

Hunting GUIDE



Avoid These Common Errors

Even the most experienced hunter might suffer a stumble or two.

Recognizing your mistakes and learning from them is the important part. It's how we all become better hunters. Here's a look at some of the most common errors made while on a hunt:

TIMING

Avoid choosing the wrong hunting times. Many focus on early mornings and evenings, to the exclusion of midday hunts. However, a significant number of mature deer are harvested between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Don't delay your shot. You should take a clear shot at the first opportunity as a buck comes within range. You're more likely to miss by allowing the deer to approach too closely. Research indicates that approximately 80 percent of missed shots are aimed too high.

LOCATION

Avoid hunting prime locations too early. Reserve your best spots for optimal conditions to avoid putting unnecessary pressure on them prematurely. Avoid following the crowd and don't overlook smaller public parcels. Larger areas typically attract the most hunters, and mature bucks are quick to evade them. If you own or lease hunting land, exercise caution when

agreeing to allow friends to hunt on your property. This can quickly lead to deer overpressure.

Don't share too much information. When you encounter that big buck, it's often best to maintain discretion regarding your location and methods. Telling others about your discovery could result in others

bagging the deer in your spot before you have the chance to return. Consider alternative food sources. Mature bucks can be quite cunning. They tend to be more cautious around commonly sought food sources during prime hunting hours. Instead, consider focusing your efforts near areas rich in honeysuckle,

greenbriar and blackberry.

SAFETY

Always wear a safety harness. Safety is paramount when hunting, so secure yourself with a climbing belt when climbing up or down a tree. Falls from tree stands are a leading cause of injuries among hunters.

While advancements in technology have led to the development of remarkable tools for hunting, an over-reliance on these gadgets can lead to complacency.

Remember that this equipment can aid and enhance your experience, but it's no substitute for essential hunting skills.



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What to Bring

Don't overlook the value of the tools you bring and your choice of hunting attire.



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Experienced hunters understand the importance of proper preparation, with traditions cultivated over years of practice. If you're newer to the hunt, however, you may have questions about which essentials are needed. This handy checklist is designed to ensure that your experience is safe, enjoyable and fulfilling.

YOUR EQUIPMENT

Many things may influence the equipment you choose to carry, starting with regulatory requirements. Your state may have established seasons when specific weapons are permitted or prohibited. Check online resources before

any outing to stay in compliance with the law.

When selecting your rifle or firearm, consider personal comfort and familiarity. If you are thinking about an upgrade, talk to expert representatives from local gun shops, sporting goods stores or wildlife and fisheries offices to learn more about the options available to you.

BE PREPARED

A fundamental rule regarding ammunition is to bring more than you anticipate needing. Even the most skilled marksmen will occasionally encounter elusive targets that create missed shots. You don't want to be left without ammo when

a pivotal shot presents itself during the hunt. You could even miss out on an entire outing.

THINK COMFORT

Going hunting requires a lot of patience, since you usually must wait a long time for the ideal moment. So prioritize comfort as well as durability. A reliable backpack is essential, particularly for longer excursions. Select one that offers adequate space for snacks, water and a first-aid kit to ensure you are ready for anything. Look for well-fitting, waterproof boots. Hunting can place significant strain on your feet. Substandard footwear can lead to accidents or blisters, while

wet or cold feet can transform a pleasant day into a miserable experience.

BEYOND FIREARMS

Firearms and ammunition are critically important to any hunt, but don't overlook the value of key accessories. Binoculars are an often-underestimated tool. They can significantly enhance your ability to see approaching wildlife, of course, but they're also useful for scouting nearby areas when you're having a slow day in the field. Always remain alert to changing weather conditions and pack extra clothing as necessary to safeguard against rain or cold weather.

Hunting on a Budget

Opting to hunt for your own food certainly can help cut down on big grocery bills, but remember, there are costs involved in hunting.

