

# Hunting For Newbies

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# INTRODUCTION

If you're looking for a hobby that will get you "off the grid," out of the house and back to nature, there are few out there that can top hunting. It doesn't matter whether you intend to become the next Daniel Boone or you just relish the idea of getting back to the basics, this sport will provide you with plenty of challenges while testing your resolve and even your mental prowess and physical stamina.

The reality is there is nothing quite like sitting in the woods or on the edge of a serene lake waiting for the right game to approach. The peacefulness, tranquillity and sheer exhilaration of being in the wild make hunting a sport worth pursuing. If game is spotted, the excitement level climbs even higher. For many hunters, it doesn't necessarily matter if game is caught or not; the act of hunting is a reward in and of itself.

To actually bring home game at the end of the day, however, hunters do need to hone certain skills. When all is said and done, the success or failure of a hunt often comes down to having the right skills (and perhaps a little luck) to put up against the natural, and often well-developed, defences of the animal in question.

While it might seem like hunting is a fairly easy sport to dive into, this isn't the case. At least this is so if a newbie hunter wants to enjoy a reasonable chance at success. To really have an opportunity to bag game during the first hunt or first few hunts, you have to understand some important ground rules. You also have to have an understanding of the game you intend to seek. Plus, it's also a good idea to make sure your "I's" are dotted and your "T's" are crossed as far as local laws are concerned. Then, of course, there's gear to buy, locations to pick and even a little bit of discipline that needs to be developed.

While it's true that even a "newbie" hunter can head into the woods and bag a big whitetail buck on the first time out, that luck will likely run short fast unless it's backed up with knowledge. In this book, we'll discuss the basics you need to know to put yourself on the path from being a newbie to becoming a novice and eventually a veteran hunter.

Although some might have preconceived notions that hunting is a simple sport that gives humans unfair advantage, veterans will tell you this just isn't the case. No matter how well equipped you are and how fast and accurate your weapon happens to be, most game animals are very well equipped with their own natural defences. It is the hunter's job to learn to recognize and overcome these defences. Whether it's an acute sense of smell, sight or hearing – or even all three – that must be overcome there are tips and tricks that veterans use to level the playing field. While they won't work on every given day, they can make the difference between success and failure in many instances.

As you get started in developing your skills at this hobby, you'll find that just about everything you do will depend on the selection of your game. When you know what type of animal you want to go after, you can arm yourself with the right weaponry, knowledge, field tips and, most importantly, licensing to make certain your hunt is legal.

Once you have your game picked, you'll need to study up on the area you plan to hunt in and what the requirements there happen to be. The next step involved in planning a successful hunt is to make sure you have and know how to use the weaponry. Having the right gear along for the hunt can mean the difference between success or failure. It's also a very good idea to set safety as priority No. 1 during every step of the way when hunting. From familiarizing yourself with your weapon to knowing how to conduct yourself in the woods, there are things you need to know to stay safe and make every hunt more enjoyable in this regard.

In this book, we'll go over all the basics you need to know to get ready for your first big hunt. From selecting the right game to tips that can help you in the field, we'll share what successful veteran hunters know that you might not.

As you read along, remember that hunting is part patience, part skill and a big dash of luck. Even the most experienced hunter can go out into the field and come back empty handed. The thrill of the hunt isn't necessarily just about taking down the game; it's about getting back to nature, soaking up the surroundings and trying to work the skills of man against the natural defences Mother Nature endows on her creations.

Good luck!

# PUTTING THE HORSE BEFORE THE CART

To progress from “newbie” to veteran, you’ll find the first step involved in planning each and every hunt is selecting the game of choice. You need to know the intended prey to plan everything from what gear to bring to what weapons will be most effective. Plus, permitting will often hinge entirely on the game in question and what seasons are available for the animal.

Selecting game for a first hunt – and each subsequent one thereafter – isn’t as easy as it sounds. To get started, there are things to consider. Asking yourself these questions can help you narrow the field:

- What game permits are available during the season I intend to hunt?

Most states in America set specific seasons for different types of game animals. Turkeys, for example, tend to be in season during the spring and early fall. Deer, certain bears, ducks and other common game might come up at different times of the year. It is imperative to not only obtain a proper license to hunt within the state you plan on hunting in, but also to have the right permits and season for the desired game animal. Even if you have a proper license, hunting an animal out of season is illegal and can get you into a ton of trouble.

- What is my intent for the hunt?

This is an important question to ask before selecting the game to go after. Some hunters prefer to only go after game they can use and will eat. Others, however, are interested in what is referred to as “sport game” by many. Animals that fall into the latter classification are those that are not traditionally eaten, but might have useful pelts. Either style of hunting is perfectly acceptable and legal. Answering the question, however, can assist with game choice and picking the right season for attempting a first hunt.

- What is my skill and patience level?

Even newbie hunters might have a fair level of skill with weaponry. This can be important for pursuing certain types of game with any degree of success. Turkeys, believe it or not, are among the most difficult of game animals to go after. Their keen senses and compact size make them very difficult even for veterans to bag. If your skills are just developing and your patience level is low, going after an easier game animal might be in order to gain experience and build confidence. If you are a deadeye with a shotgun or a pro at firing a bow, you might have a better-than-fair chance at

adapting what you already know in the field. If you are not proficient with your weapon of choice, do take the time to practice. This is important not only for accuracy, but also safety.

