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When bucks disappear from early season locations, go deeper into the woods and find areas with good mast production. Oaks, beech and browse thickets offer both food and transition cover that will increase your odds of seeing more deer during daylight. MITCH KEZAR/WINDIGO



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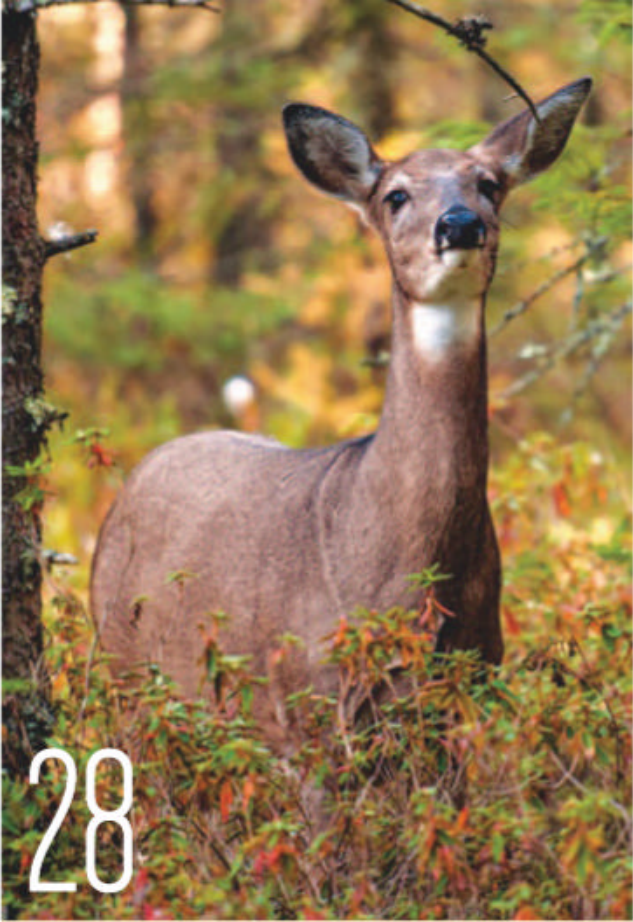
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Send letters to Daniel E. Schmidt, D&DH, P.O. Box 548, Waupaca, WI 54981. Or send an email to dan.schmidt@media360llc.com.

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EDITOR'S STUMP

DANIEL E. SCHMIDT

Gather AT THE Table

The spark that lit my dad's passion for deer hunting happened long ago and in a subtle way that's probably common among American hunters.

But subtlety was never lost in the big picture. Not for Dad, anyway. Even decades later, he remembered it like it happened yesterday. He retold the story earlier this year, and even though I had heard it many times before, I listened with wide-eyed enthusiasm.

It was Saturday morning, Nov. 22, 1958. Opening day of the annual gun-deer season. Unseasonably warm morning. A thick fog blanketed the landscape.

"It was my first time deer hunting," Dad said. "I didn't know where to go or what to do, but they told me to just walk down this edge and find a place to sit. I could barely see anything, so after I had walked a while, I found a tipped over tree with a big root base sitting up off the ground. I crawled up there and sat still. When it was light enough to see, there was a deer standing there, so I shot it. After the smoke cleared, it was still standing there, so I shot again."

Dad was fortunate in several ways on this first hunt. First, both of his shots were true. When he climbed down from his stump and walked over to the spot where the deer was standing, there were mature does piled up dead in their tracks. Secondly, his nearby buddies both had "party permits" that allowed for the harvest of antlerless deer. To them, it wasn't an issue. Filled tags meant venison for everyone. Everyone shared in the bounty and couldn't care less who pulled the trigger.

Sharing the bounty was something deeply ingrained in Dad's psyche. From his devout Catholic tithing to how he helped each of his seven children get started as adults, Dad placed selflessness next to godliness.

"Whatever you do for the church or for others will come back to you tenfold," he often said. It was that very mentality that his parents showed when raising him and his 14 siblings. If you've read D&DH long enough, you'll know his teachings have trickled down to the son who bears his name, especially when it comes to how our hunting community should treat each other. Those tenets include respect, fellowship and neighborly love. I'd also include the sharing of our annual harvest. I've written about that in the past, but where there's surplus whitetails, we should make it an annual point to donate at least one deer to someone less fortunate.

A week before Dad went to Heaven this June, he said these words:

"We shouldn't be so busy building bigger houses to hold all our treasures. We should be building bigger tables to feed the hungry."

Amen, Dad. I'll do my best to keep that message going — and add venison to the cause as often as possible.



DANIEL SCHMIDT

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EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Daniel E. Schmidt

SENIOR EDITOR

Chris Berens

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Rebecca Vogel

ONLINE CONTENT SPECIALIST

Sara Gilane

DEER RESEARCH FIELD EDITOR

John J. Ozoga

FIELD CONTRIBUTORS

Steve Bartylla, Bob Zaiglin

Dr. Stephen Ditchkoff, Steve Sorensen

COPY EDITOR

Taylor Grace Schmidt

ADVERTISING SALES

PUBLISHER

Brad Rucks, brad.rucks@media360llc.com

SALES ASSOCIATES

Casey Lenz, casey.lenz@media360llc.com

Noah Rucks, noah.rucks@media360llc.com

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR

Lisa Richter, lisa.richter@media360llc.com

OFFICE MANAGER

Susie Melum, susie.melum@media360llc.com

TELEVISION & ONLINE VIDEO

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

David Gilane

PRODUCERS

Ian Sanchez, Mackenzie Pelo

D&DH PROPERTIES

PRESIDENT

Jason Rieckmann, jason@ddhproperties.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: 800.250.9159 (U.S. and Canada)

P.O. BOX 37180 BOONE, IA 50037-0180

Outside the U.S., call 386.246.3414

MEDIA360

1990 Godfrey Drive | Waupaca, WI 54981

Brad Rucks, **PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER**

Daniel Schmidt, **VICE PRESIDENT**

FACEBOOK: @DEERHUNTINGMAG

YOUTUBE: WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/DDHONLINE

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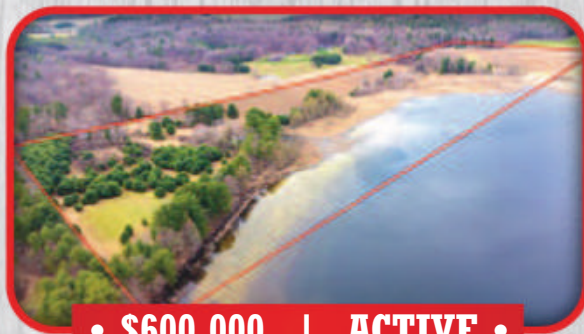


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DARREN WARNER

In the M. Night Shyamalan thriller “The Sixth Sense,” 9-year-old Cole Sear, played by Haley Joel Osment, can see dead people. The hit movie came to mind while viewing a post on the Michigan Deer Hunters Facebook page ([Facebook.com/Miwhitetailhunter](https://www.facebook.com/Miwhitetailhunter)) submitted in early November of 2022, the height of the rut for whitetails in the Great Lakes State. The post displayed two game camera photos: the first showing a dead buck laying on the ground after being shot by a Michigan hunter and the second of another buck checking out the kill site mere hours later. What information, if any, did the living buck gain by investigating the spot where the other buck had taken its last breath? And more generally, how do deer react upon finding a kill site? At the risk of getting into a discussion worthy of a Hollywood movie script, do deer see dead deer?



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But we're getting ahead of ourselves a bit, because the backstory behind the photo collection garnered significant interest among page followers. In the early morning of Nov. 3, 2022, bowhunter Tony Kohler of North Branch, Michigan, shot

a beautiful 9-pointer that was trolling for does.

"He walked past the north window of my elevated blind too quickly for me to get a shot, so I had to turn and open the window in the door," explained Kohler. "He paused there, and I shot. He ran

about 50 yards in a half-circle and died on my neighbor's property."

Unbeknownst to Kohler, neighbor Dale Techel had placed a cellular game camera in the area. Within minutes, Kohler and other members of his family received a very interesting photo.

"I hadn't seen the photo yet and I received a call from my brother Tim [Techel], who asked if I'd looked at any recent photos," remembered Techel, who's also the Michigan Deer Hunters site administrator. "At first, we thought maybe a trespasser had shot the deer. About two minutes later, I received a text from Tony telling me his deer died on our property."

Techel's hunting group and Kohler get along well and have a standing agreement that lets hunters search for their wounded deer if it crosses property boundaries. Moments after receiving the photo of the dead deer, the Techels got another one showing Kohler admiring his fantastic harvest. With the aid of a four-wheeler, Kohler dragged the deer away from the kill site to a spot near a river, where he field-dressed the animal. Kohler's a stickler for scent-control, so he wore gloves and sprayed his boots down with scent-killing spray to minimize the amount of human odor he left behind.

It didn't take long for other deer to find the spot where Kohler's buck had expired.

"About an hour later, the camera captured photos of two does checking out the spot," Techel said. "And that evening, a very nice buck, which you see in the second photo posted on our site, came by and checked it out too. He had his nose right in the spot where the dead buck had been, which was less than 12 hours after Tony had killed the buck."

Despite Kohler's best efforts to minimize human scent, undoubtedly the kill site was rife with an amalgamation of odors deer might find suspicious. Deer hair, spilled blood, odors from Kohler's breath and from using the ATV combined to create a virtual scent collage that had the potential to frighten other deer.



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We can't be certain that NO deer were negatively affected by the kill site and scent mixture left behind, but the photos provide evidence that many deer weren't bothered in the least. Perhaps one

reason stems from the nature of whitetails themselves.

"One aspect of white-tailed deer we sometimes forget as hunters and researchers is a deer's intense curiosity," said Dr. Gino D'Angelo,

assistant professor of deer ecology and management at the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources. "Deer can be curious about unusual things they encounter, including signs of death. In my experience, deer responses to sights and scents associated with other deer that died tend to be associated with curiosity rather than fear."

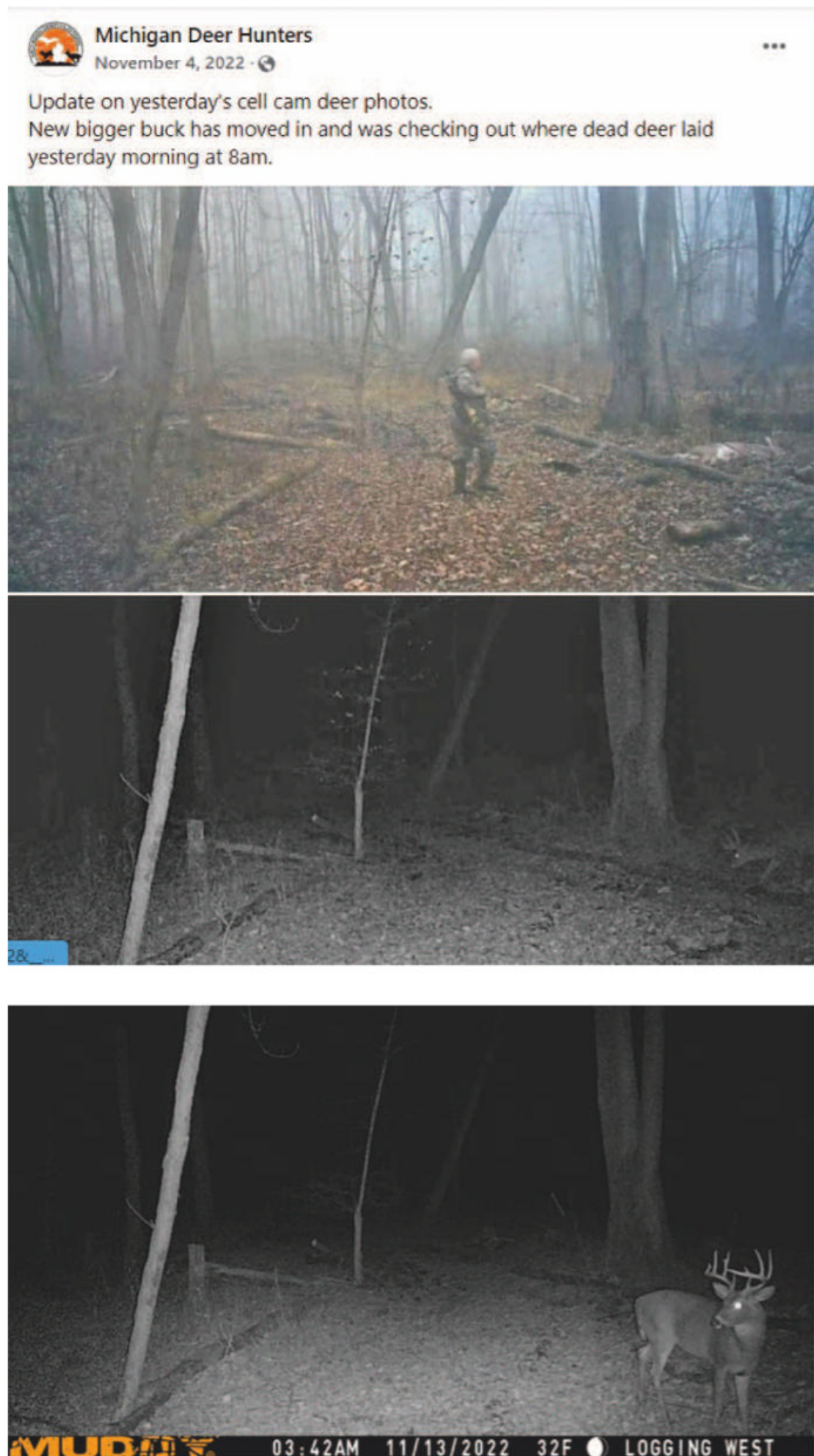
D'Angelo's deer research supports his experience. Field studies he's been a part of often involve placing trail cameras at sites where deer died from various causes. Sometimes these sites even contain entire deer carcasses or entrails left behind after field-dressing. Want to guess which species often logs the most visits to the sites? You guessed it – deer! D'Angelo has even witnessed four different bucks approach a doe that died in heat during the peak of the rut and not be spooked in the least.

"Deer encounter all sorts of stimuli in their environments. They're curious and very capable of discerning danger," added D'Angelo. "But in my estimation, avoiding areas where other deer have fallen is not part of their survival calculus."

Dr. Grant Woods, wildlife biologist and host of "GrowingDeer.tv" believes that leaving a dead deer in your shooting range while hunting may even help you achieve MORE success.

"I have observed, filmed and harvested many bucks and does that were standing over or near a deer I had shot earlier during the same hunt," Woods explained. "I can't know if any deer were spooked or didn't come into view because of the dead deer, but certainly a fresh dead deer is attractive to some deer."

So if you're hunting during cold enough weather to prevent meat spoilage and you have enough kill tags, consider leaving a deer you just harvested where it died. You might find that curiosity didn't kill just the cat, but a heavy-boned buck that came by to check out its fallen brethren.





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DEER & DEER HUNTING

ALAN CLEMONS

notebook

Pennsylvania CWD Study to Include Collared Whitetails

Deer in two Pennsylvania counties will be outfitted with tracking collars during a research project into chronic wasting disease in the state.

Deer in Bedford and Fulton counties will be outfitted with telemetry tracking collars, according to officials with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The two counties have produced about 90 percent of the known cases of CWD-positive whitetails in the Keystone State in the last 11 years.



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“Although it is unfortunate that CWD is now found in about one of every five hunter-harvested adult deer in these counties, these circumstances do provide a higher probability of capturing, marking and monitoring individual CWD-infected deer,” said Andrea Korman, the commission’s CWD section supervisor, according to GoErie.com. “It will give us insight into the effects of CWD on Pennsylvania’s deer population.”

The program is part of a joint effort with the game commission, Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Penn State University and the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine’s Wildlife Futures Program. Deer will be captured and fitted with GPS tracking collars for three years, then monitored. Officials said they hope to collar 200 bucks and does on private and public lands. Live traps

including drop nets, rocket-propelled nets and clover traps will be used.

The collared deer will be legal for hunters to take, just as with any other deer. Hunters should report the collar or ear tag to the state game commission.

A second project monitoring CWD and how it might affect future deer populations is ongoing. The Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Penn State University is supervising this one.

Ohio Council Approves 2023-24 Hunting Seasons

Deer bag limit changes are in store for seven counties after approval of the 2023-24 hunting seasons by the Ohio Wildlife Council. Ohio Department of Natural Resources officials said seasons have similar dates to last year. Bag limits will increase to three deer in Belmont, Gallia, Geauga, Harrison, Jefferson and Monroe counties, and will decrease to two in Butler County. As in years past, only one antlered deer may be harvested, regardless of where or how it is taken.

The deer hunting season dates for 2023-24 include:

- **Deer archery: Sept. 30, 2023-Feb. 4, 2024**
- **Youth deer gun: Nov. 18-19, 2023**
- **Deer gun: Nov. 27-Dec. 3, 2023; Dec. 16-17, 2023**
- **Deer muzzleloader: Jan. 6-9, 2024**

The chronic wasting disease surveillance area in Hardin, Marion, and Wyandot counties will allow additional hunting

opportunities to slow the spread of CWD. In addition to the statewide hunting seasons, hunters in Hardin, Marion, and Wyandot counties will have opportunities to participate in disease surveillance area seasons:

- **Deer archery season: Sept. 9, 2023-Feb. 4, 2024**
- **Early gun season: Oct. 7-9, 2023**

Vermont Deer Harvest Increases Slightly in 2022 Seasons

Hunters harvested 17,461 deer during the Vermont deer seasons in 2022, about 2 percent more than the previous 3-year average of 17,133.

The buck harvest in 2022 was 9,619, just 1 percent more than the previous 3-year average of 9,482 bucks. Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department officials said the total harvest was 10 percent more than the 15,858 deer taken in 2021, while the total buck harvest was 5 percent more than the 2021 buck harvest of 9,133.

Hunting conditions were variable during the 2022 seasons, but generally favorable for hunters. Temperatures were seasonable during early October, when most of the archery harvest occurs. Snow covered much of the state for most of the regular season in November. Deer often move more during the day when temperatures are cool, and snow helps hunters locate and see deer.

Additionally, statewide surveys indicated that oak, beech and apple production was fair to poor in most areas in 2022. Mast availability can

greatly affect deer behavior, and harvests are often higher in poor mast years when deer move more to find food and are more concentrated near available food sources like fields.

Antlerless harvests in recent years have helped stabilize deer numbers in most areas. The primary goal of deer management in Vermont is to keep the deer herd stable, healthy and in balance with available habitat.

Adult bucks comprised 55 percent of the total harvest, with 37 percent adult does, 4 percent male fawns, and 4 percent female fawns. The 16-day regular November season accounted for 42 percent of the total deer harvest, while 34 percent were harvested during archery season, 12 percent during the December muzzleloader season, 6 percent during the antlerless-only October muzzleloader season, 6 percent during youth season, and less than 1 percent during the new novice season.