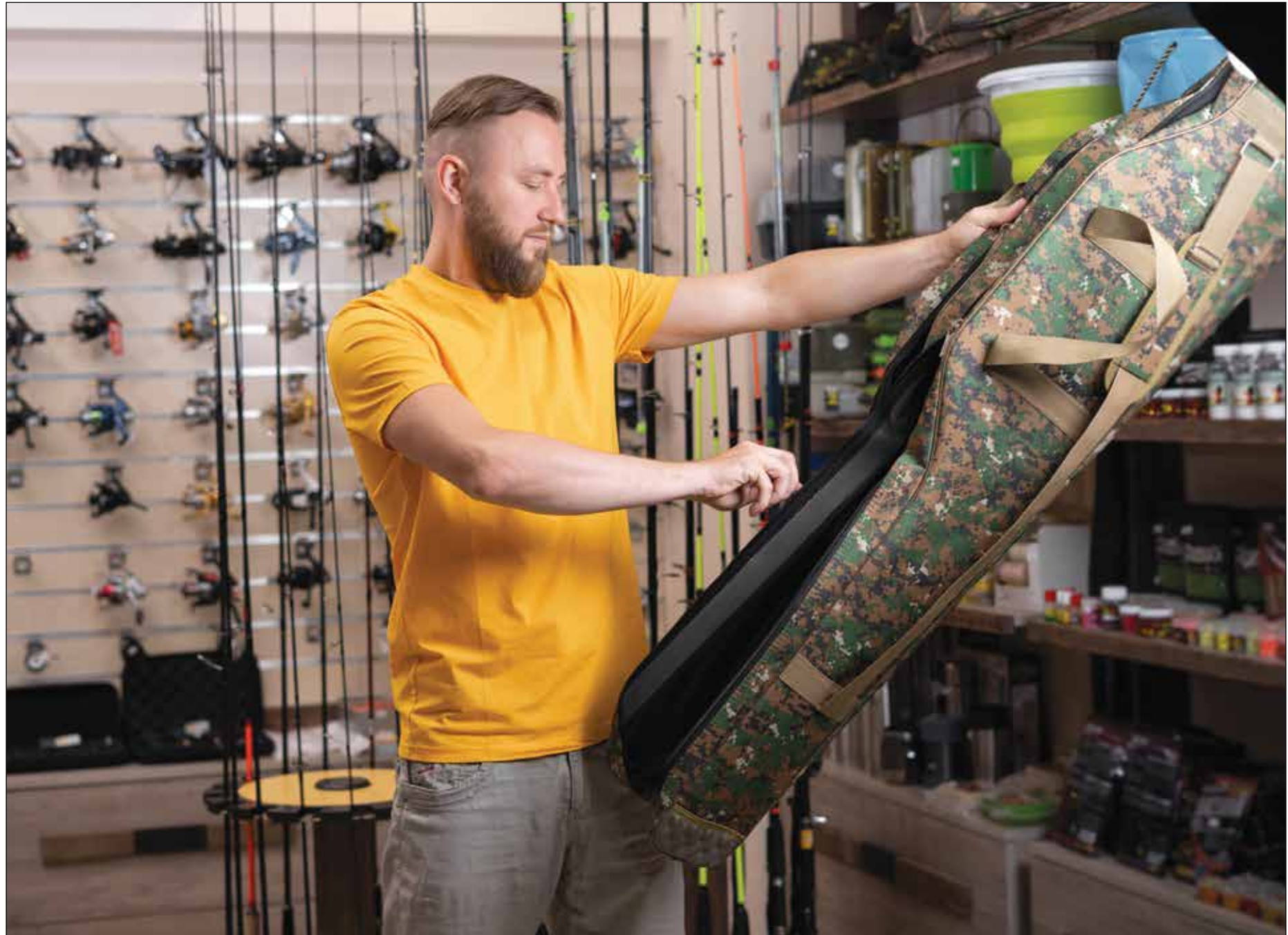
Before starting this rewarding hobby, create a budget to help guard against overspending. Experienced hunters can maximize their savings at the supermarket by harvesting their own food. Budget-friendly options while on the hunt can also improve the experience without emptying your bank account.

SHARING THE EXPERIENCE

You can split many of the built-in costs when you hunt with a friend. You'll only pay half of the cost when buying things like material for stands, trail cameras and cell cam plans. If you take turns when taking aim at nearby game, you'll save on ammunition – and you can always share the results, too. Either way, there's a sense of camaraderie built in when hunting with someone else.