So, why is it so important to peg down the game desired before heading out into the woods with a shotgun in tow? These are the main reasons why it's a good idea to pick first and shoot later:

- Your licensing hinges on it  
As we've said, you'll need a hunting license to be considered legal in the field. The type or types of animals you want to go after will have their own specific seasons and even "stamps" or permits that might be required to go along with a hunting license.
- Your gear selection will be based on it  
Most major types of game have their own specific gear requirements to improve the chances of enjoying a successful hunt. You don't want to bring along deer calls on a turkey hunt! In addition to the tools of the trade, your actual clothing and camouflage style can vary based on the prey in question.
- Your hunting site location can depend on it  
If you want to bring home a duck, you likely will not want to go into the deep woods. Instead, you'll want to find a hunting area near a water source that is known to attract these birds.
- Your weaponry and ammunition selection will revolve around it  
It does you no good whatsoever to go into the field after a small game animal with a weapon meant to bring down an elk. When you preselect your target or targets, you'll be certain to bring along the right weaponry and ammunition for the hunt in question.

Before you head out into the woods, pick up a gun and ammo and even start buying basic gear, you do want to put the horse before the cart. Knowing your intended game will shape every move you make before you enter the field, once you are there and even after you leave.

The next thing you need to do to go from a would-be hunter to a seasoned veteran is to line up your licensing. This will require a little study, some planning and cold, hard cash to pay fees in most areas. Don't worry though; there are some tips and shortcuts that can help you get on the right path for making certain your first hunt – and everyone after it – is perfectly legal and above board. The last thing you want to do is run afoul of game management officials in your intended hunting grounds!

# GETTING LICENSED

You've selected the game you want to go after and have decided the thrill of the hunt is definitely right for you. Although your mind is made up, you're still not quite ready to head out and try your hand at bringing home game. The next step you'll need to tackle to turn your idea of becoming a hunter into reality involves licensing. It is imperative to have the proper credentials to wander in the woods, wetlands and mountainous areas of America and most other countries.

Exact procedures for licensing can vary from state to state and country to country. There are a few basic rules of thumb you will want to follow, however, no matter where you intend to set up for your first big hunt. To make sure you get your documentation all in order before you arrive at your desired hunting location, be sure to follow these tips:

- Visit the local fish and wildlife commission Web site  
Most states offer a bevy of licensing information on their own Web sites. Here you will be able to check into hunting locations, licensing requirements, locations to obtain your permits and what you might need to bring with you. Keep in mind that licenses and permits can become rather specialized based on the animals in question. Some states, for example, run quota hunts for specific game. This type of permit is purchased in addition to a standard hunting license. Some management areas may also require the purchase of an additional stamp to allow legal entry for hunting. If you plan on hunting outside of the United States, visit the proper agency's Web site for the country you intend to visit to find out what is required, what the costs are and so on.
- Be very mindful of the requirements  
The exact requirements for obtaining a hunting license and permits to hunt specific game can vary greatly. Read up on these so you know exactly what you'll need to do to make certain your hunt is legal. Some areas, for example, may require the completion of a hunters' safety course before they will grant licensing to anyone, even out-of-town visitors.
- Make sure you know your seasons  
Most states and countries that allow legal hunting do set seasons on their game animals. Even with a hunting license, hunting outside of season is illegal in these areas. Fish and wildlife offices around America tend to post the dates for seasonal hunts by the type of game involved. Check out location-specific information to make sure you have your ducks in a row before you head out on a long

trip to hunt deer in a different state. There's nothing worse than arriving and finding out your desired animal is out of season.

- Understand where you need to go to get a license  
Take the time to check out the different locations where you can obtain a hunting license. Some states rely heavily on hunting-related merchants to sell licenses for them. Others might require you visit a government office to fill out forms, pay fees and obtain the proper credentials. Many do provide the ability to fill out forms and pay online, as well.

Keep in mind when you are looking into licensing requirements, it's also a good idea to brush up on the laws governing hunting in the area where you intend to hunt. Laws regarding hunting outside of set areas, outside of legal hours and even failing to wear the proper gear are on the books in many locations. The fines and penalties involved with breeches of the law can run very high. In Georgia, for example, the fine for hunting before or after legal hours is \$134. Hunting deer at night can result in a \$659 fine. Hunting without a proper license in an area where the act is considered poaching can result in felony charges and even jail time.

While it might sound nice to save a few bucks by circumventing the system, it's just not worth it. The cost of a license can vary, but in most cases it actually runs less than the fines by a long shot – even for out-of-state hunters. Using Georgia as the example again, it costs about \$9 for a one-year big game hunting license for residents. Non residents pay \$90 for a 3-day permit. They can also obtain an annual license for \$195. Hunting and fishing license combinations are even cheaper – especially when compared to the fines for going without. Other states have similar pricing structures.

Now that you know how to line up a license to make your hunt legal, your next step involves lining up the gear you'll need for a hunt. While you won't necessarily need to purchase everything right away, having the right clothing and safety gear at the very least is important.



# LINING UP THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

While your shotgun, rifle or bow might be a vital tool to have along for a big hunt, this item is not the only one you will need. To enjoy a modicum of comfort, remain safe and level the playing field a little more against your game of choice, you'll want to have other gear along.