Archers killed 5,877 deer during the 60-day archery season. The

2022 harvest was 33 percent more than 2021 and was comprised of 24 percent adult bucks, 65 percent adult does, and 11 percent fawns. Hunters using crossbows accounted for 77 percent of the harvest, similar to the 76 percent killed with crossbows in 2021. Crossbows became legal implements for all archery hunters in 2020.

Youth hunters killed 1,050 deer during the 2-day youth season

Novice hunters harvested 55 deer during the novice season, similar to the 54 deer harvested in 2021. A total of 410 new, adult hunters (age 16+) were eligible for this season, down 23% from 530 eligible novice hunters in 2021. The novice harvest was comprised of 36% adult bucks, 40% adult does, and 24% fawns

Hunters killed 1,114 deer during the October muzzleloader season, up 28 percent from 869 killed in 2021. Hunters reported 7,293 antlered bucks during the traditional 16-day regular season.



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A LOW-IMPACT STRATEGY IS NOT ALWAYS THE SMART MOVE FOR THE PUBLIC-LAND HUNTER TESTING NEW GROUND.

Back in 1980s and early 1990s, I was traveling the country whitetail hunting for months with both bows and guns. North to south, east to west, the basic premise was the same – keep your impact on the land as low as possible, hunting only when everything’s perfect, or nearly so. I was counseled to hunt the property from the outside in, avoiding sanctuary areas like they were guarded by claymores, to never set up near a bedding thicket, and whatever you I did, don’t spend a lot of time walking around.



*Sometimes, you
just have to head
into the woods
and look for a spot
where the sign is
red hot right now.*

All of this went against my very nature. Growing up hunting public land in the wide-open West, where covering lots of ground to locate elk herds and pockets of mule deer and prairie whitetails was essential, sitting back and letting things happen made little sense to me. In 1994 I heard a popular country song by Mary Chapin Carpenter, “I Take My Chances.” In part, the lyrics go: “Now some people say that you shouldn’t tempt fate; And for them I cannot disagree; But I never learned nothing from playing it safe; I say fate should not tempt me.”

What tempted me was breaking the whitetail mold, bringing what I knew best – taking chances, betting it all on bold moves – to the game, to see what happened. At this same time I was starting to explore public-land options in traditional whitetail country, something you rarely heard about in the sporting press back then. In the end what I learned was that a whitetail hunter needs a basic two-pronged approach. If I had access to private ground with which I, or another in my group, was intimately familiar, where hunting pressure was tightly controlled and a person could hunt the land for months, then low impact was the way to go, at least early on. However, when hunting strange ground, particularly public land I knew would be getting plenty of hunting pressure and where my time was limited to maybe a week or less, I flipped the switch. With only a week or so to hunt, I discovered that, as the song suggests, taking my chances every chance I get, going in, aggressively scouting the ground on foot and tempting fate before ever picking a stand location, was the ticket.

That’s still true today. Even with modern hunting aides like smartphone hunting apps, Google Earth, satellite imagery, topographic maps, Internet forums, social media groups and DNR websites, and whatnot

that allow the traveling hunter to get a big head start to understanding where they might find success, one still has to physically walk the ground to discover all the nuances that will make or break a hunt. I can look at the imagery, for example, and make an educated guess as to where bedding thickets, water sources, and travel corridors are, but until I get on the ground, I will not know where deer are actually frequenting specific places right now. HuntStand can’t show me which, if any, oaks are loaded with acorns, for example.

WHEN THE LIGHT BULB WENT ON

I was hunting a big block of Midwestern public back in late October in the mid-90s with a couple of then well-known hunting personalities who were filming for their cable TV show. They hunted old school, focusing on acorn ridges bordering some private cornfields, and so did I. But after three fruitless days, I decided I just had to see what was on the other side of the mountain. So I grabbed my bow and a climbing stand, told the boys I’d see them after dark, and right at first light went off on an aggressive scout/hunt. Up, down and all around I went, discovering some fresh sign in little isolated pockets. But it wasn’t until I took a tracked-up deer trail up out of a dry creek bed up through some chest-high brush to the crest of a hill that I decided that here was where I needed to be. The trail went under a three-strand fence that marked the property boundary; down the other side was an uncut alfalfa field. An intersecting trail paralleled the fence, and I found fresh sign where deer were crossing right here at the junction. Better still, fresh rub lines intersected at the junction, too.

It was maybe three hours before dark, so I picked a conifer 25 yards downwind of that intersection, climbed

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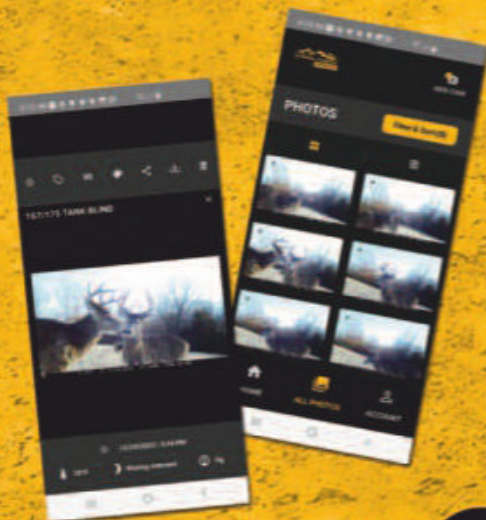


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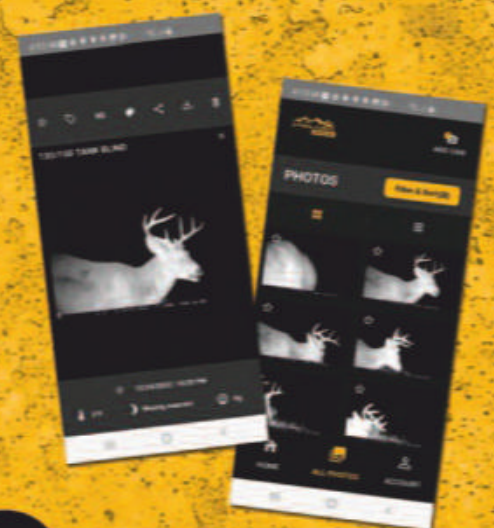
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the tree, and got settled in. It was not until right at slap dark that the big, thick-shouldered, dark-antlered 8-point came up the trail. I'd like to say it was a chore dragging him back to the road, but the truth is I was so buck-fevered that my arrow flew right between his main beams.

I ate that tag, but learned a very valuable lesson. That being, you have to hunt where the sign is hot right now – and oftentimes, that means aggressively moving out, locating it, and being prepared to set up immediately.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE LAND

Reading the above, you might think that I don't believe human encroachment will measurably affect deer movement and hunter success. You'd be wrong. There are innumerable scientific studies that tell us it does. A lot. This is why understanding and anticipating human pressure – not just hunting pressure – is something to take into account when setting a strategy.

Another example. A good friend has access to the sweetest 2,500 acres of deer heaven you've ever seen in southeast Kansas. The only people allowed to hunt this ground are the landowner, his son, and my buddy Jim. These deer are never disturbed, stands are only hunted with the right wind, and bucks allowed to grow old. As Jimmy says, "These things act like deer are supposed to act." Contrast that with the western Montana public-land unit I hunted in 2022. There were hunters everywhere, from the beginning of archery elk season on September 1 until the end of rifle deer season at the end of November. The game is hip to the games the hoard of hunters play, so you have to hunt it much more aggressively to have any chance of success.

It's all about control. Private ground? You control everything. Public ground? You control nada. I've seen it all on public land – guys hunting out of my ground blind or treestand; guys coming up and sitting right

next to me as I was glassing an open ridge, not saying a word; pheasant hunters running dogs through the brambles adjacent to the tree line I was set up in at prime time; squirrel hunters still-hunting right past me; berry pickers, dog walkers, joggers, bird watchers strolling through my hunt, you name it. So, if and when I have an opportunity at a decent buck, I take it. As a sometimes hunting guide, few words spoken by clients who passed up a decent buck, then regretted it, are more frustrating than them saying, "Well, we'll go find him again tomorrow." Probably not, Weedhopper. This isn't a cable TV show where the hosts are hunting their private sanctuary. Public is not private, and you cannot hunt it as if it were the same.

PLANS BEGIN WITH RESEARCH

All good plans are based on intel. For me, it begins with Internet research at home, accessing satellite photo imagery, topo maps, Google Earth, and smartphone apps like HuntStand, as well as game department websites. I want to create a basic game plan before I ever load my truck.

One major factor in my hunt plan is the amount of time I have. If I am traveling out of state and have budgeted nine days – two weekends and the week in between – once on the ground, my plan usually begins with setting an observation stand where I can observe a lot of country so I can get a feel for obvious deer movements. This can include a treestand in a semi-open area, or it might mean glassing from an elevated location. Then I move in and try and tighten the noose and set stands closer to places I think I can shoot a deer. If I have less time, I hit the ground running with a lightweight stand-and-stick system or climber on my back.

I do all of this knowing that public-land bucks will pattern both hunters and other human encroachment and will either move out or go nocturnal when they



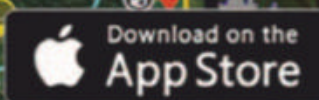
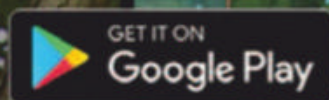
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intel without being on site.*

sense too much pressure. Studies have shown that the farther away from roads and easy access points you go, the better the hunting will be – which is another way of saying that you need to find little pockets where human activity is low. By studying maps and aerial photos, you can get a very good idea which areas are getting the least use before you ever arrive.

When I have the time, I run as many as a half-dozen trail cameras in an area, and check them daily during midday hours. I begin setting them in obvious funnels, on trails with fresh sign, and, during the various phases of the rut, on rub lines – particularly if I find an area where two or more fresh rub lines intersect -- as well as near fresh scrapes. Sure, I am going to be polluting the area a bit, even after following a strict scent-mitigation program – but if I am going to find a deer to hunt, I have to learn the nuances of the property. The only way to really do this is by walking it out. I'll pull cameras getting no action, placing them in areas where the activity levels are highest.

RUN & GUN HUNTING

The older I get, the more I have become a fan of run & gun hunting, even with bow in hand. And more and more public-land deer hunters are becoming fans of this program. All you have to do is Google “run & gun whitetail hunting” and you'll find plenty of articles and videos on the topic. For me, I don't get discouraged if I run & gun for a couple of days without finding what I am looking for. But when the sign tells me to slow down, I know it's time to either set a treestand, build a brush blind, or hunker down behind some brush or a logjam and wait. Once you find the right sign, you'll know it – and what to do.

LEARN THE LAND

Regardless of what you're hunting, few things are more important than knowing the nuances of the land and how the game uses it. Every time you walk and hunt a property – public or private – your knowledge increases exponentially. As we all know, nothing in life is constant except change. Thus, when it comes to public-land hunting, never forget that things change on a daily, and even yearly, basis. Nearby private-land crops are rotated, drought or wet years change water availability, a stand of oaks that produces a bumper crop one year produces little the next, and so on. Hunter pressure might be heavy one year, zilch the next. And so, deer change their movement patterns year to year.

Run & gun hunting also encourages me to try new areas every year. I may find promising sign and hunt it for a day or two, and if no good bucks appear, I'll move to another spot. This helps me learn the lay of the land on a personal basis that can't be done from map reading. I figure that to intimately learn a decent-sized public-land tract and be able to really hunt it effectively takes at least three years, sometimes more. But once I've done that, I am confident I can come back next year and have a good chance at making some meat.

“I take my chances, I pay my dollar and I place my bet. I take my chances, I take my chances every chance I get.” Great song – and great advice.





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DOE DATA



NEW SCIENCE-BASED RESEARCH INDICATES THAT IT MIGHT BE TIME TO STOP OVERTHINKING WHY, WHEN AND HOW YOU SHOOT ANTLERLESS DEER DURING HUNTING SEASON.

Most hunters, when they head to the woods, have some sort of expectation or goal in mind regarding that deer hunt. Some may have a need to fill their freezer and any legal deer they see will be at risk, or they might be selecting a hunting location specifically to harvest a doe. Other hunters may be laser focused on a mature buck they've been following on their trail cameras for the past six months. They then decide to set up on the main trail between the two camera locations where they regularly see him. In addition to hunting goals and expectations, most landowners today have management goals that drive many of the decisions they make throughout the hunting season. Usually, these management goals involve protecting young bucks and ensuring an adequate harvest of antlerless deer, the two foundational concepts associated with quality deer management. A plethora of articles and opinion-based columns have been published on the subject of protecting young bucks, and the concept "let him go so he can grow" is generally imprinted in most deer hunters today. The antlerless portion of the management strategy is usually numerical in nature and generally focused on how to successfully harvest enough antlerless deer during a season. However, there are several nuanced aspects to antlerless harvest that are commonly discussed at camp, around the campfire, on podcasts, etc. These include when to harvest does, and which ones to harvest.

Many hunters are very cautious when it comes to antlerless harvest for fear of disrupting their buck hunting. They may forbid shooting does from some stands, or they may restrict doe harvest to certain times during the season. Their theory is that these bans on doe harvest will reduce disturbance and increase the chances of harvesting a good buck.

In our opinion, time/location restrictions on antlerless harvest are counterproductive to this goal. But more importantly, our data shows that deer are disturbed by deer hunters — not gunshots. The presence of hunters causes deer to become nocturnal and avoid locations that have been hunted or are regularly hunted, etc. (See the Deer & Deer Hunting articles from the Auburn DeerLab that were published in September 2016 and November 2017 for more details on how hunting pressure affects deer activity.) In our opinion, when and where to harvest does has a simple answer — whenever and wherever they give you the opportunity. Most hunters are already limited in the time they can spend in the woods, and a doe in range may sometimes provide the only opportunity during the season. The other aspect of the antlerless harvest equation is which doe to harvest. We subscribe to the philosophy that it's more important to meet your antlerless quota than to wait for certain does, but when given the option, which is the best one to harvest out of a group? Opinions on this vary greatly.

Most hunters have moved past the traditional mindset that we should never shoot a doe under any circumstance, but many are strongly opposed to shooting does that have fawns for fear of negatively impacting

fawn survival. Some simply shoot the biggest doe in the group, and then there are the “if it's brown it's down” folks. In our opinion, when to harvest does has a simple answer — as soon as they give you the opportunity, because as we said earlier, achieving your antlerless harvest is difficult enough without restrictions. But as we all know, does frequently travel in groups during the hunting season, so we often have a choice on which one to harvest. In the Summer 2021 issue of Deer & Deer Hunting we discussed in detail strategies for harvesting does, but in this article we present new data that may cause you to adjust your strategy.

In the 1970, '80s, and '90s, John Ozoga, a longtime contributor to Deer & Deer Hunting and a scientist who we feel was ahead of his time, and colleagues with the Michigan DNR conducted groundbreaking research on reproduction in female white-tailed deer. They “wrote the book” on reproductive performance of female deer, and their work is at the core of much of the work we conduct at the Auburn DeerLab. Their research found that larger and older does often produce more fawns. Furthermore, their research better described predator avoidance tactics a doe will utilize to protect her fawn(s), while also better understanding the crucial bonding period a doe and her fawn(s) undertake the first few weeks after birth. Their research and that which followed focused largely on reproductive success: they examined factors that influenced the number of fawns produced.

While this research was essential in advancing our understanding of deer reproductive ecology, there still existed a major gap in our knowledge. The majority of this earlier research described factors that influenced aspects of fawn production — which does had the most

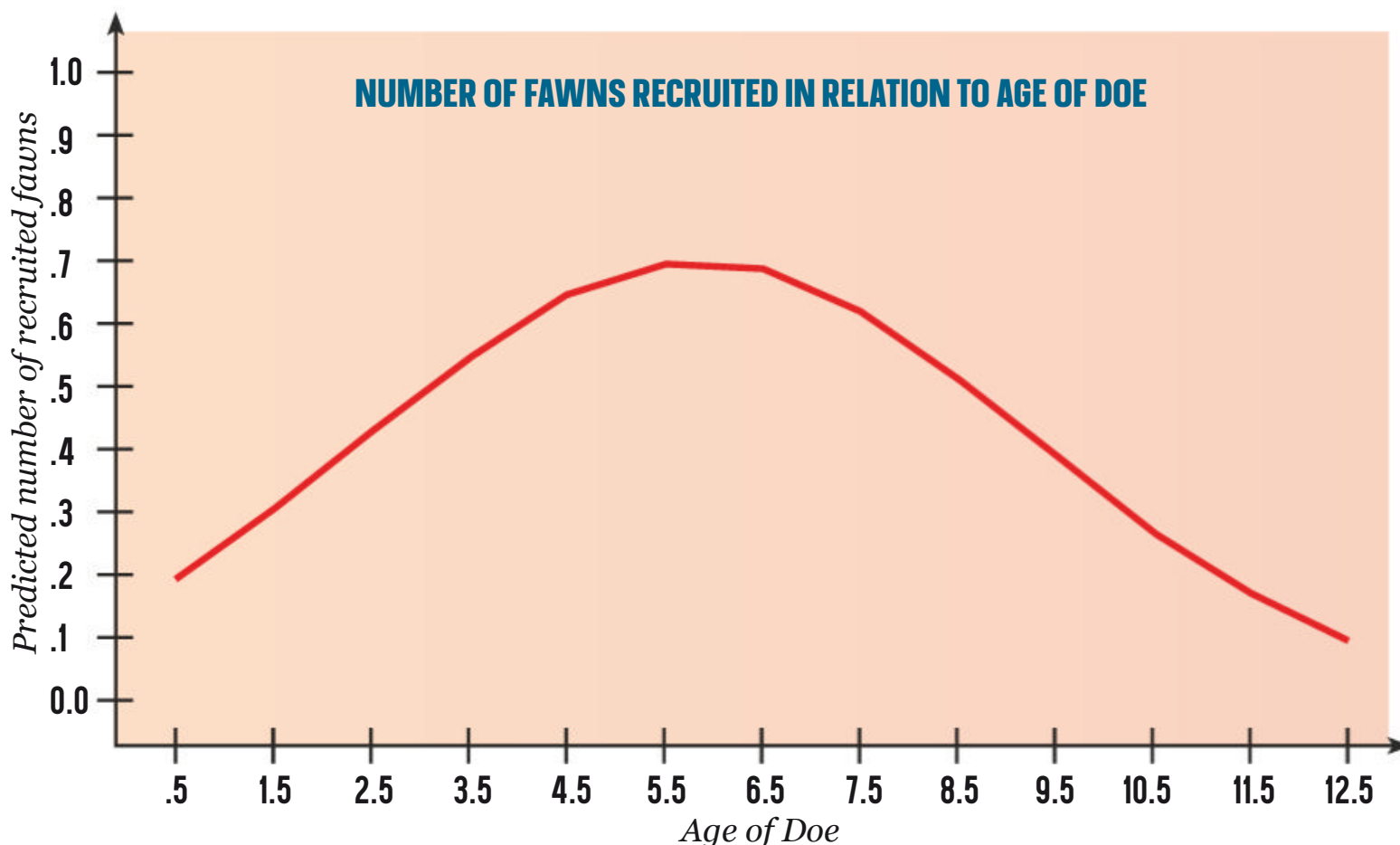


FIGURE 1. The relationship between the age of a doe and the predicted number of fawns they would recruit in a given year. Another way to interpret this graph is the line represents the recruitment rate (fawns per doe) for each age-class of doe. For example, there is a 0.2 recruitment rate (0.2 fawns per doe) for 0.5-year-old does and a recruitment rate of 0.6 (0.6 fawns per doe) for 5.5-year-old does.