SECOND-HAND GEAR

If you are looking to buy new equipment to enhance your experience, consider second-hand options. Talk to fellow hunters in your local community, hunting club or on social media platforms



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about purchasing equipment after they've upgraded. You'll be saving money while promoting sustainable practices within the hunting community. They may even agree to let you use an item on a trial basis, allowing you to get comfortable with it before committing to the purchase.

When you're ready to buy new, the temptation is to go

all out on state-of-the-art camouflage. Cheaper brands are available at sporting goods stores and some big-box retailers. Stick with these low-cost options, particularly at first, as long as they keep you warm and dry.

COST-SAVING OPTIONS

Most states require hunters to have appropriate licenses,

depending on the season or type of game they're pursuing.

These individual permits are usually affordable, but there may be opportunities for savings by purchasing all necessary licenses for the year in a single transaction. Before getting certification for one season or species, check whether your state

provides bundled options to build savings.

Look for public land where hunting is available for no additional cost. There's no need to join a pricey hunting club or pay for access to private lands, especially if you are a newer, less experienced hunter. You can save hundreds of dollars each season, if not thousands.

Focus on Safety

Hunting provides a unique opportunity to build connections with others, engage with nature and connect with the hobby's rich history. But it does come with certain risks.

Be aware of key safety measures to ensure everyone's well-being. Every year, careless hunting practices needlessly result in injury or even death.

Paramount to all these guidelines are firearm safety. But many injuries are associated with routine activities, including climbing to and from deer stands. Then there are potential encounters with hazardous wildlife.

You can navigate these unique risks and challenges by strictly following a generally agreed-upon set of safety protocols.

SAFETY COURSES

Hunter safety courses are available for beginners. In some cases, they may be mandated depending on where you live. For detailed information regarding course schedules, fees and locations, check out online resources or reach out to local fisheries and wildlife officials. Staff members at sporting goods stores may be able to provide valuable assistance.



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DRESSING RIGHT

Wear high-visibility orange clothing to ensure you are easily identifiable to other hunters. Avoid overpacking. Carrying a heavy backpack can complicate your walk through the rough or uneven terrain, as well as the climb to your stand.

Stay informed about weather conditions before and throughout your trip. This will

affect what you wear; it might also require a change in plans. If strong storms are anticipated, you may need to remain indoors. Lightning fatalities average around 50 per year in America, with hundreds more experiencing serious injuries.

STAY ALERT

Avoid consuming alcohol or any intoxicating substances

before or during your hunt. Remaining alert and clear-headed is vital when handling firearms. Before you leave, tell a trusted individual about your plans, detailing where you're going, when you expect to get back and any other important details about your trip. When possible, take a buddy or two. Companionship will add to the experience, and they'll be there if some-

thing goes wrong.

For hikers, campers, and others who enjoy the outdoors, be aware of hunting seasons so you're prepared. Non-hunters are also advised to wear bright clothing to help with their visibility. Keep dogs on a leash so they're not misidentified as wildlife. Remember that hunting is prohibited in most national parks. Only 76 out of 400 allow it.

Staying Warm While Hunting

Depending on the climate where you hunt, even a heavy jacket might not be enough to fight off the cold. You'll need to know how to make an effective, long-lasting fire.

That starts with knowing which material to gather, how to start the fire, keeping it going and then completely putting it out to lower the risk of a wildfire.

WHAT YOU NEED

Before the hunt, pack a small hatchet, a sharp knife, a tarp, a shovel and a folding saw. Gather wood that can be layered to help the flames grow. Look for limbs from downed trees that are about the thickness of your arm, making sure that the center of each is dry. Leave aside limbs from live trees since they're more difficult to ignite. Use the hatchet to trim off smaller branches and create some thin shavings. Collect twigs, leaves and straw, as well. If rain is in the forecast, cover everything with the tarp until needed.

GETTING STARTED

Choose a safe spot for your fire, preferably in a fire pit. Keep flames away from bushes, tall grass and overhanging tree limbs. Maintain at least 10 feet of clearance on



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all sides. If possible, build a perimeter using rocks or green wood to help contain the fire. Place thicker sticks on the bottom, followed by smaller branches. Shavings and kindling go on top. Make sure there's enough space for air to reach the fire's core.