The exact gear you'll want to take with you into the woods, mountains or wetlands will depend a lot on the game you are after, the time of year and how long you intend to stay in the great outdoors. There are basic rules of thumb that can help you select gear and figure out what to pack and bring along. Keep in mind, if you intend to camp, too, you'll need more than what is listed here. When you're buying or packing up your gear, make sure to take these points into account:

- Camouflage is a must  
If you want to help conceal yourself from your game and increase your chances of being able to get a shot off unnoticed, you will need camouflage. Keep in mind that there are different kinds of camo for different geographical regions. You wouldn't want to wear dark green, woody gear in the middle of a sandy waterfowl area. Know where you are going, what the seasonal colors are and try to adapt your purchases to meet the needs at hand.
- Seasonal considerations should come into play  
Beyond the coloration of your camouflage, you'll also want to take seasonal temperatures into account when selecting gear. Wearing gear meant for cold winter hunting in the north in the middle of a Florida summer is a big mistake. Dress appropriately for the time of year and even the time of day you intend to be out. Doing so will keep you more comfortable and increase your chances of being able to wait out the game for longer periods of time.
- Think comfort  
Comfort is often overlooked by beginning hunters. If you want to be able to exercise the kind of patience required to bring home the right game, you have to be able to stay outside for a while. To this end, it is smart to wear comfortable footwear meant for hiking. It's also a great idea to stuff an extra pair of socks into a backpack before you head out. There's nothing worse than slogging through a watery area first thing in the morning and having to wear those socks into the afternoon while you hope and pray a deer will walk

by. Also make sure pants, shirts, jackets and other articles of clothing are comfortable enough for all-day wear.

- **Prepare for wild events**  
Just because you're going after a whitetail buck doesn't mean you will avoid other animals when you're out in the wild. Do dress to avoid snake strikes and prepare for the possibility of other encounters. It's not a bad idea to have a plan in place for dealing with unwanted encounters with snakes, larger, less friendly animals like bears and any other eventualities that might crop up during your hunt.
- **Don't overlook safety gear**  
In most areas, it is against the law to hunt without proper reflective and safety gear. You have to be able to recognize other hunters from the game you are all after. Plus, traipsing around in the woods in the early morning or evening hours without a flashlight (if it's needed) and other simple safety gear just isn't smart. At the very least, follow local laws in regard to gear to keep yourself out of hot water with hunting officials.
- **Props and tools that can help you on the hunt**  
Not every hunter feels the need to bring along props and tools to reel in game, but many do. The items you may want to consider will vary based on the game you are after. They can include, however, such things as scenting agents, game-specific calls, decoys, feeding corn and so on. These items can help you attract the animals you're after, but they do not provide a guarantee.
- **Keeping pests at bay**  
Ask many a hunter and they will say that pests are enemy No. 1 for successful hunts. Plan ahead for the creepy, crawling things that might be in the hunting area with you. Mosquito repellents, ultrasound devices and other tools to keep flying, biting critters at bay can prove very useful in the field. In swamp areas, it's not even a bad idea to invest in some netting.
- **Passing the time**  
It is never possible to predict how long you'll have to sit in a spot to actually see the animal you're after. To prevent unnecessary movement, which can scare game away, have a plan to occupy your time during the wait. Some hunters bring along something to read. Others just enjoy the quiet time to sit, think and watch. Having a basic hunting guide or local rules books along, however, never hurt.

- Grumbling stomach concerns  
Again, sitting and waiting can be hard. Many hunters head out right after breakfast and don't return until well after the dinner dishes have been cleared. With this in mind, it's a good idea to have some snacks along for a hunt. Be smart about this, however. Crunching loud potato chips can scare off game. Heavily scented items might alert animals to your presence.
- Think unscented  
Most game animals have a highly developed sense of smell. If at all possible, make sure clothing is washed in unscented soaps. Also, use unscented soap for bathing yourself, too. Beyond game attracting scents, you really want to smell like something that belongs in the woods and not a department store model.
- Tree stands, blinds and other positioning tools  
There are concealment tools that can help you not only hide from your game, but also keep you more comfortable in the process. Tree stands are great for hunting in wooded areas. If you do opt for using a tree stand, do make sure you know how to properly position and secure one. Stands are excellent tools, but they can be dangerous if they are used improperly. Blinds can be quite useful for wetlands hunting and even when stalking grassy meadows for deer and other game. Make sure you understand how to put one up and how to position it for maximum effectiveness. If blinds and stands don't appeal, there are other tools that can help. At the very least, consider a comfortable, camouflaged cushion to sit on if you intend to wait out the game on the ground and out of direct cover.
- Navigational tools  
There is nothing fun about getting lost in the woods long after a hunt was supposed to end. To avoid this eventuality entirely, do consider bringing along a map, a compass or even a GPS device. Even if you know your hunting grounds very well, it is possible to get turned around after tracking down game. Having the tools to get you back out can prove very important as the sun is setting and your party winds down to leave for the night.
- Cleaning gear  
As a beginning hunter, you probably don't have the skills to fully dress down a deer or other animal. Still, as members of your hunting party teach you the ropes, it's a good idea to have your own set of gear for this job already in place. The basics include a sharp skinning or buck knife, rope, water and plastic bags. Binoculars can prove useful for tracking down game that has been injured, but is still able to bolt, too.

- Emergency preparedness  
Hunting in and of itself isn't a dangerous sport, but accidents can happen. You want to be prepared for what may come your way by having a basic first aid kit tossed into your backpack. Bandages, antiseptic, bug bite ointment and so on can all prove very useful in the woods.

