't push a pin through the quills, but right along side of the quills.
- Lay each feather in place carefully with a pocketknife and trim off any excess feathers from the sides.
- Let dry three to four weeks in a place free from moisture, rodents and pets.
- Scrape off the old Borax and reapply a fresh coat if there is still moisture in the cape. Allow it to sit for another week.
- Remove pins, shake off the loose Borax, and your trophy is ready to hang. (If desired, mount the cape on a piece of wood that is cut to fit the cape.)



- Put the turkey headfirst inside a large plastic garbage bag. Roll the bag over in a teardrop shape, handling the turkey by only its legs or main body. Tape the bag.
- Fit the cardboard around the tail feathers and feet. Tape or staple the cardboard in position, careful not to staple through the feathers.
- Lay the turkey in the freezer on its side for 36 to 48 hours. The turkey will be frozen solid and ready to ship.
- Take the turkey out of the freezer and wrap it in several layers of bubble wrap. Newspapers wadded and packed around the bird also help insulate it.
- Place the turkey headfirst in a box. The turkey should fit tight to prevent movement. Find a box at your local grocery store or moving company. If there are old labels on the box, tear them off or mark through them with a black marker so they do not confuse the shipping route.
- Ship your turkey to the taxidermist on a Monday, if possible, never on a Thursday. If you send it out later in the week, it could get misdirected and sit in a terminal over the weekend, thawing out and ruining your prize. A frozen wild turkey takes about two days to thaw.
- Expect to pay \$15 to \$20 in packing supplies and \$35 to \$45 for shipping.
- Be sure you have the taxidermist's proper address. Never ship to a post office box. Ship only to a street address and include appropriate phone numbers on the shipping label.
- Include your name, address and phone number on a piece of paper inside the box. Be ready to discuss the pose of your wild turkey mount when your taxidermist calls.

### For more information

For more tips and turkey-hunting projects, logon to [www.nwtf.org](http://www.nwtf.org). Click on the For Hunters link, then on Tips & Adventures.