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fawns, or produced fawns earlier, or produced the heaviest fawns, and what fawns survived through two months of age. However, there still exists a significant portion of time between fawn survival in the first two months of life and when they reach recruitment age (6 months). Fawn production is important to understand and a critical aspect of deer ecology and management, but fawn recruitment drives population dynamics and management decisions, and very few research groups have focused on fawn recruitment.

We sought to build upon the foundational knowledge established by Ozoga and others, and improve our understanding of the factors that influence the ability of a doe to successfully recruit fawns. Specifically, we were curious how characteristics of a doe, such as age and body size, influenced recruitment success. In addition, we also examined how prior breeding activities (raising a fawn the year before or in consecutive years) impacted the ability of a doe to successfully recruit a fawn. Most hunters don't realize that lactation is the most nutrient-demanding process that a doe will face during her entire lifetime.

After successfully raising and weaning a fawn, a doe is often in sub-optimal physical condition, and it can be difficult for her to recuperate her nutrient reserves before the next fawning season begins. For this reason, we felt it was important to examine how prior fawn recruitment influenced current fawn recruitment.

We had a unique opportunity to address these questions at our lab's captive deer research facility: a 450-acre high-fence property located in Camp Hill, Alabama, with approximately 100 deer at any given time. The habitat in the facility consists of about 56% forest and 44% pastureland, with creeks to provide water and several feeders to supplement nutrition. Due to the expansive area within the facility, deer are able to undergo natural behavior that would be expected of a noncaptive population. This research site is unique because it enables us to monitor deer for their entire lifetime, including their reproductive history, in a similar manner to the captive facility utilized by Ozoga and his colleagues. From 2008 to 2019 we worked to capture each deer annually with the use of dart guns loaded with sedatives. While sedated, we aged each deer, collected body measurements and a whole range of other data, and obtained a tissue sample for parentage analysis. During the duration of the study, we were able to determine who the mothers were for 260 deer, enabling us to address the questions we posed earlier.

Not surprisingly, we found some very interesting results when we completed a thorough analysis of the data. When examining how doe age influenced recruitment success, we found that a doe's ability to successfully recruit fawns increased with age until a peak around 5.5 to 6.5 years, after which recruitment success began to decline (see Figure 1). In the past, data reported on fawn production suggested that a doe is most fertile from

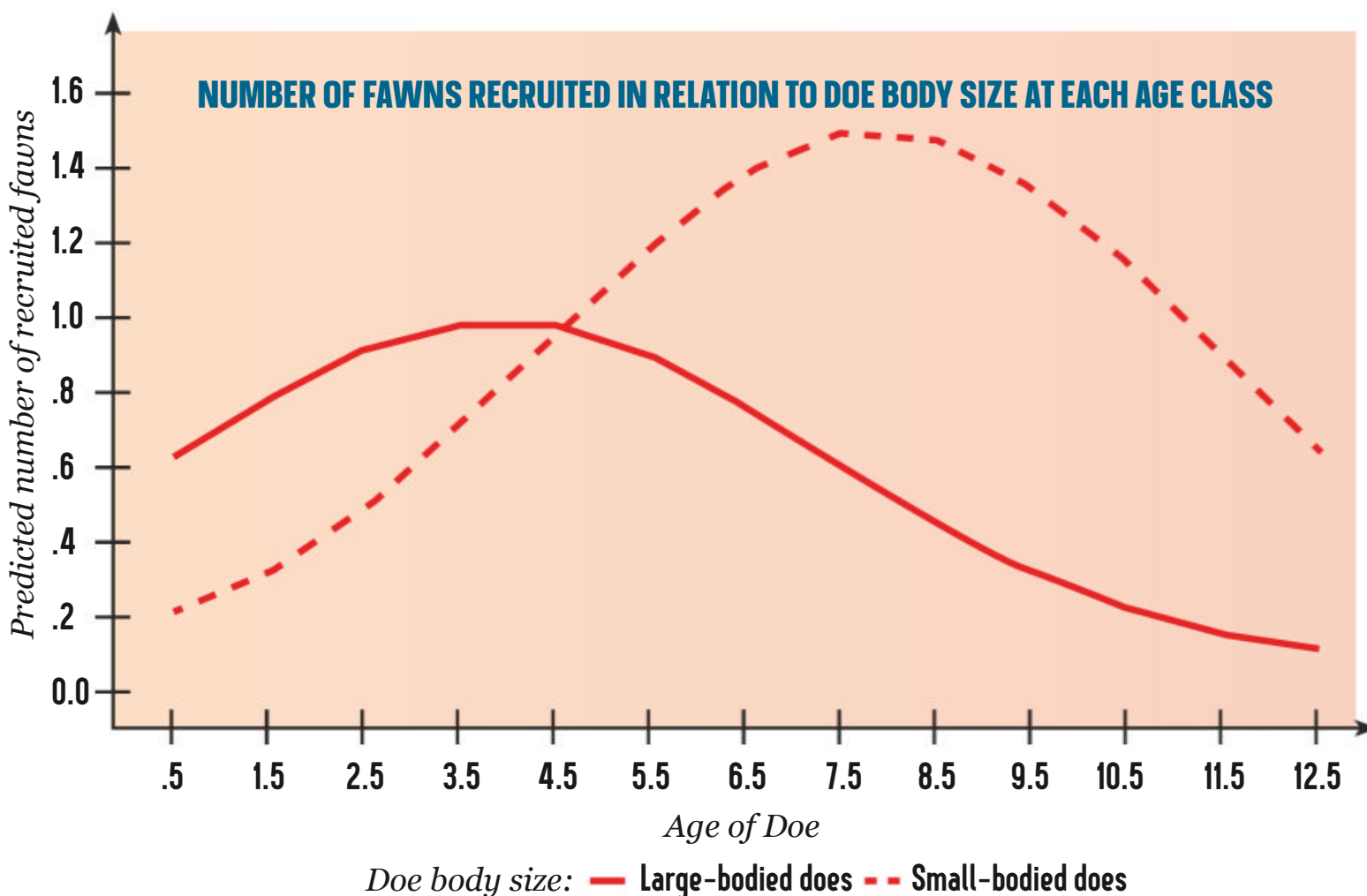
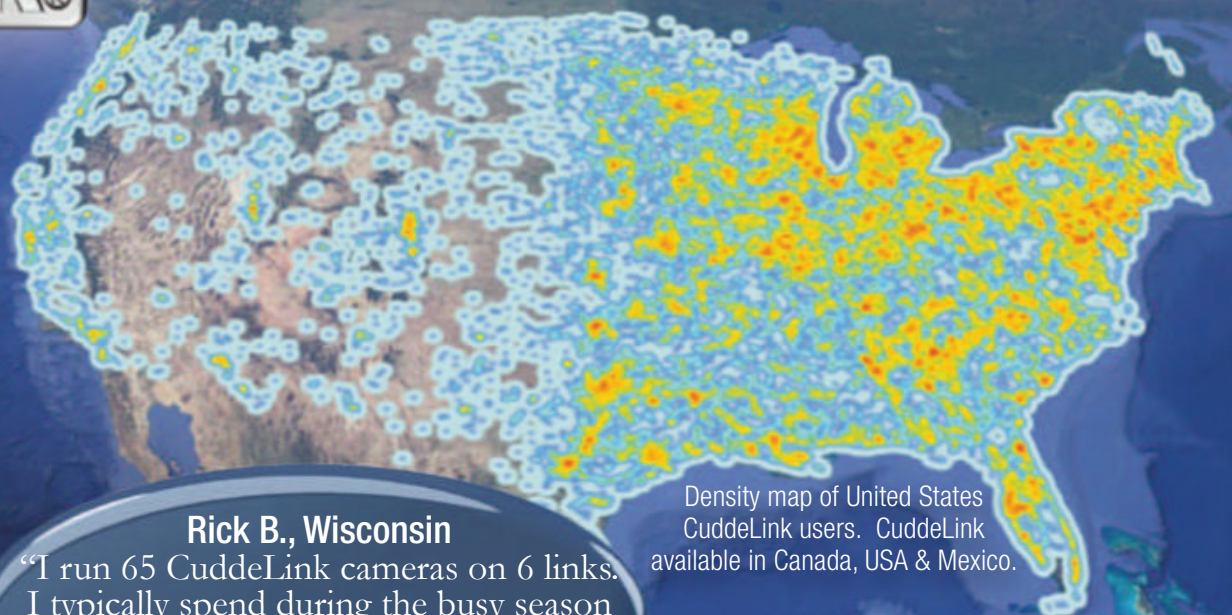


FIGURE 2. The relationship between the age of a doe and the predicted number of fawns they would recruit in a given year depending on the size of the doe. The lines represent the recruitment rate (fawns per doe) for does of different sizes for each age-class. For example, small does (dashed line) will have a recruitment rate of 0.2 (fawns per doe) at 1.5 years of age and a recruitment rate of 1.4 (fawns per doe) at 7.5 years of age. Small-bodied does are represented by the dashed line and large-bodied does are represented by the solid line.



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about 3 to 7 years of age; however, these findings were only based on pregnancy rates and not recruitment rates. Despite this significant peak in recruitment for does 4-7 years of age, both young and old does successfully recruited fawns. For example, 14 female fawns gave birth to and successfully recruited offspring during the study, and does were found to successfully recruit offspring up until 12.5 years of age. These findings provide a perspective of when a doe may be at or past her peak period of productivity. It follows that fawn recruitment success in a deer population will be a function of the female age structure, where in a very young population that experiences high rates of antlerless harvest there may be lower recruitment rates in comparison to populations with lesser antlerless harvest pressure.

The data we analyzed on how body size influenced reproductive success was equally interesting. Past research has reported that larger does generally produce the most fawns, and it is believed that larger does have more stored energy/nutrients that can be used to produce milk. However, our findings were not that simple: we found that body size affected fawn recruitment, but the way in which it affected recruitment varied with age. Our data indicated that larger does recruited more fawns early in life and smaller-bodied does recruited more fawns later in life (see Figure 2). It's important to note, however, that while the figure seems to suggest that small-bodied does recruit more fawns, their recruitment at older ages is dependent on them surviving to older ages. The reality is that survival of white-tailed deer is linked to body size, where smaller-bodied females have lower survival rates and thus a decreased chance of making it past 4 or 5 years of age. As a result, the reproductive contribution of small-bodied females is less than that of large-bodied females. These results definitely make the decision regarding which doe to harvest a complex one.

So, what did our data say about prior reproductive success? We had hypothesized that does that had successfully recruited a fawn during the previous season would successfully recruit less fawns than does that had not recruited a fawn the previous year. In other words, we believed that the nutritional challenges of lactation would make it difficult to recruit fawns during successive seasons. Much to our surprise, we found the exact opposite: does that recruited a fawn experienced greater recruitment success the following year than does that had not recruited a fawn. To be more specific, successful does recruited nearly 1.5 times as many fawns the next year compared to does that failed to successfully recruit.

We also examined only does that recruited fawns in consecutive years (hereafter we refer to them as consecutive recruiters). In our study, we had a total of 86 known mothers (we had an additional 70 does that never recruited a fawn during their lifetime), and 40 of them (only 26% of the total population) recruited fawns during consecutive years at least once in their life. Of the 260 recruited fawns we studied, 75% of them came from mothers who were consecutive recruiters. Essentially, 26%

of our does recruited over 75% of all the fawns in our study. Several of our does we would describe as being exceptional mothers. For example, we had one doe that recruited nine fawns in eight years and another doe that recruited at least one fawn per year for seven straight years. Also, consecutive recruiters generally had longer lifespans and reproduced for the first time at an earlier age compared to other known mothers within the population. These findings indicate that a subset of does in a population likely recruit a large majority of the fawns during any given fawning season and it's generally the same does doing this every year. Keep in mind that this does not mean these other does are not producing fawns: it just means their fawns aren't surviving to 6 months of age. In other words, some does are really good mothers, and some aren't. The question is, how do you distinguish good mothers from the poor ones during the hunting season? We were unable to distinguish good mothers from the rest based solely on age or body size, and so we believe there are other inherent maternal factors that play a role in fawn recruitment.

What this means is there is no perfect technique in the field for distinguishing good mothers from poor mothers. However, hunters in the field could use fawn presence as a general indicator of doe quality. Does that have fawns with them during hunting season probably have a greater chance of successfully recruiting fawns the next year than does that are not accompanied by fawns. This has potential implications for herd management. If the goal is to reduce herd size due to overpopulation or for other reasons, then targeting does with fawns may advance your management objectives. On the flip side, if the goal is to increase the population over time, it would be best to harvest does without fawns and thereby keep those good mothers in the population.

Our findings indicate that patterns of reproduction in female white-tailed deer are extremely complex, and using these patterns to inform antlerless harvest decisions can be challenging. In reality, the answer regarding which doe to harvest is likely scenario-based. What are your goals for that hunt? Not every hunter has the ability to choose what deer they want to harvest: some are just trying to fill the freezer and others may not be fortunate enough to be able to be choosy. As we mentioned earlier, the most sound method may be to simply shoot whatever doe presents the best target, because proper management of any population entails an adequate harvest of antlerless deer. But if you're looking for some takeaways, here are three to consider: (1) the ability of a doe to recruit fawns peaks at about 6.5 years of age, but does much older can still recruit fawns, (2) just because a doe is small in stature does not mean she is a poor mother, and (3) age and body size are not always definitive features of good mothers, but the presence of fawns may be. Hopefully, this will give you something to think about in the stand next year ... just don't let the complexity of the situation take the fun out of it.



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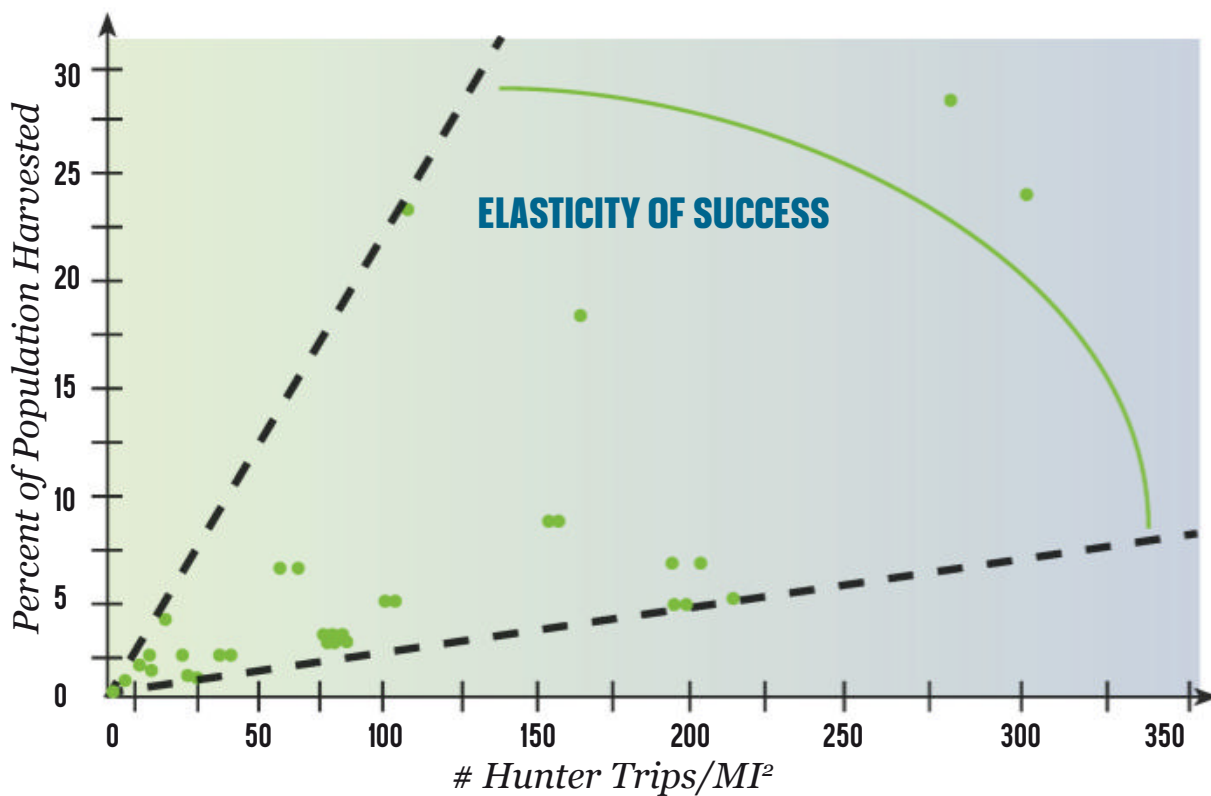
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HARVEST SUCCESS RELATED TO ARCHERY TACKLE



Deer hunter success is affected by several factors. Paramount among these is deer density. All else being equal, success will be proportional to deer abundance. But all else is rarely equal. Also affecting success are effort, bag limit, method, skill, weather, tackle, terrain and other factors. The purpose of this article is not to discuss all of these, but to explore the relation of hunter selection and archery tackle to success rates.



MECHANICS OF SELECTION

Bowhunter success rates are strongly affected by the degree that bowhunters select for a specific deer or antler condition. For a variety of reasons, when given the opportunity, most hunters will select an adult over a fawn or an antlered buck over a doe.

Selection implies having a choice. Most bowhunting seasons have allowed the harvest of any deer. Long hunting seasons with a bag limit of one tend to encourage selection as many bowhunters defer killing something to extend their hunting

experience. High deer populations also contribute to selection because hunter confidence of success is increased. Conversely, short hunting seasons or low deer populations offer few opportunities for choice, so hunters are likely to shoot at the first legal deer within range.

One can see a growing degree of selection evident in some state archery harvests in recent decades as deer numbers have increased and archery tackle has improved. In earlier days of any-deer bowhunting with traditional tackle, the sex and ages of shot deer were more nearly

in proportion to their presence in the herd. Now it is commonplace for antlered bucks to be more than 50% of the archery harvest when adult bucks normally make up only 20-25% of the pre-hunt herd.

Most reported statewide success rates by archers do not reflect the capability of archers to be successful. Low reported success rates are often the result of deferred kills or selection by hunters.

MECHANICS OF SUCCESS

An analysis I did prior to the general availability of crossbows showed bowhunting success was highly elastic. By standardizing data for deer density and hunter effort, it was evident that statewide deer harvest statistics severely underestimated the capability of bowhunters to be successful.

Lowest data-points on the graph are mostly success rates for long statewide and regional hunts in Wisconsin (reported 1983). Higher success rates are those from special hunts such as at Howland Island (NY 1958-62), Fort McCoy (WI 1983), Burr Oak Woods (MO), and the Badger Army Ammunition Plant (WI 1981-83).