Once you have your basic gear lined up for your big hunt, your actual weaponry should occupy your attention. The gear on this end is highly specialized and takes some know how to select and even more to operate.

# WEAPONRY MATTERS

Unless you're crazy enough to head out into the woods after a big animal with nothing more than your bare hands, you're going to need a weapon. If you're new to hunting, you'll find the options out there are a little more extensive than you might realize. The type of weapon you select can impact not only your chances for getting game, but also the times of year you are able to hunt. Bows, muzzleloaders and regular shotgun and rifle seasons tend to all be a little different.

## THE 4 MAJOR CLASSES OF WEAPONS

As you seek out your weapon of choice, you will find there are four main categories. In the gun department, the calibers can vary, but the overall weapon style will remain the same. The types are:

- Bows  
Good old fashion bows and arrows are still used by hunters all over the globe. This particular weapon requires not only eye-hand coordination, but also some physical strength and stamina. The types of bows you will run into include long bows, recurve bows, crossbows and compound bows. Long bows are likely the most difficult to master. Compound and recurve bows are frequently used by hunters, as well, and can often be modified to operate with other gear like scopes for better aiming. Some jurisdictions may have restrictions placed on the use of a crossbow during hunting seasons. It does pay to check requirements and restrictions closely.
- Muzzleloaders  
A muzzleloader is any firearm that is loaded directly from the muzzle of the gun. Often calling for the use of black powder, this type of gun is considered old-fashion in nature, but still has its uses in the hunting arena. Some states run seasons strictly for hunters who prefer to use muzzleloaders. This type of firearm can be extremely accurate, but does require some skill and practice to aim, fire and reload. Muzzleloaders may also take on the form of flintlocks and percussion long guns.
- Rifles  
Rifles are firearms that are meant to be fired from the shoulder position. This type of firearm generally has built-in sights and is commonly used for hunting. Muzzleloaders are technically rifles, but

they are not the only firearms that fall into this classification. For hunting purposes, rifles often operate using a clip-loading system, which means multiple rounds can be set and ready to fire. Semi-automatic rifles like the Remington Model 7400 are often selected by hunters for big game shooting. They are favored by some for the ease in reloading, the accuracy and the dependability they provide.

- Shotguns

This type of firearm is similar to a rifle, but has a smoothbore instead of a rifled barrel. It is also fired from the shoulder and generally fires a shell that is loaded with pellets, known as shot. Shotguns can have large calibers designed for big game and also can be loaded with "bird shot" for smaller targets. Shotguns generally have a lower hold capacity for ammunition than a rifle with a clip might have. In some jurisdictions, there is a limit on how many shells a shotgun can hold during a hunt. Although shotguns are not necessarily as convenient as their semi-automatic rifle counterparts, they are the preferred weapon of choice by many hunters.

Although the above are the most common weapons used in hunting, they are not the only ones. In some areas, people continue to hunt with spears and other sharp implements. For beginning hunters, however, these techniques are not often recommended. Getting up close and personal with a big game animal with nothing more than a spear is often best left to the veterans.

## GAME SPECIFIC WEAPON RECOMMENDATIONS

Selecting the right type of weapon for the game at hand is an important consideration before heading out on a trip. While hunters use a variety of weapons and ammunition for all types of game, there are some standard recommendations for popular prey animals. To help guide your weapon selection as you start out, the following recommendations are often made based on the animal in question:

- Deer

The most commonly used weapons for deer hunting include bows, muzzleloaders, 10-, 12- or 20-gauge shotguns loaded with buckshot and a variety of rifles. Keep in mind some areas may prohibit the use of rifles when deer hunting.

- Hogs

Although the laws in regard to weaponry may vary from state to

state, standard hog hunting calls for the use of rifles of any caliber, black powder of any caliber, shotguns, bows and even handguns. Check jurisdictional regulations just to play it safe. In some areas, hog hunting is allowed year-round, as well, because these animals are often considered nuisances.

- Elk  
This larger game animal can be successfully tagged with a number of different weapons. Depending on the jurisdiction, the weapons of choice include muzzleloaders, high-powered rifles, bows and pistols. The most common weapon used for elk hunting is a high-powered rifle. Bows tend to provide the greatest challenge for the hunter.
- Duck and other waterfowl  
Bow hunting is permitted in many areas, but shotguns with birdshot are often preferred. The smaller the pellet used, the less likely a shot will destroy the food value of a bird.
- Turkeys  
Turkey hunters that desire a serious challenge head into the woods armed with nothing more than a bow and some arrows. Since this particular creature is rather crafty, many hunters prefer using a 10-12- or 20-gauge shotgun with the proper ammunition for birds. The 12-gauge shotgun, however, is favored by many.
- Bear  
Just about every weapon type is usable for bear hunting, but some jurisdictions may have restrictions. This type of prey, however, does call for a higher caliber shell than many others.

# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

No matter what type of weapon you select for the hunt, it is imperative not only for your success, but also your safety that you learn how to use it right. You don't have to become a sharpshooter to be successful either. You just have to learn the basics, understand safety and have a reasonably good accuracy rate.

