

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



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Notes: Raising deer for their velvet goes on in New Zealand, among other places. But other countries — Ireland and the United Kingdom, for example — don't allow it. The American Veterinary Medical Association says this: "When velvet antler is farmed the removal of velvet [done before it would fall off on its own] causes stress and pain to the animal that should be mitigated through refinements of husbandry and the use of short- and long-term analgesia. ... More research is required to establish safe and effective techniques." In other words: Velvet removal can hurt. Pain-killing medicine can help. But if it helps enough and how to give it need more study (http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/deer_velvet_bgnd.asp).

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Q. Dear Twig: The stuff that a deer rubs off of its antlers — the "velvet." What happens to it? My dad and I saw a rubbed tree but no velvet.

A. Deer reader: It seems **the deer eats it**. Or, if the deer is a farm-raised deer, **a person might eat it**, too.

"Deer rub on trees to help peel away the velvet," a story by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources explains. "They frequently eat the protein-rich velvet shards."

See a deer do both — rub off and eat its own velvet (no fries) (nor ketchup) (nor ice cream after) — in a slide show on the Web. Find it on *Field and Stream* magazine's Web site. Go to http://www.fieldandstream.com/article_gallery/Slide-Show-A-Buck-Sheds-Its-Velvet.

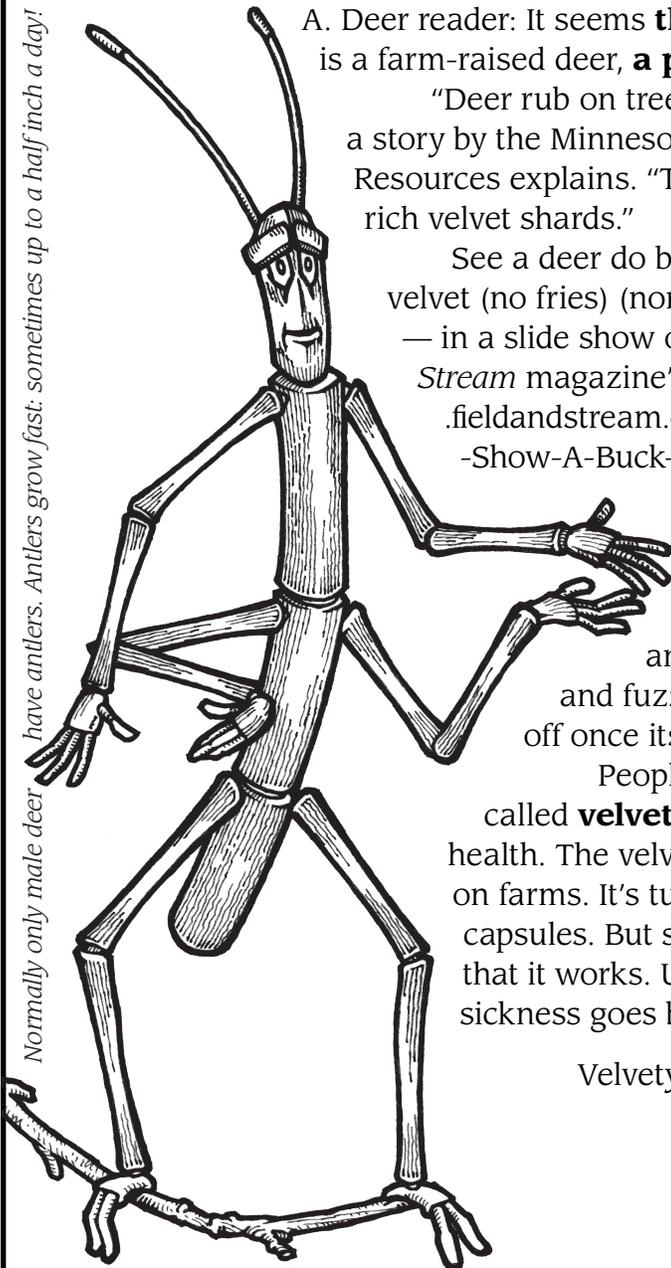
Velvet covers the antlers as they grow and get hard. (Antlers fall off and grow new every year.) It has **nerves** and **blood vessels** in it. It's soft and fuzzy like — yes! — velvet. It falls off once its work is done.

People who eat deer velvet (also called **velvet antler**) believe it helps their health. The velvet gets taken from deer raised on farms. It's turned into powder and put into capsules. But science so far hasn't proved that it works. Using deer velvet to try to treat sickness goes back at least 2,000 years.

Velvety,

Twig

Normally only male deer have antlers. Antlers grow fast: sometimes up to a half-inch a day!



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