Given the proper incentives, bowhunters can be quite efficient. By examining several special hunts that have been offered around the country, it was apparent that success rates with vertical bows could vary by as much as three to five fold. Long seasons and limited bag tended to reduce apparent efficiency as many hunters deferred kills to extend their hunt or to seek a particular deer. Short seasons, unique hunting opportunities, and multiple bag limits increased apparent efficiency.

The maximum range and ease-of-use of tackle that hunters choose also drives harvest opportunity and success. Longbows, recurves, compounds and crossbows may have similar ranges of effectiveness. But they form a rather broad spectrum on the ease-of-use scale that has caused anxious discussion among some hunters.

Archers themselves seem most interested in the relative success of bowhunting tackle choices. Traditional archers were initially threatened by the advent of the compound bow. They

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feared that the mechanical advantages would increase success rates and swell hunter numbers, thereby endangering the liberal hunting rules enjoyed by bowhunters. Now, there are similar worries about the increased use of crossbows.

TRADITIONAL VS. COMPOUND BOWS

Traditional archery was defined as tackle that was hand-held, hand-drawn, and hand-released. Hand-released implied fingers on the string. With the advent of the compound and shorter limbs, hand-released included mechanical releases.

One of the earliest attempts to document success rates of various archery tackle was conducted by Lee Gladfelter in Iowa. Low-cost compound bows were becoming increasingly popular during the 1970s, causing some to wonder if increased efficiency posed a threat to traditional bowhunting.

Lee conducted questionnaire surveys of Iowa bowhunters from 1976-79 and found that traditional archers (longbows and recurves) reported an average success rate of 20.6% and compound users reported success of 27.2%.

The reader should note that the percentages used in this article are merely an attempt to show relative efficiency at a given time or place. The percentages apply only to

the studies cited. Thus, the Iowa surveys suggested that compound users in the late-1970s were nearly one-third more successful than those using traditional tackle.

Studies by Steve Ditchkoff and associates also compared success rates of traditional and compound bows. The McAlester Army Ammunition Plant (Oklahoma) conducted a series of six weekend hunts each fall. Hunters were drawn by lottery and allowed only one weekend of hunting. This limited and special opportunity would have the effect of minimizing selection that would reduce success rates.

Bowhunts from 1983-88 were open to all archery tackle, but more than 95% used compounds. From 1989-95 bowhunters were restricted to traditional tackle. Direct comparison of the results of these hunts is compromised some by the fact that these hunts occurred in different years.

Average success of compound users was 17.8%, and for users of traditional tackle it was 10.7%. These results suggested a somewhat greater advantage of compounds over traditional bows than was indicated by the Iowa study. However, the magnitude of difference may have been inflated by changes in deer density between time periods. Deer-sighting rates

averaged 18% lower during the traditional hunting period.

Still, from these two studies, it seems that users of early (<1990) compound bows achieved about one-third greater success rates than those using traditional tackle.

ENTER CROSSBOWS

A success comparison between crossbows and compounds at McAlester AAP was also a bit unclear. Success by compound-users at McAlester from 1983-1988 averaged 17.8% (above) compared to later hunts in 1996-2000 when crossbow success rates averaged 23.3%. Deer densities during these two periods were not published.

The authors of this series of studies also suspected that technological improvements might have increased the efficiency of compound bows since the mid-1980s, causing their efficiency to close the difference in success some by the 1990s.

Hunts at McAlester AAP also reported information on crossbow and traditional bow efficiency. During the 1996-2000 hunts, the second of six weekend hunts was open only to physically challenged hunters using crossbows. In this comparison, crossbows achieved the average success rate of 23.3% reported above. Traditional archers hunting on weekends before and after the crossbow hunt experienced an average success of only 6.9%.

Those crossbow users experienced success rates that exceeded traditional archers by more than threefold. These data come from the same time and place, and deer densities were similar, though slowly declining during these hunts. But what was not clearly stated was whether the traditional-only rules caused some compound users to gain access to the hunt by temporarily switching back to traditional tackle with which they were less practiced. This could have the effect of magnifying the difference.

A recent report prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources contained a table of statewide success for four states. Ohio, which had reported similar success between vertical and crossbows as early as 2000, had a recent three-year average success of

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20.7% vs. 22.9%, respectively. This seemed corroborated by Missouri that reported a two-year average success of 31.4% for compounds and 35.2% for crossbows.

In contrast, results in Wisconsin indicated a five-year average success rate for vertical bows (90% compounds) of 23.3% vs. 31.3% for crossbows, and for Maryland buck hunters, 24.4% for vertical bows and 32.2% for crossbows.

Seemingly, data for two states suggest at least a 10% advantage for crossbows over vertical, while two states and a McAlester result suggest a more than 30% advantage. Not knowing all the nuances of rules controlling these hunts, I tend to think that there is likely a 30% advantage to crossbows.

SUMMARY

At this time, I lean toward giving compounds a one-third advantage over traditional tackle based on the Iowa and McAlester studies. And I suggest that crossbows may have up to a one-third advantage over compounds based mainly on the

Maryland and Wisconsin statewide hunt results.

Intuitively, one would conclude that crossbows should produce higher success rates than vertical bows. The internal ballistics of crossbows are fixed, much like a firearm. This is in direct contrast to a vertical bow where internal ballistics depend totally upon the shooter. The ease of use and reduced motion required to shoot a crossbow should enable even unskilled persons to be effective with a crossbow.

It is the ease of use of crossbows and presumed higher success rates that caused bowhunters in big bowhunting states, like Michigan and Wisconsin, to have resisted efforts to legalize crossbows for general use. Bowhunters feared that their already high numbers in these states would swell with crossover from gun hunters. Current success rates have caused debates in MI and WI about regulating the allocation of harvest between vertical bow, crossbow and gun-hunters. But current overabundance of deer has trumped these concerns.

These might not be concerns for states with small bowhunting populations and overabundant deer. Meanwhile, a crossbow seems a good choice when dealing with urban deer control. Like vertical bows, crossbows remain short-range, silent and safe for use in areas of human occupation.

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HIDDEN EDGES

SUBTLE EDGE LINES LOCATED OFF THE BEATEN PATH CAN BE THE KEY TO CONSISTENT DEER HUNTING SUCCESS. HERE'S HOW TO FIND THEM.

It's no secret that whitetails love edge cover. They use edges to define travel routes, and also as places to find tasty browse that grows in transition zones that receive additional sunlight and/or moisture than plants growing in darker, thicker spots. One obvious example would be the borders where croplands and food plots meet the woods or CRP-type flora. Others would be where a stand of mature trees borders a clear cut, a line of standing timber in a cutover next to freshly cut trees, where different types of tree lines meet — think where a stand of hardwoods meets a stand of cedars or pines — a windbreak of juniper, eucalyptus, or other trees planted in prairie country, and so on.



Often bucks will use exposed edge trails like this one after dark. Finding edge trails leading to this type of trail hidden back in the thick cover makes a better hunting strategy.



Powerline cuts create classic edge cover. Be sure to check for well-worn deer trails and fresh sign just inside the tree line on both sides of the cut.

Then there are terrain features that form edge cover into natural funnels. Creeks and rivers, fencerows, steep river and creek banks that force deer to skirt the water's edge, natural and man-made water crossings like dirt road tracks and shallow crossings near deep water, drainage ditches in large ag fields, logging roads – anything that breaks up the landscape with a change is a potential edge that will attract deer.

But it's the hidden edge you should be looking for, even if you don't know it. Say what? I am talking about those places deep in the woods that are a thick tangle of brush, briars and brambles. Or a swampy marsh mess with mud that will suck your boots off that's dotted with little islands covered in

trees and brush. You know, places where it's hard to walk through without getting tangled up. When this thick stuff is in the middle of big woods with oaks and other food sources for deer, then you have just located the best spot for a stand. You just have to find the trails deer are using heavily – and odds are, they'll be on an edge of some type.

These little secret spot edge zones are dynamite stand locations for one obvious reason – they're isolated from easy human access, providing a sense of security. And while little isolated bedding thickets have lots of low browse, they generally don't have enough of the foods deer both need and want to keep them from venturing forth to feed on nearby agriculture,

or falling acorns, or other highly nutritious natural foods. Deer leave these thickets just as the sun goes down, for two reasons. One, they feel safe. But also, they naturally want to abandon the perfect stalking habitat for predators like coyotes. Scouting the edge of these hidden thickets, you can locate the most likely food source for that time of year and set up a plan to hunt the edge and catch the deer moving out to feed in the evening.

This exact scenario played out for me one evening in southwest Missouri. I'd hunted a woodlot corner that jutted out into a big standing cornfield for two days and seen nada, so then at midday decided to follow the deer trail I was on back into the woods. About 300 yards later I found the

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If you can find hidden edge trails that lead from bedding thickets to preferred food sources, you're on your way to a backstrap dinner.

bedding thicket, the trail I was on skirting the edge of the coverline. My spider sense tingled, so I took down my original stand and set it up downwind of the edge of the thicket edge. Right at slap dark a 4½-year old 8-pointer emerged from the brushy cover and headed my way. He did not make the cornfield.

LOCATING HIDDEN EDGES

When hunting a new property, it's easy to locate obvious edge cover before you ever arrive using a topographic map, satellite imagery or a smartphone hunting app. These are the places I go first to try and sniff out travel corridors leading to basic deer magnets like food, water and bedding areas. Then it becomes a matter of boots on the ground, walking the property out in search of hidden edges that are not obvious until you get there. If I have time, I try and find more than one of these little edge line pockets so I have options as my hunt progresses.

What if you only have a few days to hunt? This is where focusing on hidden edges can be your ace in the hole. Here's the plan.

First, after your pre-hunt map and smartphone research, remember that you'll have five basic cover types to look for — funnels in brushy cover, obvious edges between two cover types, saddles, points extending off a hill or ridge that creates an edge, and ridge lines where the deer often travel not on the top, but down the slope a bit, or on little benches on the sidehill that form a type of edge.

After identifying potential areas with these features, it's time to speed scout. On a five-day hunt, more often than not I'll spend the first day rapidly scouting as much of the property as possible, the specific areas dependent on the time of year. Early season? Focus on areas near ag fields, food plots, and water. October? Acorn ridges. Rut? Water, deep-woods bedding

thickets, funnels between food and bedding areas. If I have time, I may hang some scouting cameras in areas that show the best fresh sign. After processing what I've found, it's time to set some stands and start hunting.

INSIDE INFORMATION

You can take this one fact to the bank — deer in general, and older bucks in particular, prefer to travel an edge just inside the cover line. A utility right of way, powerline cuts through timber and old logging roads are obvious man-made changes to a landscape that create edges. While the deer might travel right down their middles, often you'll find deer trails set a few yards back inside the tree line and paralleling these landscape scars. You'll only find them by walking the ground.

One thing I always look for on new ground is an old abandoned homestead. These spots have lots of edge cover nearby created by people — roads, fence lines, hand-planted windbreaks of trees, gardens and tilled fields, and so on. I almost killed the biggest buck I've ever seen in such a spot.

The old buildings were set in a stand of pines and cedars, with an old road running out onto the highway a quarter-mile distant across some ag fields. Along the edge of the tree line was a traditional rub line, obviously in use for decades. One of the wooden gate posts had been rubbed into an hourglass shape over the years. There were some old and new scrapes, too. The place screamed "big bucks," so I set a stand up a tree along the edge of the road, where two rub lines intersected. Over the course of five days I saw no less than 15 bucks cruise through the area. The morning of day six Big Toby came, a monstrous 10-point with stickers I know would have grossed more than 200 Pope & Young inches. He snuck in cautiously, scent-checking the scrapes, listening and eyeing the countryside, never leaving the edge of the timber. He was just 25 yards from me, but the trees too thick for a shot. I still have dreams about that deer.



If you can add an element to the edge cover - here thick brushy cover bordering CRP cover - like a traditional rub line, you're well on your way to a successful ambush.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

As you think like a deer, you wonder, "How can I get from Point A to Point B as quickly and easily as possible, yet remain safe?" So you think, if I walk along terrain feature edges, I'll find easy walking, yet have escape routes close at hand. More examples include dry riparian habitats created when rivers and creeks have flooded at some point in time, the overflow creating dry riverbeds that meander along. These areas often have different flora than the surrounding countryside. If you can find a pinch point that funnels deer to a narrow spot where travel is easy - a deep drop-off bank, for example - this can be a great ambush spot.

Another example might be small offshoot creeks along main waterways. These little creeks are usually bordered by thick cover, and many times you can find preferred travel routes marked by traditional rub lines on small trees. Find a main crossing, look for fresh sign, and set a stand downwind. Western whitetail hunters often find that both whitetails and mule deer like to travel the edges of sagebrush, preferring to walk below the skyline in depressions, under cut banks, or along windrows planted by old homesteaders. You'll find trails on the lee side of the thick cover.

Obvious edges are just that - obvious. For consistent success, spend some time walking the property and locating those hidden edge lines that offer both security and easy travel to food, water and bedding areas. Hunt them with a low-impact strategy, and you'll be well on your way to another successful deer season.



| JOSH HONEYCUTT

A LOOK AT 25 COMMON BUT UGLY BLUNDERS
THAT FOOD PLOTTERS SHOULD AVOID.

25 FOOD PLOT KILLERS

If I've made five food plot mistakes, I've made 50. I've probably invented ways to kill a food plot never seen by man before or since. Obviously, that's hyperbole. Still, I wasn't

born with a green thumb. I've made many a blunder trying to make green things grow. Below are some of the biggest mistakes that ruin a good food plot, and I've made all of them, so you don't have to.

Choosing the right food plot plant species is important.

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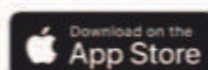
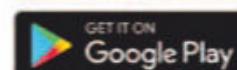


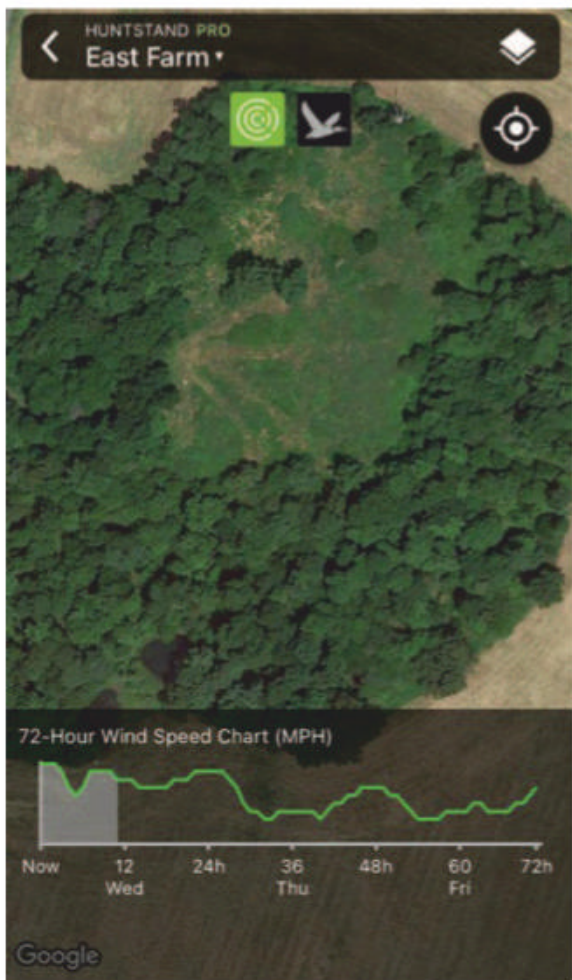
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Plant food plots within known buck core areas.

1. MISSING THE PLANTING WINDOW

Coming from someone who is habitually late, one of the biggest and most difficult issues to recover from is missing the window. Miss the boat, and there's no time left to redo the situation. The only option is waiting for the next boat. In spring, that's fall. In fall, that's spring. For that reason, it's best to be on time.

2. MISSING THE PLANTING DEPTH

Food plot species, like all plants, must be planted at a certain depth to germinate. Plant too shallow, and it receives too much moisture, can't establish strong roots, gets picked up by scavengers, etc. Plant too deep, and it can't reach the sun. This makes planting at the correct depth range incredibly important. Pay close attention to planting depths.

3. PLANTING INCORRECT PLANTS FOR THE SOIL TYPE

There are many different soil types throughout the country. Some plant species work better in certain soil types than others. Determining what your soil type is, and selecting a plant that works with these circumstances, is an important step.

4. NOT TESTING THE SOIL

The soil quality is rarely what you think it is. Even if it's close to expectations, generally, it could be



better. Taking a soil test can result in an undesirable pH level. Planting a seed with an incompatible pH range, and neither germination nor yield will meet goals.

5. MAKING NO SOIL CORRECTION

Even if you take a soil test, the ground won't fix itself. You must take the sample, analyze the results, and make necessary corrections. Do that, and the ground is more likely to facilitate proper plant growth.

6. PLANTING INCORRECT PLANTS FOR THE ZONE

Every plant species has a designated zone (or zones) that it is compatible with. In the U.S., maps exist to showcase these. While there are several slight variations to this map, these are much the same with about 10-13 different zones illustrated. Oftentimes, seed bags show these maps, or at least state which zone(s) the plants are suitable for.

7. PLANTING WHERE THE SUN DOESN'T SHINE

Most food plot plants need partial to full sunlight to thrive. This makes it more difficult to grow quality food plots in shaded areas, especially in smaller openings within the timber or on the edge of it.

8. PLANTING AWAY FROM ESTABLISHED LINES OF MOVEMENT

Placing plots in random locations rarely works well. Food plot locations should be in areas that are optimized. A random field or opening might work out, but more than likely will not. Instead, place food plots along well-used lines of movements. Placing these between bedding areas and food sources and choosing a food plot species whose peak attraction syncs with the timing of the bedding area and destination food source increases the odds of success.

9. CREATING THE WRONG SHAPES

Hunting plots should be created in a way that makes hunting easier. That includes the shape of the plot. Circular, rectangular and square shapes are not ideal. Deer can see the entire food plot without entering it. Furthermore, they aren't forced through a pinch point to travel the plot. T-, U-, J-, L-, V-, turkey foot-, and hourglass-shaped food plots do accomplish those things.

10. MAKING PLOTS TOO BIG

Food plots can be too small and become quickly overbrowsed. But they can also be too big. Under the latter scenario, unless perfectly designed, large food plots oftentimes put deer out of range.