Light a match and place it directly under the tinder. As the flames take hold, add more kindling to continue building up the fire. Add more fuel as needed.

PUTTING IT OUT

If possible, allow the fire to

burn until there is nothing left but ash. Pour water on the fire, drowning all the embers – whether they are red or not. Keep at it until all hissing sounds stop. (If you do not have an adequate supply of water, use a shovel to bury the fire with dirt or sand.)

Remove any remaining embers from sticks or logs by scraping them with your shovel.

Make sure none of them are smoldering. Continue adding water, sand or dirt while stirring with the shovel until the entire area is cool.

Becoming a Better Tracker

Before you go, you'll need to know where the wildlife is. Begin with thorough research about the game you're hunting, focusing on their behavior, diet and habitat.

Once you've learned all of this, you'll be on your way to becoming a better tracker. Soon, dinner will be served!

LOOK FOR SIGNS

Wildlife typically move around in lightly wooded areas and open fields, and they often leave behind noticeable signs of their presence. One reliable method for identifying areas with significant animal activity is simply to look for foot or hoof prints. Familiarize yourself with images of the species you plan to hunt so you can accurately gauge their size. Your focus is on adult animals. Follow the tracks safely and you'll often find their habitat.

Learning to identify animals by their feces can also be useful. Analyze droppings for insights into how recently an animal has been in the vicinity, and figure out the number that may be present. This aspect of research is certainly not glamorous, but it often serves as a critical factor in whether you have a productive hunt or not.



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If you typically frequent the same hunting grounds, consider investing in a few trail cameras. Reviewing the footage prior to the hunting will equip you with valuable knowledge about when and where their activity is taking place.

TRACKING A TARGET

Consider equipping yourself

with lights designed to improve visibility in shady or low-light times of the day. If you bring along a trained hunting dog, the chances of successfully locating your game are significantly increased. A well-prepared canine can easily track the scent, all while guiding a hunter along.

Unfortunately, getting a

clean kill with a single shot is not always possible. A wounded animal may move over a considerable distance, and the direction is often influenced by the location of the shot. To uphold ethical hunting practices, it's important to track down the wounded animal and complete the harvest.

The primary method for

locating a target after impact is to follow the blood trail. Take note of the animal's trajectory immediately after the shot, then follow its escape route. You may be walking over longer distances, so identify the precise impact site before you leave. That will help guide you back to the starting point in the recovery process.

Hunting 101

Hunting can be an exciting and rewarding pastime, even if you don't come from a long line of outdoorsy types.

Many people take up the hobby as adults. Just keep in mind that there are key considerations before you do, including the inherent difficulties associated with rugged terrain and weather conditions.

EXPECT ADVERSITY

Hunting can lead you into challenging and even uncomfortable places. The conditions you may encounter while in hunting stands, blinds or boats can vary widely, from extreme temperatures to wind and rain. Consider the type of hunting you're interested in and the particular conditions you'll face before jumping in. The more well-informed you are about what to expect, the better prepared you'll be for whatever adversity comes your way.

BIG TIME COMMITMENT

Hunting tends to demand a substantial time investment. Part of taking up hunting is being prepared to commit to long trips and longer hours – and sometimes you'll still return empty-handed. Activities like big game bow hunting on public lands can be particularly time-intensive. You'll have to spend time getting your licensing in order with governmental authorities. Beginners



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should schedule ample time for preparation, including practicing with your weapon and familiarizing yourself with the hunting area.

GAME AND WEAPONS

Harvest rates can vary significantly depending on the species and the state where you live. If hunters significantly

outnumber deer, for instance, you might spend a considerable amount of time in fruitless pursuit of an animal. Experts often recommend selecting an animal whose habitat you find particularly engaging, so you can reconnect with nature even if you don't have a successful hunt.

The choice of weapon

profoundly influences every hunting experience. It dictates how close you must be to the animal. Bow and arrows require hunters to be far nearer to an animal than a rifle.

FIND A MENTOR

If you take up bow hunting, it will require years of practice and expertise. That's typical of

a pastime where it's always smart for the inexperienced to have a mentor. Look to those with more time in the outdoors to guide you into this hobby. There's a lot of hard-won knowledge shared when talking about best practices and best places, but these lessons also come with treasured memories and lots of camaraderie.