So, how can you learn to become proficient at your weapon of choice? There are a number of options available to you no matter what type of weapon you choose to hunt with. One of the best things you can start out doing is taking a hunters' safety course. The course curriculum can vary from state to state, but in most cases classes include lessons in:

- Hunting education
- Firearms and equipment
- Basic shooting skills
- Basic hunting skills
- Wildlife conservation
- Live fire and testing with your weapon
- Basic regulations in the state you intend to hunt in

Beyond hunting safety courses, you can also seek out local ranges to practice firing your weapon. Some areas even have ranges set up for compound, recurve and long bow shooting. If you do intend to use a bow, you can also legally (in many areas) set up targets on private property as long as the property is remote. In some jurisdictions, it is also legal to set up firing ranges for shotguns and rifles, as well. Just be certain to check into regulations. Discharging a firearm in a populated area is a serious offense.

No matter your weapon of choice, practice is essential to build up accuracy in firing and reloading. Even if you are already good at shooting, additional practice is never a bad idea.

Ideally, you will want to be able to:

- Understand the full operation of your weapon  
Make sure you know how to load, empty and clean your firearm. Also, be certain you know how to break it down and clean it. This is imperative for preserving the lifespan and increasing the accuracy and safety of a weapon.



- Keep a tight pattern on a target  
Again, you don't have to shoot like an Olympic pro to be a good hunter. You will, however, want to be able to keep a tight pattern going and have bullets or arrows land true more often than not. This requires practice, practice and more practice. If you don't fire with reasonable accuracy, you might find your shots hitting in non-fatal areas. This may still result in an eventual kill, but it could put an animal through unnecessary suffering in the process.
- Identify any problems if they arise  
The better you know your weapon, the more likely it is you will be able to spot a problem if one arises. If you know the sounds it makes, the kick it is supposed to have and so on, you will be better off.

Becoming a proficient hunter does demand a certain mastery over weaponry. While you won't have to be a perfect shot every time, the more effort you put into learning your weapon and how to use it properly, the safer and more accurate you are likely to be.

Once you have your weapon skills down, the next thing you want to study up on is the game you intend to go after. The more tricks and tips you know, the more likely it is you will be able to enjoy a successful hunt.

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR GAME

Just about every major game animal in North America and beyond has its own distinct patterns of behavior, strengths and weaknesses. The more you study up on your game animal of choice, the more likely it is you will be able to head into its territory, think like it and eventually root one out to line up a shot. Knowing your game is simply essential to lining up a good hunt.

## GENERALIZED TIPS AND TRICKS

It doesn't matter what type of game animal you intend to hunt, there are some basic things you can do to increase your chances of enjoying a successful outing. They include:

- Studying up on animal signs  
Take the time to study the typical signs and markings your animal of choice leaves behind in an area it frequents. Knowing what to look for can help you select a hunting ground that is likely to naturally attract your target. Wild hogs, for example, tend to leave burrowing marks behind. Ideally, you'll want to know where your game of choice is likely to be found before you set up for a hunt.
- Learning what attracts your game  
Certain scents, colors, feed, calls and other tools can prove quite useful for attracting specific game. Study up on your target and see what might work for you.
- Understanding your game's habits  
Some animals are more active during the early hours; others can be spotted at all times. Find out if your target of choice has particular habits you can use to your advantage.
- Be certain of what to avoid for safety's sake  
While black clothing might be acceptable for deer hunting, it's not for going after turkeys. Be mindful of any game specific safety rules.

## ANIMAL SPECIFIC ADVICE

There are a variety of tips, tricks and techniques that successful hunters use for North America's most popular game animals. The following advice

is animal specific and may help you bag your target even your first time out:

- **Deer hunting**  
Deer have very keen senses and are likely to spook and run at the slightest sound, sniff of something that doesn't belong or sight of movement. Considering the acuity of their senses, deer do have some advantages that many other game animals do not. To increase your chances with this often elusive prey, remember they tend to be more active in the early morning and dusk hours than during the middle of the day. It is often best to seek out deer feeding areas, such as clover fields, trees with lots of acorns and watering holes. When hunting deer, it is imperative to try and mask human scent. The reality is most deer are shot downwind from main feeding sources. Limiting movement as much as possible can also prove very helpful with deer. Many hunters use tree stands to limit movement and help with scent masking.
- **Hog hunting**  
Hogs are also equipped with an incredible sense of smell. Their other senses are not necessarily as fine tuned, but what they lack in sight and hearing they do make up for in scent. To overcome this, it is important to seek out their feeding sources, stay downwind and consider using a tree stand to help avoid that incredible sniffing snout. When hog trails are found, avoid walking directly into them. The scent of human can stay behind for quite some time and encourage this already nomadic animal to move on to greener pastures for feeding.
- **Elk hunting**  
Elk are a lot like deer when it comes to their senses. They have well developed hearing, sight and smell. This particular game animal, however, is more likely to rely on its sense of smell to steer clear of predators. Mask human odors when heading out on a hunt and try to avoid major movements that may alert an elk to your presence. Do keep in mind that elk do have very good hearing so keeping it quiet in the woods is important, as well. It is best to get to a hunting location before the sun rises or before dark. Elk tend to be more active right after dawn and just before dark.
- **Turkey hunting**  
Believe it or not, this is one of the hardest game animals to bag. Turkeys have an incredibly well developed sense of sight. They can spot movement from a great distance and will move on to a different area if they spot anything amiss. To increase your chances with this bird, it's important to get to a location early and plan on

staying late. Do make sure to wear proper camouflage into the field and avoid using white socks. Dark colors are often better for making sure feet don't give you away. For your own safety, it is best not to wear red, white or blue while hunting turkey as these colors can make other hunters mistake you for a gobbler. Also, be mindful of gear that is colored red, white or blue. Stories abound about hunters shooting at other's cigarette packages and other similar items.