11. MIXING INCOMPATIBLE PLANT SPECIES

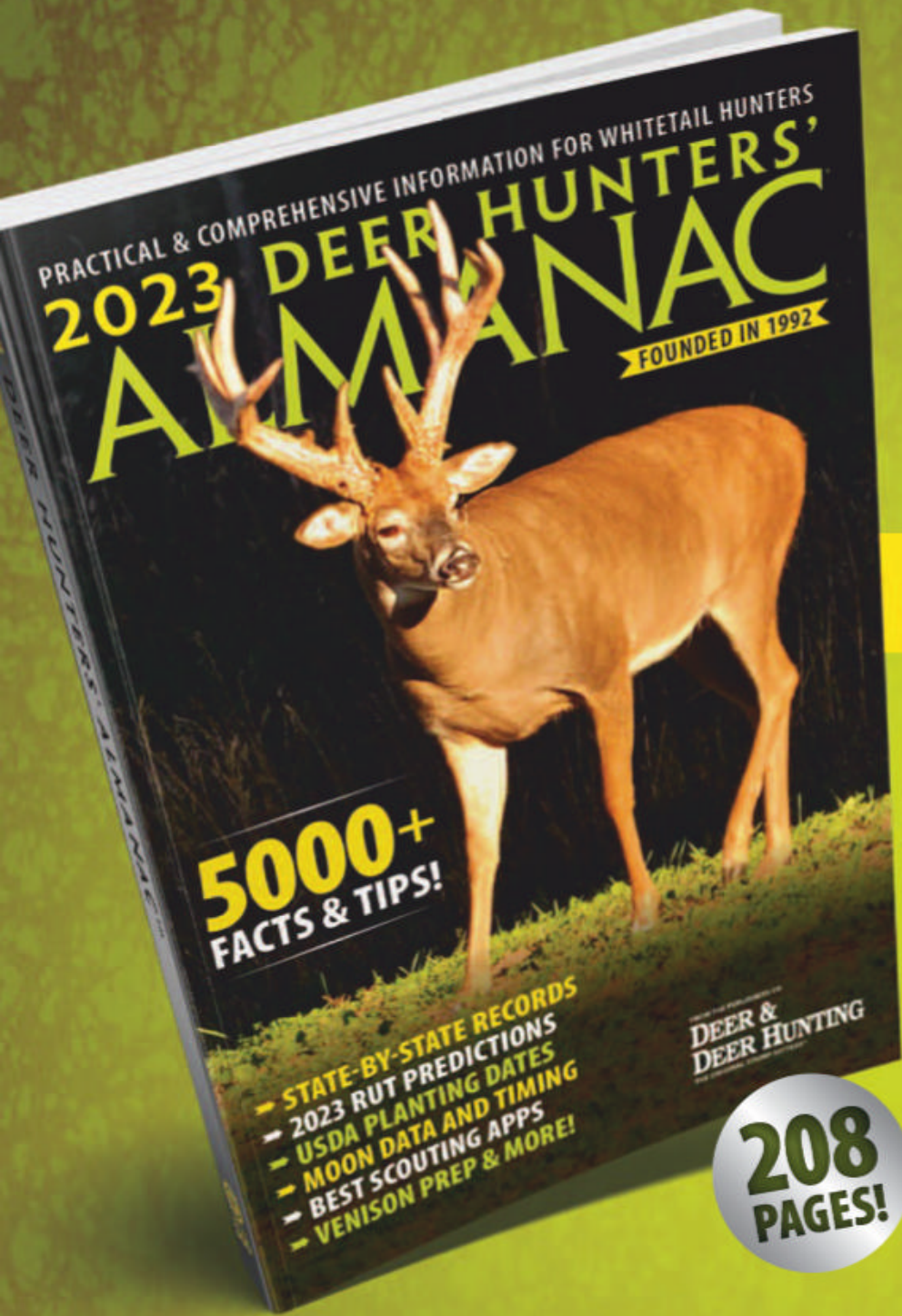
Some hunters like combo plantings. This is where they plant multiple plant species together in the same area. However, if a food plotter does this, they should mix plant species that are compatible. This means they should prefer the same pH range, soil conditions, sunlight, moisture, and not outcompete one another.

12. PREPPING THE SEED BED INCORRECTLY

All plants need seed-to-soil contact, and most plant species need a well-prepped seed bed to germinate. Failing to prep the seed bed properly is a big mistake. Make sure this box gets checked, or the green stuff isn't growing.

13. FAILING TO NURTURE YOUNG PLANTS

Seedlings and young plants are more vulnerable than mature growth. Take care of budding food plots to ensure they reach maturity.



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THE WEIRD WAYS OF GREAT ACCESS

Treestands are nothing without quality entry and exit routes. This makes good stand locations with great access even better. But quality entry and exit routes don't always look the same. Furthermore, some of them are quite unique, or even weird. The following are some common, and some unique, methods for great access.

- Creating screening cover with hinge-cuts.
- Creating screening cover with tall-growing plantings, such as Egyptian wheat (annual) or giant miscanthus (perennial).
- Walking along ditches and drainages.
- Following shallow, wadable waterways.
- Boating, canoeing and kayaking deeper waters.
- Deploying electric bikes and carts.
- Using in-field truck, tractor or side-by-side drop-offs.
- Using in-field truck, tractor or side-by-side pick-ups.
- Implementing roadside drop-offs in spots with good access.
- Crawling and crouching where there is no other option.
- Using two-dimensional livestock decoys as cover in open areas.

Optimize food plots for hunting purposes.

This might entail battling weeds, installing a temporary exclusion fence, fertilizing at the proper time, etc.

14. OVERGRAZING

Food plots that get hammered — especially early in the growing cycle — run the risk of failing. As previously stated, building an exclusion fence can keep deer out until you want them to begin consuming it.

15. FAILING TO USE CHEMICALS PROPERLY

Certain herbicides can help your food plots, but only if used correctly. Glyphosate, 2-4-D and Clethodim are common chemicals for maintaining food plots. Glyphosate is a nonselective herbicide that kills just about everything. Furthermore, 2-4-D is a systematic chemical, and is ideal for broadleaf weeds in grass-based plots. Clethodim is a grass-selective herbicide that doesn't harm broadleaf plants when used correctly.

16. PLANTING TOO CLOSE TO PROPERTY LINES

Placing a food plot on a property line is almost always ill-advised. This draws deer toward neighboring lands, increases the risk of someone shooting across the line, and more. Plant food plots away from property lines.

17. PLANTING TOO CLOSE TO PEOPLE

Other places that food plots shouldn't be close to include roadways and other well-traveled areas. Usually, unless in a setting where deer see human activity all day, every day, they are more likely to avoid these plots until after dark. This is especially true for mature bucks.

18. COMMITTING OPERATOR ERRORS

Most food plots require heavy machinery, including ATVs, tractors, etc. Obviously, unsafe or uneducated use of these can lead to mistakes. Broken equipment, injury and death are all possible. Operator errors also lead to issues within the food plot, such as planting too shallow or deep, planting when the soil is too wet, planting with no rain in the forecast, and more.

19. PESKY INSECTS

Bugs eat plants, and they love food plot sprouts. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bug species will target many of the available food plots species. It's best to be on the lookout for insect issues and respond accordingly.

20. RODENTS AND SMALL GAME

Likewise, rodents and small game can do the same. Ground squirrels, gophers, groundhogs, opossums, raccoons, skunks, squirrels and other

small mammals can destroy good plots. Sometimes, when and where permitted, management is needed.

21. LARGE-ANIMAL NUISANCES

Larger animals can impact plots, as well. Livestock that get out of fences can quickly destroy your hard work. Wild hogs cause millions of dollars of damage to food plots, too. Work diligently to prevent these issues, and when they do occur, respond accordingly. Repair fences to keep out livestock. Trap or shoot wild hogs.

22. SERIOUS DROUGHT

Lack of rain has killed more food plots than most things. There isn't anything food plotters can do to change the weather. However, in some situations, they can irrigate food plots. This takes a lot of effort, but most of the time, it's worth it.

23. UNRELENTING HEAT

Just as prolonged drought can kill food plots, so can unrelenting heat. Oftentimes, if it's very hot for extended periods, it can pull the moisture from the ground, or even damage plants directly. Again, there isn't much to do here except irrigate or replant.

24. UNCHECKED WEEDS

Some food plots species are hardy enough to outcompete weeds. Other

STAY CONNECTED.

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FOOD PLOT COMBOS

Food plot combos are popular in the wide world of deer management. However, I rarely plant a true blend of plants in the same plot. Oftentimes, the plants compete with one another, and many don't germinate or survive. Furthermore, these plants sometimes perform best with slightly different pH levels. So, the specific combos a land manager selects should be attuned to the setting. Some plants do better or worse in certain planting zones, though. Ensure the species you select works well for the area.

Because of the above reasons and more, I prefer to plant singular but complementary species adjacent to one another. By doing this, you maximize the yield of each given species, and offer multi-season attraction and forage for the deer herd.

EARLY SEASON: Soybeans and winter peas is an excellent one-two punch for September, October and beyond. Experience early and late-season attractiveness peaks.

PRE-RUT: Clover and oats are solid bets for this timeframe. They begin to ramp up in attractiveness during the pre-rut and continue performing well into the rut.

RUT: Chicory and turnips are solid bets for November, and even December. This selection is sure to draw deer during that window, and beyond.

LATE SEASON: Alfalfa and radishes are big-time deer foods. Alfalfa does well during the early season, but under the right circumstances, also during the late season. Radishes do, as well.

Regardless of the combos you go with, consider planning prior to planting. Plant species that peak during bow season closer to bow stands and blinds. Plant species that peak during gun seasons farther away, or closer to gun stands and blinds.

times, the weeds win. Oftentimes, food plotters must fight several

rounds of this. There are, however, ways to swing the fight in your favor.

Removing weeds prior to planting, and sometimes after the food plot begins growing, can give your plants a better chance at survival. Regardless, don't let unchecked weeds ruin the plot.

25. OVERHUNTING

Spending too much time hunting over a food plot will surely kill it. The plants will live on, but the deer will quit using it — at least during daylight. So, to prolong the quality of hunting in the area, don't overhunt food plots.

FOOD PLOT SAVES

Obviously, if detected early enough, the above problems can usually be mitigated. Despite the many different things that will kill a good food plot, it's possible to save these beautiful, lush, green stands of deer grub from destruction. Obviously, the best prescription is prevention. Understanding possible threats, knowing how to respond, and reacting accordingly is good medicine. But these proactive responses aren't possible in every situation.

That leaves us with alternatives. First, starting food plots in spring gives hunters additional time to address problems. If a spring food plot problem occurs, try to fix it. If that doesn't work, scrap it and replant in the fall.

If the problem occurs early enough, even fall plots can be replanted. If it's getting toward the later stages of sowing season, perhaps top-sow a fall plot with a seed that requires minimal effort. Good options are crimson clover and wheat. Or replant another fast-growing species. Then, chalk up another lesson learned to avoid next year.



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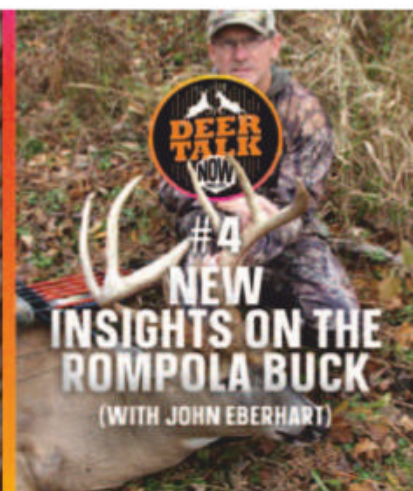
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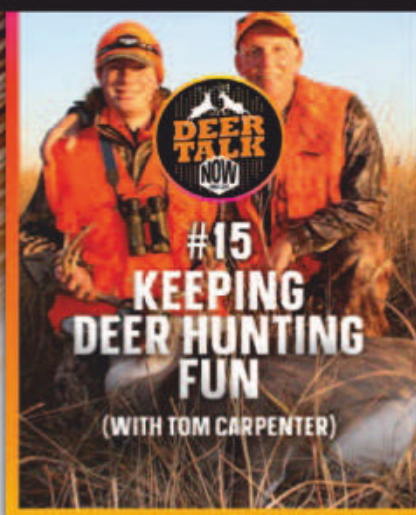




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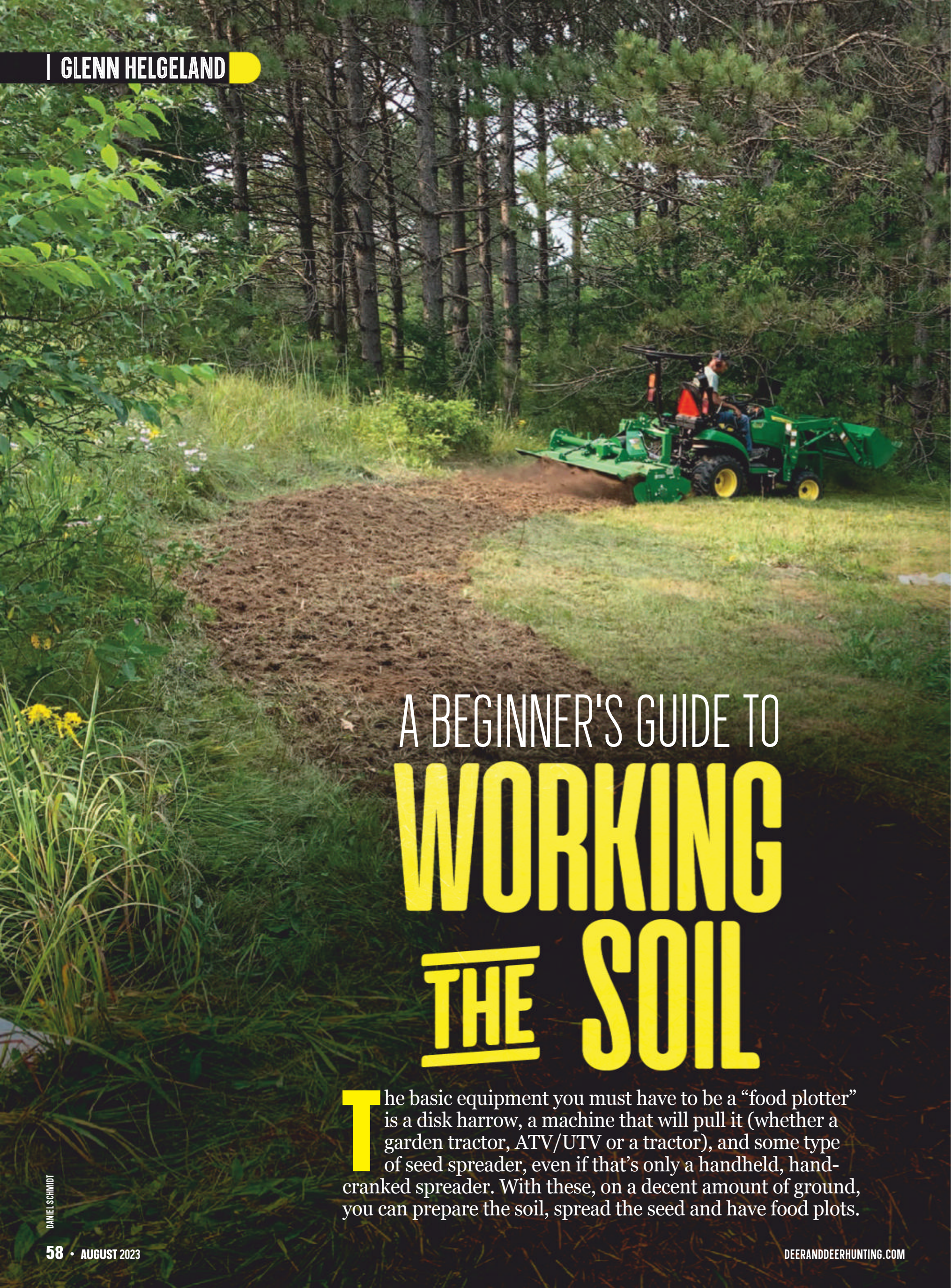
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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO WORKING THE SOIL

The basic equipment you must have to be a “food plotter” is a disk harrow, a machine that will pull it (whether a garden tractor, ATV/UTV or a tractor), and some type of seed spreader, even if that’s only a handheld, hand-cranked spreader. With these, on a decent amount of ground, you can prepare the soil, spread the seed and have food plots.

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There are implements outside these basic, minimal needs that aren't absolutely necessary, but would greatly advance your success if you had them.

Here's a look at some of them:

PLOWING: WHAT IS IT, AND WHY AND WHEN DO YOU DO IT?

Basic Moldboard Plow

The moldboard plow is designed to completely pull up the soil along with all of the weeds and other plants growing in it. The moldboard plow then turns the soil and buries the

unnecessary weeds and other plants under the soil. The moldboard plow easily prepares most types of soil for planting. Modern plowing machines have up to seven moldboards for fast and efficient preparation of large tracts of land because it automatically forms furrows with ridges for proper drainage of the soil. The hydraulic system of the tractor controls the action of the plow.

Chisel Plow

The chisel plow prepares the soil for planting without as much disturbance of soil. This plow loosens

soil, but unlike the moldboard plow it does not turn the soil. The plow prepares fields that do not require too much tilling. The chisel plow needs a powerful tractor because it causes considerable soil drag.

Technically, plowing is a type of tilling. Plowing furrows are six inches or more deep. Plowing also can expose dormant weed seeds to water and oxygen and shallow soil depths, and cause them to spring to life. You don't want this.

Plowing breaks up the blocky structure of the soil, which can aid in drainage and root growth. Plowing also buries organic matter, increasing decomposition and adding nutrients from the organic matter to the soil.

It's better to plow once a year, usually in the fall, so newly buried organic matter can decompose and enrich the soil. In the North, freezing and thawing of newly plowed soil also breaks up soil clods.

Plowing simply makes it easier to plant, but you will still need to till the soil, usually with a disk, to create a smoother planting surface.

DISKING: WHAT IS IT, AND WHY AND WHEN DO YOU DO IT?

Disking is an important tillage practice, even for farmers who manage crop production with reduced tillage. However, a disk is still included for soil preparation. Disking breaks up clods and surface crusts, thereby improving soil granulation, surface uniformity and reducing soil erosion. It is always performed shallower than plowing, at a depth of 10-15 cm (4-6 inches). Disk blades are round and can be notched or smooth edged. They are only a few inches apart and are in different diameter sizes.

By breaking down soil clods into smaller pieces, water penetrates more easily into the soil, increasing soil aeration, as well as enhancing the activity of the soil flora and fauna. The final result is a successful seedbed preparation ready for the next growing season. It ultimately has significant effects on both the soil and yield.

By using the best soil tillage practices, you can ensure well-prepared soil structure that will manage weeds, recycle plant nutrients, provide a soft mass for sowing, and a suitable surface for seeds. Disking is a soil preparation practice that usually



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PLANNING YOUR FOOD PLOT FOR HUNTING

There's a lot of prep work, thinking, planning and decisions you can – and **SHOULD** or **MUST** – do before you begin working the soil for a food plot.

- Shape and size of your intended plot.
- Soil test.
- Lime and fertilizer.
- Approach and exit to and from your treestand area(s) to hunt your food plot.
- A list of knowledgeable people and government agencies who can advise and help you.
- Search for soil-working equipment if you plan to do the work yourself.
- Your budget, time available and affordable costs.
- Nearby water source.

First, what's the location and size of your intended plot? Is it to be a staging area near a bedding area, part of a larger field, or someplace between a bedding area and a major food source? There can be relatively narrow plots you can shoot an arrow at deer across. There can be food plots very near or around the tree you have your treestand positioned in. How accessible is it? Will you need to cut some trees, saplings or brush to get to the area where you want to create a food plot?

Looking at these items in more depth:

SHAPE AND SIZE OF YOUR INTENDED PLOT.

You want to be able to shoot across the food plot, if at all possible. With the relatively limited range of a bow and arrow, this will mean a small plot or a long, skinny and winding larger plot. This also is the best shape for firearms hunting. Obviously, if you will be shooting a firearm, the plot can be larger.

The plot should have bends so that deer won't be able to see the entire food plot, and so they will feel more comfortable entering the plot. Deer like to enter a food plot where they feel protected. This will give you more close-range shot opportunities. Think of a plot shaped like a V or W.

Will your food plot be near ideal trees in which you can place treestands?

If you will have a relatively narrow plot, be sure enough direct sunlight can get to it. So will the plot need to be north-south or east-west or triangular? If any part of your plot will be in shade from neighboring trees, plant shade-tolerant seeds in shaded areas. Clover is good. Different plants that green up earlier in the spring than the plants you have seeded in the sunlight will make the plot attractive longer; planting fall brassicas will extend the plot's attractiveness later in the season.

SOIL TEST

This is a requirement. You need to know the quality of the soil, the mineral elements it has in good supply, and those it is short of. You need to know the soil's pH. (A pH of 6.5 to 7.0 is neutral.) A soil testing below 6.0 will need lime to increase the pH to the desired level. The soil test will tell you if you need to add fertilizer, and if so, the quantity and nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium (NPK) ratio to add.

How sandy is the soil? Will it lose water quickly? If the soil is in a low elevation, how wet is it? This will affect what you should and should not plant. Both factors will tell you what should be done.

APPROACH AND EXIT TO AND FROM YOUR TREESTAND AREA(S) TO HUNT YOUR FOOD PLOT.

First, you want to approach into the wind or quartering it, so deer that may be in the area now or later will not smell you. You do not want to enter on a game trail, that could leave an alarming human scent, even if you are bathed in human-scent neutralizer or masking scent. You want to enter quietly at any time, before or after daylight. Will you need to clear a trail so you can move quietly? If so, do this far before the season.

A LIST OF KNOWLEDGEABLE PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES WHO CAN ADVISE AND HELP YOU.

Get to know your county (or multiple county) extension agricultural agents. They can tell you something about your soils, and may have food plot programs

available. Get to know your county or area Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) people. The NRCS is within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

THE NRCS has a Pollinator Program that will plant forbs and grasses, and possibly other plants, that benefit bees, butterflies and birds – the pollinators – which the natural world needs and are in short supply in many areas. This is a cost-sharing program.

Most areas also have individuals who will do the necessary food plot field work – working the soil, planting and maybe more – for you. This work is not free, but it may be something to look into. There also are people who work with the NRCS and its Pollinator Program. The NRCS has different seed plans, depending on your soil and what you want to do with your food plot.

My friend Stan Godfrey works with such a person. Stan said his NRCS seed cost this year was \$475 per acre, and his planting cost was \$125 per acre. But he didn't have to do the work, which is a factor to consider.

SEARCH FOR SOIL-WORKING EQUIPMENT IF YOU PLAN TO DO THE WORK YOURSELF.

A boss at a former job had a favorite slogan: THINK BIG CHEAP. You should practice this when you search for suitable food plot equipment. Stan Godfrey got his cultipacker from a friend who no longer needed it. I got a drag section with adjustable teeth from a college friend who had to pull it out of weeds behind his machine shed. And so it goes. There's nothing wrong with scrounging.

Look at places that sell used farm equipment to see what's for sale and what it costs. Attend farm auctions; you may find good bargains there.

The size of your food plot(s) and its surroundings come into play here, too. A riding garden tractor and a 36-inch rototiller works well for me. I have small, accessible plots. If you're planning to create a food plot in a woodlot, the presence and location of trees and brush will affect what you can use. Can you remove blocking trees and brush to get medium-size or smaller equipment into the planned site, if that site is back in trees and brush?

YOUR BUDGET, TIME AVAILABLE AND AFFORDABLE COSTS.

How much can you spend on soil tilling equipment and the power to pull it? How much will you need to spend on lime, fertilizer and seed? What will it cost to spray the intended food plot to kill the weeds? How much time can you spend doing the spraying, tilling and planting? Should you hire some of the work and do some yourself? Should you hire all of it or none of it?

OPEN WATER SOURCE NEAR THE FOOD PLOT?

Deer need water, more than we often think. When deer can eat and drink in a setting where they feel comfortable, you will immensely improve the food plot's attractiveness to them, especially in early season hot weather and during the rut when deer are especially active. The water source doesn't need to be large, often a puddle or seep will work, but how long will it last? If you have to create a water source, position it to catch as much runoff water as possible when it rains. Create a couple of furrows that will direct water to the pond. You won't have to fill it as often. Line the water source with a rubber pond liner.

When a water source is to be next to a food plot or field, locate it at the same elevation or higher so that fertilizer, mineral and soil from the plot/field cannot wash into it. Flat or rolling land is a natural setting for a pond, or a created water hole above ground framed by logs, old railroad ties, sections of telephone or light poles, with a pond liner to ensure water doesn't leak out.

Consider picking a good treestand tree, then creating a pond 18–20 yards from the tree.

Open water, such as rivers, large ponds and lakes can be a protective barrier for deer, too.

– Glenn Helgeland

follows plowing the soil surface, whether it was deep or shallow soil tillage.

Disking is the preferred measure to manage plant residues from the previous crop, such as soybean and cornstalks. It chops and incorporates crop residue into the soil, promoting rapid decay of the plant material, making the soil easier to manage.

Another benefit with disking is the incorporation of agricultural lime into the soil when there is the need to increase soil pH. Tillage with disks supports the mixing of soil and lime, thereby reducing acid saturation in the topsoil layer and increasing soil health. This also provides ideal conditions for healthy and strong root development.

Soil moisture must be considered when planning soil disking. Disking when the soil is wet causes problems.

TILLING/TILLAGE: WHAT IS IT, AND WHY AND WHEN DO YOU DO IT?

Including deep tillage, medium-depth tillage and shallow tillage? Till or disk? Does it matter, and why?

Tillage/tilling is a generic term. It can be done with moldboard plows, adjustable-depth chisel plows, spring-tooth diggers, and any tool that can scratch and disturb the soil.

Deep tillage is probably best with adjustable-depth chisel plows. Chisel plows can be used differently to comply with different needs and conditions.

Chisel plowing in the fall gives you a jump on preparing your fields for spring planting and more. Chiseling incorporates the bulk of the crop residue into the soil to allow the natural processes to break it down, returning the residual nutrients to the soil. It leaves enough residue on the surface to reduce or eliminate wind and water erosion.

Chisel plowing in the spring breaks up the soil, incorporates crop residue, aerates the land and kills early sprouting weeds. In most soils, a follow-up pass with a disk readies the field for planting seeds.

Conventional plowing, disking, planting and harvesting always involves traveling the same direction up and down the field. Over time, the soil tends to reflect these linear farming techniques. Chisel plowing a field at an angle, 20 to 30 degrees from the usual direction, eliminates the linear affect and mixes the field's soil evenly.

Tilling is the practice of aerating the soil to permit moisture and air to permeate, allowing seeds to germinate,

encouraging root growth, controlling weed growth, and integrating fertilizers into the soil.

Tilling rakes over the soil to even out the area. Use tilling when you need to improve the quality of your soil and help your plants germinate and grow efficiently on even, smooth ground. In general, less disturbance of soil can lead to more organic matter and lower potential for soil erosion and compaction. No-till is generally the least intensive form of tillage, while conventional tillage is the most intensive form of tillage.

Land without a history of recent annual crops is often tough and needs to be tilled to prepare it for planting. However, excessive tillage can harm soil structure. Tillage of silt loam soil while wet increases soil bulk, density and has lasting negative effects on productivity.

The tilling process helps the soil become loose, which makes the nutrients present in the soil distribute evenly, and thus, improves aeration. It helps in bettering the tendency of the soil to retain water. It plays an essential part in removing unwanted weeds. It improves the microbiome of the soil. Tilling helps break down weed roots.

You should till fertilizer and other organic materials into the ground during the tilling process to allow the soil to become enriched with ingredients it may lack and to create a suitable growing environment for plants.

CULTIPACKING: WHAT IS IT, AND WHY AND WHEN DO YOU DO IT?

Cultipacking is especially important when you are planting small-seed crops (clover, alfalfa, chicory, brassicas) because cultipacking creates consistent seed-to-soil contact across the entire food plot, minimizing the number of seeds planted too deeply. Small seeds like these do not contain enough energy to germinate and reach the surface if they are buried more than 1/4 inch deep. All they need is to be firmly pressed into the surface of the soil without being buried.

A cultipacker is a heavy, iron roller, usually with iron cleats, that you roll over the soil after it has been disked, to firm and smooth out the seedbed. The cleats help the cultipacker get traction and roll so that it firms the soil evenly.

Cultipack again after broadcast planting seeds. The seeds will be pressed into the surface of the seedbed. Even if heavy rains follow, germination should be fine.

DANIEL SCHMIDT



Cultipackers are also valuable for large-seed crops that you broadcast, such as cereal grains (wheat, oats, rye), corn and soybeans. Disk, broadcast and then cultipack once. Larger seeds can tolerate being planted more deeply.

A section of chain-link fence won't work as well. Homemade drags tend to push and pile soil as they are dragged, leaving no seed in some spots and too much seed in others. I tried a homemade drag like this and gave it up.

Tractor-size and ATV models are available. Don't get a super heavy one. It is more difficult to attach and detach and load on a trailer. It may require a full-size ATV with good towing power, especially going up slopes.

Lighter cultipackers often are combination implements, a disk/cultipacker combo. Often, the disk gangs and cultipacker roller can be raised and lowered independently, so you can disk without cultipacking, cultipack without disking, or disk and cultipack at the same time. This tool is easier to attach and detach and handle because it's lighter, but it doesn't do as good of a job of rolling out high spots and leveling seedbeds as heavier cultipackers.

You can also buy seeder/cultipacker combos, like the Plotmaster and Firminator, that give you disks, seeders and cultipackers in one implement. But, they can be expensive.

OTHER TOOLS THAT WORK WELL: GARDEN TRACTORS

I have a John Deere garden tractor with enough power to pull a 36-inch, adjustable-depth DR tiller. Pick the rocks first if you plan to have a food plot in rocky ground; small tillers don't like rocks of any size.

This and a small tiller can get into many staging areas and other in-the-woods spots to create isolated, high-quality food plots deer will love. If you need to take out a few trees to clear an entry route, this work should be minimal.

Another option: Use a small lawn mower, brush-cutting tools, a garden tiller, shovels and hand rakes to clear, prepare and plant a small, relatively inaccessible area. You should be able to broadcast lime and fertilizer there with a handheld tool.

SMALL TILLERS

Small adjustable-depth tillers dig down to about a 4-inch depth, which should be good enough.

They are highly maneuverable. I have used mine to till 1/4-acre food plots, farm lanes and areas on the edge of my lawn. Deer love these areas.

"NO-TILL" PLANTING

No-till planting is a great method to produce a stand where the ground cannot be worked due to excessive rocks, stumps or other debris, a site where you cannot get equipment to, or for first-time food plotters who don't have the necessary equipment.

Planting no-till food plots for whitetails or turkeys, or planting without working the soil can be done, but choose the right crop. For the most part, you'll need to use small seeds that have a planting depth of 1/2 inch or less, such as clovers, brassicas, chicory, alfalfa and some cereal grains. Large seeds — corn, beans and peas — with a planting depth of an inch or more will likely need to be avoided unless

you have an implement that will bury the seeds to the appropriate depth.

There are three important steps in planting no-till food plots:

1) Be sure you choose a suitable location. There should be enough sunlight hitting the plot, it should be receiving adequate moisture and the soil should be suitable to sustain plant life.

Remove some canopy trees before attempting to create a food plot back in the woods. Four hours of direct sunlight is the absolute minimum; six hours per day or more is better.

Since this is no-till, you won't be working lime into the soil. An application of pelletized lime may help, but it will be important to choose a crop that will grow in the pH that you have.

2) Be sure to eliminate the existing vegetation. If there is a lot of plant mass to kill and remove, consider planning a no-till plot a year in advance and begin killing weeds the year prior. Best results will be achieved by spraying grasses when they are young and thriving, so the poison is readily absorbed.

3) Be sure seeds make contact with the soil. For good germination, the seeds must be planted to the appropriate depth.

If there is a mat of vegetation, like a layer of sod, it must be removed. The seeds need to make contact with the soil. Decaying plant material will rob nitrogen and other nutrients from new seedlings. An ATV/UTV with a harrow-type drag will work fine to remove dead plant residue. A lawn dethatcher pulled behind an ATV or tractor also works well.

For late-summer planting, there often will be tall green plants or grass growing so you may need to mow before you spray your herbicide. If you mow, wait a few days before you spray the herbicide. Mowing will shock the plants into dormancy. You want the targeted plants growing robustly so they suck the poison into their root systems.

The type of soil (clay through the spectrum to sand) and weather conditions will have an influence on germination rate. Depending upon combinations of soil types and current weather and rain conditions, there are many seed germination and growth scenarios that can happen.

The ultimate no-till planting method would be a no-till drill. It saves time during a busy time of the year, prevents soil erosion, increases yield, lowers costs and is better for the soil. A no-till grain-drill can make the difference in being able to plant during a wet year and planting on inclines. (With tilled soil, the slope would have caused severe erosion.)

A no-till plot may not look as pretty as a well-prepared seedbed, but you can still produce tons of forage for wildlife.





ONE SHACK. SEVERAL GENERATIONS. 77 YEARS' WORTH OF
DEER HUNTING MEMORIES. **TEXT & PHOTOS BY AL CURTIS**

TRADITION & HERITAGE



Five members of the original Buckskin Camp pose for a photo outside the shack in November 1946, after making a 200-mile drive in what appears to be an early 1930s Chevrolet or Plymouth coupe. Notes on the back of the photo read: "From left: Art, Byron, Rudy, Bill and Grandpa Valeria."

PHOTO COURTESY OF AL CURTIS

What is deer camp? Well, it's more often a state of mind than an actual location. True, like most hunting camps throughout North America, a deer camp is simply someplace to provide shelter. They may be quite spartan or elaborate. The number of curtains on the windows and rugs on the floor depends on how tolerant the wives might be of mosquitoes and wood ticks. Many deer hunting shacks double as summer weekends for the family. This ensures that the "shack" will remain in good condition and generally free of winter hiding rodents that make noise at night.

And, too, some deer camps are spartan, often makeshift, endeavors.

I have a good friend that uses a wall tent. It sounds crazy for northern Wisconsin, but he does it. He, his son, and grandson continue the tradition his father started. A little extra work turns out to be a comfortable abode. A Coleman lantern and stove, small sheet-iron woodstove set up in the corner and a square of protecting sand provides the basics. After all, how much luxury does a hardy nimrod need?

Shacks used for deer hunting are common in the Northeast and Upper Great Lakes regions. They might be a renovated logging company shed. Or a couple of old school busses. Or even a modified shipping container. Whatever the origin, each will leave its own contribution of tradition and heritage.

And boatloads of memories.

Maybe a long line of family or a group of neophytes learning the scope of new and lasting life behavior. The magnitude of comradeship, respect, cooperation, and how to enjoy the outdoors will vary within each shack. It is there for all and prevails in hunting shacks to become tradition. As a life experience it can't be beaten. Hunting shacks for any species all have similar reasons for being. First, the shack needs to be in or

adjacent to an environment that supports the species hunted. When used for other than hunting, a new set of factors comes into the equation. When only a male endeavor, the shack only needs the basics. When it doubles for nonhunters, it must provide more of the amenities, no dirty floors and rodent-infested sleeping pads.

Sometimes hard to understand and hard to admit, improvements will make the shack more comfortable for the user that arrives with only some beer, a simple menu, a rifle or two and heavy attire that has been out on the clothesline for a few days.

Despite an inborn trend toward male ability to tolerate inconvenience, some simple frills are honestly enjoyed. Not to be admitted — but enjoyed nonetheless. Especially on a cold 4:30 a.m. as one crawls out of a warm sleeping bag. Hopefully Tim has been up and has the coffee perking and a chunk in the Round Oak.

As a longtime participant of hunting trips, it would be a better world if our leaders would look and follow our example. Oh well. It seems as if our statesmen have all gone “out to lunch.”

INTRODUCTION TO THE BUCKSKIN

I have decades of fond memories of a place we called “the cabin” for many years. We later renamed it “The Buckskin.” This tradition began in 1945 by family friend Art Walters. Initially it was to be a hunting cabin, but fortune smiled on the enterprise, and it became much more. Although the following pages are primarily related to deer hunting, The Buckskin has contributed much more.

Although Walters is not related to me, his son married my sister, so we became connected. My kids called him Grandpa as we became acquainted and visited The Buckskin.

Art liked to hunt whatever he could. To hunt white-tailed deer in the mid-1900s, one had to go north, as the species was hard to find anywhere else. As a child, I can remember Pa driving extra miles on the trip to my grandparents to sample Grandma's cooking of the old red rooster. Maybe we would see the deer that was reported to be around Mr. Mountford's back pasture. The names of northern cities such as Phillips, Phelps, Hayward, Eagle River, and others were destinations for neighbors that owned a .30-30 and had kids to do the chores at home. Grandpa Walters, his family and cronies picked the Eagle River area for some reason, now a part of history. After a few years of finding places to stay, he decided to get his own hunting shack. In 1945, there were still large chunks of land that had been returned to the counties when taxes were not paid.

The various cut-and-run forestry operations left land parcels that could be purchased by folks willing to pay a small fee and assume the tax responsibility. Grandpa Walters did that and purchased 200 acres along the Deerskin River. Most of it was recovering forest, but Paul Bunyan had left a few large pines and a beautiful cabin site along the river. One of the largest white pines had a strong branch growing rather horizontally and it became the final resting place for many Northwoods bucks. Much more fitting than some buck pole of discarded telephone company junk.



OLD-SCHOOL DEER RIFLES

Old-school deer camps are cool, but old-school deer rifles might be cooler! We've asked our resident gun experts, and although they cannot say with certainty, they're confident the guns from this Buckskin Camp photo are (from left): an **1895 WINCHESTER** (95% confidence); **TWO BOLT-ACTION 1903 SPRINGFIELDS (OR 1917 ENFIELDS)**; **LEVER-ACTION WINCHESTER 1894**; and possibly a **WINCHESTER 1886 CENTENNIAL** (quite possibly chambered in .45-75).

UP IT GOES

Building a cabin takes work and planning. Two hundred miles with the old Plymouth and trailer was a long trip, even if gasoline was only 19 cents a gallon. Grandpa Walters was hit by polio as a young man but made up for any physical problem with lots of determination. He was also lucky to find helpful neighbors in the area. Building a cabin 200 miles away and holding a job in the city took lots of planning and hard work.