- Duck  
There is a reason why many duck hunters insist on using a blind. This reason is the simple fact that ducks have a highly developed sense of sight. If using a blind doesn't fit your style, make sure to at least use camouflage. When hunting for ducks, go to their favorite watering sources. If you do manage to scare away a flock, don't panic. Hunker down and avoid movement instead. Ducks are likely to return a few at a time once they feel danger has passed. This will give you more opportunity to sight in and shoot a single rather than scattering shot into a flock.
- Bear  
Bagging a bear can take a tremendous amount of work. While bears are known to be colorblind and have horrible eyesight, they make up for this fact with their ability to smell and hear. Some bears have been known to have a scent range that goes on for miles. Despite this, it is still possible to track and hunt bear with a degree of success. Many hunters prefer to stalk this particular type of prey, but tree stand and still waiting are also popular forms. Just remember masking scent is imperative. So is maintaining a quiet approach.

The more time you take to get to know your game, how to spot where it frequents and how it behaves, the more likely it is you will enjoy a successful hunt. To increase your chances in the woods, waterways and mountains, you have to learn to think like your prey, how to spot its signs and how to make sure it doesn't become alerted to your presence.

Once you know more about your game, you will need to know how to stake out a spot for hunting it. Getting to know the area in which you will hunt is an important planning step that comes before many a successful venture.

# KNOW YOUR HUNTING GROUNDS

If you've come this far, you're almost ready for your first hunt. The last move you'll want to take in preparation is to make every attempt to see your hunting grounds personally before the day of your first hunt. Veterans are known to scope out their hunting grounds weeks and even months in advance. They track where their intended prey goes, learn the local habits and stake out spots well in advance.

Even if you cannot go to your hunting grounds weeks or months in advance, at least checking out the site a day before is a smart idea. When you do, you'll want to keep your eyes open for such things as:

- **Animal signs**  
Ideally, you will have studied up on what to look for to indicate the presence of your desired game. Look for fresh and strong signs of your target and start scoping out areas where they are likely to frequent. You are likely to find signs in areas that serve as natural pathways to feeding and watering sites.
- **Feeding and watering sources**  
Look for spots in your hunting grounds where your prey animals are likely to feed and/or water. Locations around these natural attractors are often the best for setting up blinds, tree stands or even ground-sitting locations for waiting out game.
- **Other tree stands or blinds**  
You do not want to stake out a spot for yourself right on top of where another hunter will be. First off, this is a serious breach of hunting etiquette. Secondly, it can be dangerous. Mentally or even physically in a notebook mark the location of other hunters' set ups. If you plan on using a tree stand, it is generally acceptable to go ahead and set it up a day or so in advance of your hunt. You will run the risk of theft, but incidents like that tend to be low. The advantage in setting up in advance lies in the fact you can get into position as soon as you arrive at your spot. This can give you a leg up when animals start moving at dawn.
- **Natural cover locations**  
If you don't intend to use a blind or stand, consider looking for

natural locations that will provide you vision of incoming game and some cover from animals' natural senses. Fallen trees, large trunks, dense overgrowth areas and other natural "blinds" can work very well for certain types of hunts.

- Landmarks  
If you are hunting in an area you are wholly unfamiliar with, make sure to study landmarks as you stake out a spot. More than one beginning hunter has set up a tree stand only to discover retracing the steps in the dark isn't as easy as previously imagined. Look for landmarks in the terrain that can lead you directly into your spot without damaging game trails or scenting up other hunters' locations. Jot these down, if you must, so you can commit them to memory. If you're hunting in a game preserve, get a map and mark your spot on it for easier recall.
- Any safety considerations  
As you walk your intended hunting grounds, do be mindful of things to watch out for when you return in the early morning hours. Having a good idea of a clear path to take to your stand, for example, can save you from twisting an ankle or at the very least making undo sounds as you move through the location under cover of darkness.

If hunting season has already begun before your arrival in a hunting area, do be mindful of safety and etiquette rules as you move through. The last thing you want to do is upset another hunter's time in the woods or have yourself mistaken for prey. With this in mind, wear the proper safety gear as you move about and do your best to cover your scent and keep movement sounds to a minimum so you do not scare off game for others.

Generally, the more you can find out about your hunting location in advance, the better. Taking the time to scope out a spot in advance can greatly increase your chances of success when it is time to head out for your actual hunt.

There are a variety of tips that can help you transform everything you've learned so far into a safe and successful trip into the woods, waterways or mountains. Just keep in mind, half the fun is just being out in the thick of nature. You may or may not see the game you're after, but you will enjoy a quiet, relaxing day communing with nature.

# TIPS FOR THE 1<sup>ST</sup> HUNT

You're geared up, have your license and have picked out a hunting spot at the very least. The big day has arrived and it's officially time for your first hunt.

Congratulations! You are about to embark on a hobby that men and women from all over the world have enjoyed for centuries. The pastime of kings and paupers alike, hunting is an experience like none other.

Whether you bring an animal home with you at the end of the day or not, you will be able to soak up some incredible scenery, spot animals you may have otherwise never seen outside of a National Geographic show and get some fresh, clean air in your lungs.