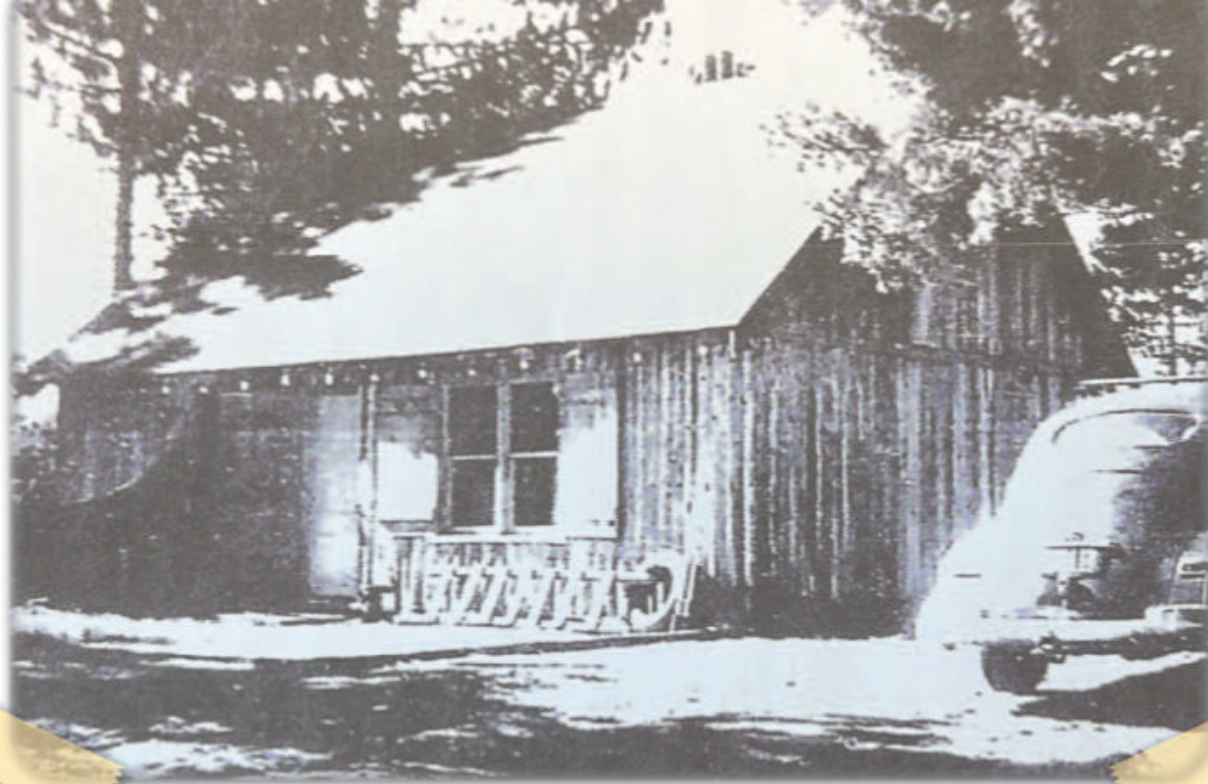
To help get things going, Tom McFarland came into the picture. An accomplished handyman who could work in very adverse conditions. None of us can remember much about how he got things done. He started in the winter cutting and skidding logs from the swamp west of the cabin. He stayed in a tent and used a blind horse named Queenie. Queenie had a simple shelter of canvas and slab wood. Until the cabin was framed and enclosed, Tom and Effie lived in a tent. Grandpa Walters and others kept them supplied and lent a hand when possible. Bill and Rudy Valeria often had a hand in the heavy work. Good neighbors!

A portable mill was set up at the cabin site to process logs Tom brought out of the swamp. Foley's swamp is the result of a prehistoric glacial pothole and supplied the timber for the cabin. The walls were half-sawed white cedar, put up vertically with sills and plates of white pine. The structure frame and rafters were also white pine.

Tom finished the interior cupboards, windows and doors. This was finished on a 20'x26' slab of concrete that still supports the cabin with no cracks. The Valerias had a motor-driven mixer to use. It wasn't far to the Deerskin River for water, and sand came from a knoll west of the site.

A sand-point well was driven at one end of the cabin, and a good supply of water was available in the kitchen. It served well for many years, but like all sand points, it had to be replaced. It was only 16 feet deep, and the pipe was put down in 3-foot sections, so the change could be made in the cabin.

A simple pipeline ran out from a small sink to a barrel and a bed of small rocks to drain wastewater.



His plan for the layout worked very well. Numerous folks have made improvements in the years since, but the main building has survived many Northern Wisconsin winters, and served as a happy abode for hunters and summer tourists.

Three small bedrooms made room for 12 people, providing some were younger and agile enough to get into the top bunks.

TIME TO HUNT

The first hunt from The Buckskin took place in November

1946. I can't find any info on what happened that year, but there are a few notes about the years following. I joined the crew in 1950.

We had a house full, 16 people in all. It was an either-sex deer season, and we took home a trailer load: 16 licenses and 13 deer. Ted Amyx, brother Hugh and I didn't need to clean any powder from our rifle barrels. My future wife Marlene and my sister (she shot a buck), had to sleep in the top bunk above Grandma Walters. I, brother Hugh, Tex and Byron slept

NOVEMBER 1946

NOV. 1, 1946: The first Basketball

Association of America game sees the New York Knicks beat the Toronto Huskies, **68-66**.

NOV. 5, 1946: John F. Kennedy elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

NOV. 6, 1946: Karol Wojtyla (future Pope John Paul II) holds his first Mass as a newly ordained Catholic priest.

NOV. 9, 1946: **NO. 1** ranked college football team Army battles **NO. 2** Notre

Dame before **74,000** spectators at Yankee Stadium. The game ends in a **0-0 TIE**, ending Army's 25-game winning streak.

NOV. 15, 1946: Slugger Ted Williams is named AL MVP after leading the Red Sox to the pennant.

NOV. 21, 1946: Harry Truman becomes 1st U.S. President to travel in a submerged submarine.

NOV. 23, 1946: Five deer hunters (see photo on article lead) gather at the Buckskin deer shack on opening day of Wisconsin's gun-deer season, wearing the newly mandatory red clothing (first required in 1945). The five men are among only **201,061** who bought deer licenses that year. Statewide, **55,276** bucks are harvested. The Buckskin was one of the first modern hunting camps to allow women. By 1950, the shack was home to **16** hunters (full capacity) and included husband-and-wife duos, family members and friends.

NOVEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

in the attic with the hibernating bats. It seems that Grandma Walters didn't trust a group of college guys and two young women, although both potential unions are now past 60 years and counting.

The early 1950s found the young guys doing service for Uncle Sam. My brother and I did a tour with the "Semper Fi" troops, while Byron and Tex were in the Army. After time of service, we all finished college and spread out in different directions. Hugh and I settled in Northern Wisconsin, Tex went to the western part of the state and Byron started farming.

I settled in a town closer to the cabin and was able to use the area more than the others. My brother's family and mine shared the cabin many times. Lifestyles and southern deer populations reduced the need to drive north, so some friends and I would use the cabin on Thanksgiving week. As teachers, this was a handy situation for a long weekend. When my son Dennis started to hunt, I didn't want to throw a rookie in with a large group of men, so the nickel limit poker games went out with red and black wool jackets.

The surrounding area provided good hunting, but the lure of hunting from The Buckskin was greater. It's kind of a man thing in keeping days past. The big woods, away from others, good hunting 100 yards from the door, cooking on the wood stove, and the good times a group of hunters can share in a hunting shack. With the passing of Grandpa Walters to a greater hunting area, his edict that, "The cabin was built for hunting and the boys could use it if they wanted," has prevailed.

As time went on, the clientele changed for many reasons. It evolved to a more permanent program and has prevailed for many years. Retirement and intended vacations added days in the woods. Harley Adams and Will have passed on to the big woods in the sky. When Harley left, his son-in-law Dick left also. Dick always brought a large pan of sweet rolls that his wife Sue made.

Sometimes a special friend was included, but not often. Bill Austin was welcomed for a few years. He could shoot better than play cribbage, which was lucky when the big 8-pointer came out in front of his stand. Another good friend, Bob Casper, was a regular for a while.

The current gang consists of me, the old-timer, my son Dennis, good friend of many years Roger, his son Paul and grandson Derek, and Tim and his son Nick. Dennis is beginning to take up some responsibilities. His right hand to make sure the hunt goes well is Tim. I have even given up some of the cooking jobs to Den and Tim. Not an easy job when there are hungry hunters around.

Paul is a relative newcomer, only been with the group for 20 years. His main contribution is chopping wood for the cookstove (when he hasn't broken the ax handle).

Derek is now a rookie engineer in Minnesota. That's three generations of Brandts.



Tim's son Nick has a new job and a girlfriend. Tim likes getting up early, and during hunting days 4:30 a.m. comes soon.

However, Tim usually has coffee perking for the "old swamp buck." Seniors get some consideration occasionally.

All we have written here are many of the times that enrich our lives. Hopefully those who don't hunt or spend time in the woods may have other activities that fill their lives with enrichment. Our story does this for us, as it has for many years and many folks. May it continue as in the past, and may we all do our part to maintain the heritage given to us.

Yes, things changed with time. Two hundred miles seemed longer each year. Age tended to slow legs and deepens the snow. Eventually, the gang of hunters became history. Byron returned from a tour in the Army and spent his time with dairy cows, corn and hay. Added to natural aging and time, the lure of the North Woods hunt waned. Then, too, the deer population began to fill in the woodlots of central counties. The property passed from Grandpa Walters to his son and daughter. His three grandchildren bought his daughter's half and were gifted their father's half.

SOMEWHAT IN CONCLUSION

I have referred to several folks that are and were a part of this story. It is my wish to remember them in more detail as they have been a part of history. The only one I would mention special is Grandpa Walters. Art initiated the idea of The Buckskin, but collectively everyone else made it work for so many years. You see, The Buckskin easily became a special place for everyone. "Tradition and Heritage" became a part of every activity at this beloved deer camp.

— Cpl. Al Curtis was a high school conservation teacher for 35 years and a director of the outdoor education. Now 94, he served stateside for the U.S. Marines during the Korean War from 1951 to 1953.





Fat-tire e-bikes allow you to travel uneven terrain with little to no problem.

E-BIKE REVOLUTION

Maybe you've seen e-bikes cruising along your morning commute or down a winding urban trail, but did you know that there's a growing contingency of hunters that now consider their e-bike a critical piece of gear? Ask them why and they'll all tell you the big benefit of a high-quality electric mountain bike is all due to one game-changing thing: access. Of course, there are several other reasons why the e-bike generation is so perfectly paired with deer hunting, but it's hard to overlook that when you're deep in the woods navigating rough terrain, an e-bike is simply the tool for the job.

5

**WAYS AN E-BIKE CAN
MAKE YOUR HUNT
MORE ENJOYABLE.**



Scouting and checking cameras just got a whole lot easier.

1. GET DEEP INTO ROUGH TERRAIN

A pedal assist bike can get you deep into your favorite remote hunting grounds easier than your truck and your four-wheeler. Shaving hundreds of pounds off your access rig unlocks incredible opportunities for scouting, placing trail cameras, and even finding a new sweeping viewpoint. And with high-quality, smooth, and burly front

suspension, an e-bike does all that while lowering impact and climbing over roots, clacking through talus fields, and swishing through the tall grass. Plus, the hydraulic brakes have you covered if things get squirrely.

The fat tires on e-bikes paired with a range of more than 20 miles (and that's without extra batteries) helps it thrive in all conditions — from crunching snow to sandy side-hilling.

2. STAY STEALTHY

True, we've all ripped around a corner in a four-wheeler and surprised an unsuspecting deer. But imagine what hears that four-stroke engine coming from a mile away and is long gone by the time you approach. A high-quality electric hunting bike is the perfect mix of power and stealth and could completely boost the success of a scouting mission or get you to your duck blind or treestand without spooking nearby game. In some cases, a pedal-assist hunting bike can even be quieter than walking.

3. REDUCE YOUR SCENT TRAIL

An electric hunting bike is not without scent — you'll likely carry with you the smell of chain lube and cleaner, tube sealant, and more minor detectable smells. But compare it to truck diesel, your four-wheeler gas, oil, transmission fluid, exhaust — you get the picture. In many cases, reducing your scent profile is just as important as staying quiet and stealthy. A well-maintained electric bike eliminates countless scent variables and has the power to completely change an outcome.

4. CARRY LOTS OF GEAR

No matter if you're headed out for a quick scout mission or dropping into a multi-day hunt, with the right accessories, an e-bike can handle lots of gear with ease without sacrificing much in the way of stealth or maneuverability. A full range of durable, waterproof on-bike packs are ideal for carrying dry layers, cooking gear, hearty meals and — of course — coffee. Add a rack for a tent and extra water. The real toting capability, though, comes from bomber single- or two-wheeled cargo trailers.

5. EASILY HAUL YOUR DEER OUT

No one will argue that a more remote hunt is simply better — fewer people mean more active deer and an



Cargo baskets are ideal for all-day shed-hunting adventures.



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all-around better experience. That is, until it's time to pack out a big buck. Northern bucks can exceed 250 pounds on the hoof. That's no joke if you find yourself on a solo hunt packing it out 100 pounds at a time on foot. An electric hunting bike can completely change the experience and save hours and hours of time between kill shot and getting the meat into the freezer. Some e-bikes are designed specifically to be stable and easy to load even when you're deep in the backcountry. The three-way adjustable rack system can be laid flat or angled to accommodate awkwardly shaped loads. And when you're finally headed back to the truck, the strong connection to the electric hunting bike keeps things securely in place.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST E-BIKE

Simply switching to an electric hunting bike can help boost a hunting experience in a notable way. But that's certainly not to say that all electric hunting bikes are made equal. When looking for the ideal e-bike for your style of whitetail



Most walk-in areas are bike friendly, but be sure to check local regulations before you go.

hunting and terrain considerations, it's important to be sure the bike you're looking at has the basic build to boost your success.

Consider your desired range: will 20 miles of battery life be enough to get you out and back? If not, look at the extra battery options and be sure to pack enough power to see you safely to your car. Next, look at gears. Are you pedaling through flat fields to access trout streams or a marshy duck blind? Maybe a single speed will suit your needs. But if you're heading up into the hills,

consider an option that has eight, maybe even nine gears. Hydraulic disc brakes are renowned as the safest, most efficient technology, but mechanical brakes work well, too, in lower-impact situations.

— Content courtesy of QuietKat.
For more information on e-bikes and accessories, visit quietkat.com.



10
YEARS

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The sun isn't up yet. You're standing beside your truck double-checking your pockets when you hear a sound behind you that you don't expect. Your light is still in your pack. Your gun is still in its case.

You turn around to investigate the sound, met by the last thing you expect: a thief.

Maybe they have a gun, maybe a knife, but here you are, caught off-guard and unaware.

As you read that, did you see yourself on the lane to your hunting property or the gas station you stop at on the way to hunt?

Carrying while hunting may seem, at best, redundant. At worst, you may think it unnecessary. In reality, you're often putting yourself in situations where, if you weren't a hunter, you would absolutely want to be armed.

As a hunter and concealed-carry license holder, there are some special considerations you need to take into account.

CONCEALED CARRY *WHILE HUNTING*

WHAT IS THE USCCA?

The United States Concealed Carry Association was formed to offer education, training and self-defense liability insurance to concealed carry permit holders across the country. While we may sometimes see the news stories of good Samaritans using their self-defense weapon to help save lives, we rarely see the turmoil of the legal minefield they are about to enter. Knowing what to expect and how to respond in the seconds, hours and days after a self-defense incident is critical to an outcome in your favor. The USCCA blends a network of self-defense attorneys, firearms instructors and industry-leading resources like Concealed Carry Magazine, to give its members all the resources they need to be responsibly armed Americans. To learn more, visit WWW.USCONCEALED CARRY.COM.

WHY WOULD I EVEN NEED TO CARRY WHILE HUNTING?

Hunters go into remote areas before daybreak and after night has fallen. Often hunters are using public lands that are open to anyone. Even on private land, the threat of trespassers is ever present.

We can hope that in most instances these interactions are

innocent enough, but we can't pretend that the criminal element isn't often looking for exactly the kind of spot that a big buck might call home.

In the woods, we can't be ignorant to the possibility of encountering a marijuana grow operation or meth lab. Maybe these criminals set up shop after our last trip to the woods. It may be that we are tracking an animal into a part of the property where we typically don't go. How we get there doesn't matter nearly as much as how we will get out.

As political tensions rise, we also need to be mindful of the possibility of having an encounter with an anti-hunting extremist. Hopefully, your state has hunter harassment laws on the books that have helped curb this kind of dangerous activity. But even where these laws exist, as more people assume positions at either end of the political spectrum, you may well find yourself being threatened or harassed while on your hunt.

How far some of these people are willing to go is truly unsettling.

We also need to think about the entire arc of the hunt. How often do

you leave the house and go straight to the woods and straight back? Do you stop for gas? Food? Rest stop? How many of those places would you typically be carrying, but you don't think about it when you go hunting?

The scenario we opened this article with could play out virtually anywhere. We are up early, out late, often alone. We present exactly the kind of target the criminal element is looking for. If we would carry when we aren't hunting, why wouldn't we carry when we are?

IS IT LEGAL TO CARRY WHERE YOU HUNT?

Chances are, it is. According to the folks at the United States Concealed Carry Association, only six states restrict the licensed carrying of a handgun while gun hunting, and only nine have such restrictions while bowhunting. Largely, these are some of the stricter states of the Northeast, notoriously gun unfriendly Hawaii and California, with Nebraska being the lone flyover state that restricts carrying a handgun while bowhunting.

While the USCCA is one of, if not the most trusted clearinghouse





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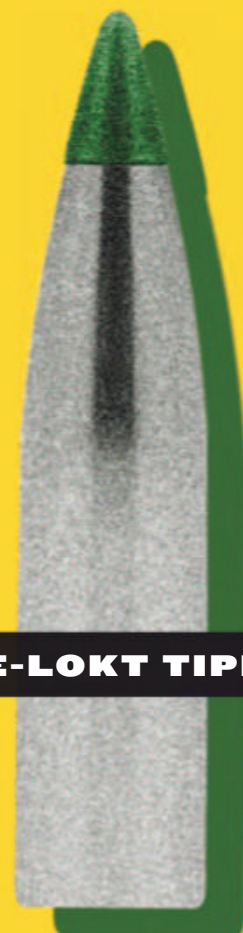


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If you're like me, your first gun was a Mossberg 500. Maybe you have a few of the popular Mossberg rifles of recent vintage in your safe. The Mossberg line of pistols introduced over the last handful of years, though, may be the best kept secret in the firearms industry. When the MC1 first came on the scene, I loved the way it fit my hand, but wasn't a big fan of the single-stack capacity. When the MC2c came out shortly after, I knew I had my next EDC. The 13- or 15-round capacity was exactly what I was looking for, and the ergonomics and feel matched my hand perfectly. I'm up over 1,000 rounds through my own MC2c now, with no jams or failures. If you're looking for something even a little more compact, the new MC2sc may well be an option for you. WWW.MOSSBERG.COM

for concealed carry information, they would be the first to tell you to always consult your local laws yourself, to ensure you fully understand exactly what is required to be fully in compliance with all state and local ordinances related to concealed carry. I would tell you to do the same. Citing this article won't get you very far in a criminal defense case should you end up on the wrong side of the law.