Before you head off to try and spot your game, there are some last-minute tips that can help you on the hunt and even help keep you a little safer. Following them won't necessarily guarantee that you'll make the shot, but they can help make your day go a whole lot easier. Remember, any day in the woods or in a blind is better than a day in the office!

## THE BUDDY SYSTEM IS A MUST

Chances are strong if you're truly a newbie hunter that you will have a more experienced person along for the ride. Making sure this is so is important for a few very good reasons. Hunting with a buddy is vital for these reasons:

- It can keep you safer  
Even if you and your buddy set up your hunts a half-mile downstream from each other, it's always a good idea to go out in pairs. When you have a hunting buddy, that person will know where you are supposed to be and will be available to assist if something goes awry. It is always a good idea to make sure "buddies" know exactly where each other will set up and to set advance times for meeting up at the end of the day. If one of you doesn't show up at the set time, the other can take appropriate steps to find the missing person and ensure that everything is OK. Should you venture out completely alone and a problem arises, it could take some time before someone finds you or even knows to look for you.

- It can help you with game  
Dragging large game out of the woods is generally best as a two-person job. Whether it's you or your buddy who tags an animal, having someone else along can be important. If one of you makes a shot and the animal bolts, it is often easier for two people to track the animal than just one. Following a blood trail is much easier for two to accomplish than just one.
- The advice can prove invaluable  
It is always a very good idea for a new hunter to seek out help from a more experienced hunter. When you pair up with a veteran, you'll gain a world of useful advice on not only hunting, but also navigating in natural terrain.

To make sure the buddy system works well for both you and your partner, keep these tips in mind:

- Don't set up on top of each other  
You don't want to be too close or too far away from each other. Ideally, you'll be close enough to help each other if something comes up, but far enough away not to ruin each other's shots.
- Make sure you know the exact location of the other's setup  
Having a good handle on the setup location of your buddy is important not only for keeping shots solid, but also safety. Never shoot in the exact direction of your buddy's location if the range is close.
- Establish rendezvous times  
Do set a prearranged time to meet up at the end of the hunt. Having a watch along for this reason is important.
- Establish calls  
You don't necessarily want to communicate with your "buddy" verbally during the thick of a hunt. This is especially so if you are out of whispering distance from each other. Establish calls that won't scare off game to alert the other person that you might require his or her assistance. Don't disrupt your buddy's hunt unless it is truly necessary, however.

Going on a hunt alone can be fraught with perils. To avoid accidents, getting lost or simply not having the ability to bring home a kill, do make sure to pair up with someone you can rely on. It's always better to be safe than sorry.



## WHERE TO POSITION

Even though you may have spent a lot of time prior to your hunt staking out a spot to set up, it's possible your chosen location will be taken when you arrive in the wee morning hours. If you have a tree stand already in place, you can try to press your point with the hunter who has encroached, but otherwise you might just want to move along.

To find a good spot when you're acting on the fly, remember the locations you looked at in the past. Ideally, you'll want a spot that offers you:

- A clear line to fire from  
Make sure you set up where you can get a clear shot off on game that may wander by. You don't want to shoot through other hunters' locations and you don't want to be fully blocked by trees and other impediments that can cause a ricochet.
- Decent camouflaging  
Try to pick a spot that does offer you some visual cover from game. If you must be out in the open, pick a spot you can settle in that won't demand a lot of movement on your part.
- An ability to mask your scent  
You don't want to position in a spot that will carry your scent on the wind directly to where animals may congregate. Tree stands can help in this regard no matter what direction the wind is blowing from, but being mindful of direction can still prove to be very important.
- The ability to steer clear of other hunters' shots  
Do not set up directly on top of another hunter. First off, this violates hunting etiquette. Secondly, it can jeopardize your chances of enjoying a successful hunt. Thirdly, it can prove dangerous.

Having the right setup is important, but one of the biggest keys to a successful outing is found in nothing more than patience.

## PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

If it's your plan to head into the woods before dawn, sit for a few minutes after sunrise and shoot to kill right away, hunting might not be for you. In most cases, hunters find they have to sit for hours on end to even catch a glimpse of what they are after. With this in mind, patience is perhaps your No. 1 weapon for a successful hunt.

Should patience not be something you have in abundance, there are ways to pass the time without disrupting your own hunt or interfering with those around you. To keep yourself quiet and sitting still consider following these tips:

- **Bring along reading material**  
Many hunters bring along their favorite books, hunting guides or other materials to help them pass the time. As long as the covers aren't colored to look like turkeys (in season) and you can turn the pages without a peep, reading can work wonders for keeping your patience level high. Just remember to look up from time to time to check for approaching game!
- **Bring binoculars with you**  
Turn your hunting trip into an animal-sighting adventure. Even if you don't ever see the game you're after, you might spot rare birds, unique plants and other living things you've never seen before.
- **Use a strap in tree stands**  
More than one bad hunting story involves hunters who fell asleep in their stands. To avoid complications here, always make sure to strap yourself in. It can be difficult to stay awake for hours on end in the peaceful surroundings of the woods.
- **Use the time to let your thoughts wander**  
In today's workaday world, it's not often people have the opportunity to be alone with their thoughts. Take advantage of the wait time before you to consider things you'd like to see or do. If this doesn't work for you, try meditating or simply allowing yourself to relax.

While patience is a must if you want to be able to spot game during your time in the field, it is also vital as far as hunting etiquette goes. If you are unable to sit for long periods and stay quiet in the process, you might infringe on someone else's ability to enjoy a successful hunt. Remember, when game is scared off, it may not return to the same spot for some time.

## RESPECTING OTHER HUNTERS

There are a number of rules that surround the sport of hunting. Some center around safety and others are nothing more than showing common courtesy and respect for others in the field.

To help yourself stay safe and out of trouble with others, keep these rules in mind:

- Always practice proper safety techniques  
Your well being and those around you depends on your ability to hunt safely. Make sure you understand the rules of the road in this regard. Basic hunting courses will fill you in on most of what you need to know like wearing the right gear to help other hunters identify you as a person and keeping the safety on until you are ready to fire.
- Never approach another person with a gun out in a threatening manner  
Make sure to walk with your gun barrel pointed down and keep your finger away from the trigger. This is especially so when approaching other humans.
- Clean up after yourself  
No one likes a messy hunter. Be certain to pick up any shell casings, food wrappers, soda cans and so on before you leave your hunting area. Ideally, you'll want to leave your spot in the same pristine condition you found it in or better.
- Keep your noise and movement down  
Just because you're ready to give up on a spot doesn't mean those around you are. If you must move during a hunt, keep your sound level down and try to mask your scent as you move.

There are a lot of must dos and no-no maneuvers in hunting. Just remember to use some commonsense and ask if you don't know something. You'll pick up the rules of the road in no time at all.

## WHEN TO TAKE THE SHOT

Learning when to take the shot and when to let an opportunity pass by is one of the most difficult judgments you'll make in the field. There are some tips that can help you decide when to fire away and when it's best just to wait. They include:

- Being certain of an animal's identification  
More than one overzealous hunter has shot at a doe, for example, instead of a buck. To avoid shooting at the wrong type of creature – or worse yet a person – be 100 percent sure you know what you're

firing at. Mistakes in this regard are generally unintentional, but they can be devastating nonetheless.

- Making certain a kill shot is possible  
It is often best to try and line up a clean, kill shot before firing. If you are only going to be able to “wing” an animal, you run the risk of it getting away wounded. While this can happen under ideal circumstances, allowing it intentionally is cruel as it can cause an animal unnecessary suffering.
- Being clear that your shot won’t interfere with another hunter’s  
It is never a good idea to take a shot when it’s clear another person is going to make one. Even if the other hunter misses and forces you to move locations, squabbling over game is just bad form. Also, be mindful of shots that are near another person’s hunting setup. Shooting a target under another hunter’s tree stand, for example, is a bad idea. This is even so if the other hunter fails to see the animal.

When it’s time to take a shot, make sure your identification is right. Then line it up, take a deep breath and be certain the line of fire is clear. If all goes well, you’ll be moving on to the final phase of a successful hunt.

## AFTER THE SHOT

Once you’ve made a successful shot, you’ll need to track down your target and prepare it for removal from the hunting site. How much or little difficulty involved with this will depend on whether you’ve had a clean kill or if the animal has wandered off. The size of the game in question can also impact the difficulty level here, as well.

When a shot has been fired in an area, all activity will generally stop for a while. Do make sure the coast is clear and other hunters know you intend to move in before you do. Take care when approaching your target. It is possible it may not be dead. Wounded animals, even small ones, can be dangerous. If your target isn’t dead, you may have to complete the task once you reach it. A secondary shot is generally the quickest, most humane way to go.

If you find your target has wandered off after the shot, but is wounded, it is your duty to track it down. To find an animal that has bolted, head out in the direction the creature ran off and look for signs. In most cases, you will be able to spot a blood trail that can easily lead you to your target. Be prepared that some animals can travel a rather large distance even

wounded. It is best to keep up with the trail for as long as it takes. Do not, however, put yourself or other hunters in danger in the process. If an animal has wandered too far or the trail becomes impossible to follow, it might be time to give up.

After you find your target and ensure that it is dead and isn't suffering, you'll want to prepare it for removal. Depending on the size of the animal, you may want to dress it out in the field. If not, prepare it for moving by harnessing ropes to drag the carcass out of the woods.

When you finish up a successful hunt, keep in mind any legal requirements for taking an animal out of a hunting area. It is possible that you may have to check in with a ranger and get your kill tagged before you leave. Don't overlook the importance of this last step to keep yourself out of trouble!

# A FEW WORDS IN PARTING

Hunting is a challenging and exhilarating sport that is loved by men, women and even children the world over. Historically, it is the sport of kings, but today just about anyone can enjoy this pursuit.

If you are a newbie hunter hoping to become a veteran some day, you'll find this particular hobby can be very rewarding. To make sure you enjoy the best possible experience, it is important to take some time in the planning phase to learn what you need to about safety, weaponry, hunting etiquette and the game you'd like to go after. Select your gear, weapon of choice and hunting grounds with care and you can increase your chances of bring something home.

Do take the time to learn as much as you can about the animal you're after and the location where you intend to hunt. The more knowledge you arm yourself with in advance of a hunt, the more likely it is you will have a very enjoyable time. There is nothing quite like getting out into nature and enjoying a day tracking and watching for game. Even if you never manage to get a shot off, you will find the experience is one few people would ever trade.

As you venture into the great outdoors, remember there is more to hunting than aiming and firing. The thrill is often found simply in seeing a part of nature that only a select few ever have the opportunity to enjoy. Play it smart and keep everything safe and chances are you will progress from beginner to seasoned pro in no time at all.

Good luck and happy hunting!