With that being said, with more states than ever voting to enact permitless carry for all legal residents, what just a generation ago was a quagmire of red tape and restrictions is now much easier to understand. So, unless you call somewhere like New Jersey or Rhode Island home, there's about an 85% chance that you are well within your right to carry while hunting, even while bowhunting.



**WE HAVE
GIANT
BEARS**

ABOVE RIGHT PHOTO: "I went on my first bear hunt with Saskatchewan Big Buck Adventures LTD and what a hunt it was. I saw multiple bears on every sit, and was amazed at how quietly they could walk through the woods. On the night I harvested my big bore he was the ninth bear into the bait that night. Ryley's bear hunts are world class." -Brad Rucks, *Deer & Deer Hunting*

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SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CARRYING WHILE HUNTING

Carry Style

On a daily basis, I'm an inside-the-waistband at the 4 o'clock position carrier. This offers the best balance of comfort and concealment when I'm out to eat, shopping or running errands. On the drive to and from the woods, this makes the most sense as well.

But does it work for carrying DURING the hunt?

Spend much time at all talking to or working with concealed carry trainers and they will tell you that one of the most common issues people run into is clearing the cover garment in the event that they need to draw their sidearm. This is the case while wearing a light sweatshirt or button-down. What about a base layer, mid-weight and over-jacket? Wearing bibs? Forget about it.

Early in the season you may well be able to switch over to your hunting pants from whatever you wore to the woods and carry without much difference. But as the season drags on and layers get added, you may need to make other arrangements.

I'm not much for off-body carry, so I try to avoid adding my sidearm to my hunting pack, although that is one of the more popular solutions. I've experimented with shoulder holsters that I can wear under my jacket, and I've personally come to prefer this method as it keeps my sidearm exactly where I want it — within reach and well concealed.

Weight

None of us like adding extra weight to the pack or our person for those walks to the stand or all-day stalks. It may end up making you opt for a second or third choice of carry pistol while you are hunting.

For years, my every day carry pistol was a subcompact SCCY CPX-1. It was easily concealed and very dependable. I've beat the crap out of my SCCY and would put it up against guns costing five times as much.

These days though, I opt for

the higher capacity and slightly larger profile of the compact profile. For me, the type of carry I do, and my hunting technique, the compact offers the best balance of concealability, weight, capacity and comfort.

Training

We tell hunters all the time to "practice how you hunt." The same is true of concealed carry. You must practice how you carry. Range time is great. It's invaluable. So is dry-fire training. But you must train how you carry, and that means training with your hunting gear on if you are going to carry while hunting.

We already touched on the difficulty that additional layers can add to getting a gun cleared and drawn. If you're used to carrying IWB or OWB, but put your sidearm in your pack while hunting, how quickly can you remove your pack, open it, locate your pistol, and get into a defensive shooting position? Can you do it safely? Have you ever tried?

Honestly, if you carry concealed now, how often do you practice clearing and drawing in your everyday dress?

Just as hunters owe it to the animals we chase to be as educated and effective as we can be, if you are going to make the decision to carry a defensive firearm, you owe it to yourself, and those around you, to make yourself a responsible, ethical, well-trained armed American.

The reality is, a considerable number of concealed carry license holders are also hunters. However, in talking to hunters over the years, rarely are these license holders carrying when they go to the woods.

We take precautions with harnesses in the stand, first-aid kits in our packs and emergency kits in our trucks.

Why aren't we exercising our human right to self-defense?



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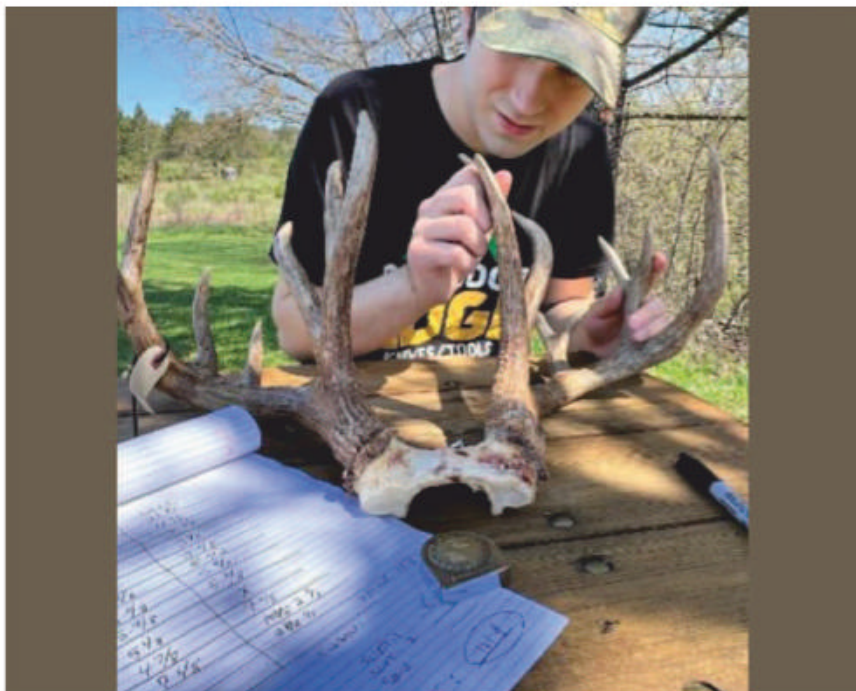
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FACEBOOK

WHAT A BUCK!

SHARED BY DEER AND DEER HUNTING

#WEAREPURSUIT



PURSUIT CHANNEL ADDS MORE DISTRIBUTION

Earlier this year, Pursuit Media, LLC, announced a new partnership with free global streaming media platform, Plex, that makes Pursuit UP content available to millions of new streaming viewers through a new FAST channel lineup.

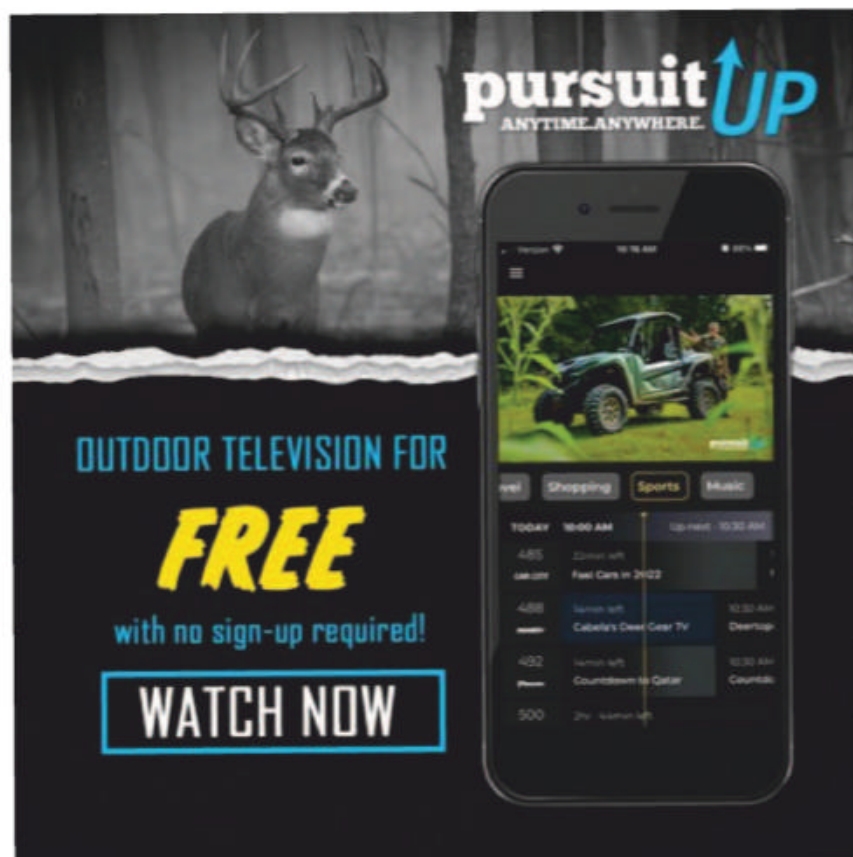
Pursuit Media, LLC and Plex have reached an agreement that will bring Pursuit's streaming channel, Pursuit UP, to Plex TV's lineup of channels. Plex has an impressive monthly active user base (MAU) of 16 million. Available on almost any device including Apple, Android, Smart TVs, smartphones, gaming consoles, and more, Plex is the first and only streaming platform to offer free ad-supported movies, shows, and live TV together with the ability to

easily search and save any title ever made, no matter where it lives – making it a significant distribution addition for Pursuit UP.

Catering to the outdoor community and America's heartland, the Pursuit Channel delivers top quality programming to its viewers related to hunting, fishing, and shooting. Created in 2007, the channel is currently carried by several major cable and satellite TV providers, and enjoys a strong and growing following on several streaming platforms, as well.

"This is another wonderful achievement for us here at Pursuit Channel," said Rusty Faulk, Founder and CEO of Pursuit Media. "We are so proud of our network and all our programming partners that help us promote conservation and celebrate the outdoors lifestyle that we love so dearly. Having Pursuit UP added to Plex's amazing platform to reach even more people with our message is truly a blessing," he continued.

"The addition of Pursuit UP to our FAST channel lineup caters to a passionate and engaged audience that is often underserved by mainstream media, providing them with a wealth of content related to the outdoors to explore and enjoy," said Shawn Eldridge, Vice President of Business Development and Content at Plex.



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BEST BURGERS EVER!



Burgers are hitting the grill about as quickly as home runs leaving baseball stadiums and fireflies lighting up summer, and it's pretty doggone hard to argue with a tasty burger.

Everyone has their own method of preparing and cooking burgers. We get that. No one has “the” way to make what everyone else would say is the greatest burger in the world. But we can agree there are some burgers we flat-out love with vivid memories, and others we never would put toward our securely pursed lips again.

Great venison burgers start when your deer is on the ground. There's no denying that. Getting your deer cleaned and cooled is critical, especially during the opening weeks of the season, when it's still hot. We've heard the old

stories about Pee-Paw showing off his buck around town with it on the hood or tailgate. Well, don't be like Pee-Paw. Get your buck to the processor or your skinning shed, get it going and get it cooled down.

When you're dealing with different cuts, it's time to grind. If you're a do-it-yourself hunter, use a sufficiently powerful grinder with different plates to give you a coarse or fine grind. Weston makes a couple of good models of grinders that have different plates, along with sausage stuffers. Add whatever amount of fat to your venison, if desired, and any other spices or

ingredients you might want while grinding and mixing.

Form patties in uniform sizes, or use a Weston burger press. Consistent sizes help with cooking time and doneness. Too small and they burn before the larger ones get done, and a giant double patty might not be cooked thoroughly. Make them about 3/4- to 1-inch thick, and put a thumbprint divot in the middle. This helps the patty keep its shape during the grilling process.

With a medium-high heat setting on the grill and an oiled grate to help reduce sticking, put the patties on and close the lid. If you're a burger watcher, it might take a little longer to cook. No biggie, though. A critical deal is to leave them alone. No poking, lifting, cutting, forking or anything. Let them cook, and when they release easily from the grate with a spatula, it's time to flip.

Flip once. Remember the no poking-lifting-cutting thing? Yeah, same deal. If you cut open a burger to see if it's done, whatever great flavorful juices are inside will go trickling into the flame. Don't do that. Let them cook for about five minutes for well-done or longer if you want them done through. When they release easily, add any cheese to quickly melt or a brush of a final quick marinade, if desired.

Remove the patties and cover them under tinfoil on a plate. Toss the buttered buns on the grill for a quick minute to give them some love. Combine a patty, whatever else you want — condiments, onions, mushrooms, greens, bacon (mmm, bacon), a fried egg — and enjoy.

It's summertime. What could be better than venison burgers in summer?

MARINADES AND RUBS

Summer also is a great time for cranking up the smoker to create some delicious roasts, ribs, shoulders or sausages. If you planned ahead and have some deer shoulders or roasts to use, that's great. If not, a good beef brisket, ribs, pork roast or some store-bought sausages are great options before deer season gets here.

There seems to be two camps for marinades and rubs. One loves a lot of various flavors, herbs, spices

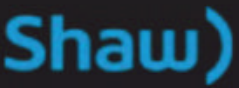
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PHOTO & TEXT BY JACK HENNESSY



Venison Meatballs In Korean Cranberry Sauce

INGREDIENTS (FOUR-SIX SERVINGS):

MEATBALL MIX:

- + 32 ounces ground venison, 16 ounces ground country pork
- + 3-1/2 teaspoons paprika
- + 3 teaspoons kosher salt
- + 2-1/2 teaspoons fennel seeds
- + 2-1/2 teaspoons granulated garlic
- + 2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- + 1 teaspoon onion powder
- + 1/4 cup ice-cold sherry cooking wine
- + Sunflower or peanut oil for cooking

CRANBERRY SAUCE:

- + Two 14-ounce cans whole-berry cranberry sauce
- + 1 cup hoisin sauce
- + 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
- + 1/2 cup chicken stock
- + 1 teaspoon soy sauce

SUGGESTED GARNISHES:

- + Sliced scallions
- + Sesame seeds

DIRECTIONS:

When meat is ice cold, mix it together with meatball spices. Once decently mixed, add ice-cold sherry and continue mixing until tacky (total of 3-5 minutes of mixing). Form into small meatball-size balls (approximately 2 ounces apiece).

To make sauce, add all ingredients to a medium saucepan and simmer. Mix often.

To cook meatballs, in a large (preferably cast iron) skillet, heat a thin layer of cooking oil (sunflower or peanut oil works great) on medium-high heat until oil is approximately 400 degrees. Sear a few or all sides of meatballs then add to a large pot or crock pot. (You will want to sear meatballs in batches for the best sear. Make sure the skillet is only half full when searing. A crowded skillet will steam and cause exterior of meat to soften).

Once all meatballs have been seared and added to a large pot or crock pot, add the sauce and leave on low. Allow meatballs to simmer and finish cooking for 1 hour. Make sure to cut one open and check for doneness before serving. Garnish with sliced scallions and sesame seeds. Serve with jasmine rice or even cauliflower rice as a side.

Reach out to me on Instagram (@WildGameJack) with any questions or comments.

Venison meatballs soaked and simmered in a savory, slightly sweet and slightly tangy sauce is the perfect appetizer or main course during the holidays or even for the big-game get-together. A big bonus: You can make these ahead of time and simply warm them up and leave them at a warm temp for hours, meaning folks can come and plate as they please.

Same as with making sausage, you'll want to mix the meat when it's ice-cold. Protein extraction—which is what gives sausage its texture and juicy flavor—occurs best when meat is 34 degrees Fahrenheit. If the meat is too warm, protein extraction may not occur and you'll be left with dry, crumbly meatballs because when cooked, the pork fat will leak out since it was not chemically bound to venison proteins.

However, while you might use pork back fat for making sausage, here you can pick up some ground country pork, which is ground pork shoulder (otherwise known as pork butt). So, no, you don't have to grind your venison and pork together as you might if making sausage. If you have a couple venison 1-pound chub bags, you can source the ground pork from your local grocer and make this simple, yet very tasty, recipe.

In terms of sides, you can go the traditional route of jasmine rice, for example, or get creatively healthy and make some cauliflower rice like I did here. You can either purchase pre-made cauliflower rice or use a grater (large-size side) and grate a few cauliflower heads then sauté in a bit of cooking oil and some seasonings.

These meatballs get tastier the longer they soak and simmer in sauce, so make sure to allow a few hours ahead of serving for all the magic to happen. Also, you'll want to dollop a bit of sauce over each meatball when plating.

or mixes. If you've ever watched "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives" on Food Network, you've seen host Guy Fieri whistle at the array of rub or marinade ingredients some of his guests use. The other camp is more minimal, perhaps using just a couple of ingredients in a rub or marinade. And some folks just want salt, pepper and nothing else.

That's what makes food and dining so much fun. Uncle Bob's "special rib sauce" he never discusses might include just one

secret ingredient or five. Aunt Susie might be more of a throw-it-all-in type and through the years has figured out what works best, even if she couldn't write down the ingredients to save her life. It's also hard to beat a well-smoked roast with just salt, pepper and natural flavors. To each his own, of course.

Here, for example, is a marinade for one of Weston's recipes for stir fry venison and an example of simple things that work together:

Marinade

- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon red wine
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon peanut oil
- 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes
- 1 clove fresh garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon ginger

That's about as simple as it gets. Seven ingredients, combining the savory (soy sauce, ginger) with the sweet (honey) and a few additions.

There's nothing outlandish, fancy, too expensive or far-out "can't-get-it-here-in-my-store" type of ingredient that can't be found. Heck, you probably could find almost all of those items in some of the larger mini-mart gas stations that have a food section when you're going to or are at deer camp.

Fresh garlic is outstanding, of course, but it's not cheating to save some prep time by using pre-cut or minced garlic, peppers, onions, carrots or other items available at your grocery store. Minced garlic comes in small and large jars, and for marinades, it's a lot simpler to add a couple of tablespoons (hey, we love garlic) to a mix than to have to peel and slice (or mince) umpteen cloves. Refrigerate the jar of garlic, and you'll have it ready next time to mix with a little red wine and honey before brushing on the venison steaks for the grill.

If you're going to camp for a work weekend or later on in the season, pack your pre-cut items in something like an Engel cooler with ice to keep them cold and fresh. You also could make your marinade a

day before, pack it in the cooler and have it ready, or even use a vacuum sealer to secure the marinating venison for the cooler. Plan ahead and the cooking time will be easier.

JUST WHAT IS SILVER SKIN?

We read or hear about how important it is to remove the silver skin on any venison — or beef or pork, for that matter — in one of the first components of our kitchen prep work to ensure better tasting food.

Silver skin is sometimes described as skin, sinew, a shimmering coating on the muscle (true), ligament or tendon (both of which are inaccurate), and also some phrases with more vividly salty language.

It can be a bit of a challenge to remove all the silver skin, which is fascia surrounding a muscle and comprised of dense strands of collagen fiber. Fascia helps protect the muscle and moves with it, but the collagen is so dense that it's almost inedible unless cooked low and slow for hours. That's one reason shoulder roasts, often discarded because of

the bones, fascia and tendons, are best used with marinade and a slow cooking process, and then pulled apart for sandwiches or tacos.

It's easy to remove silver skin on larger cuts, such as the loin or hindquarters. One easy way to do this is to partially freeze the meat. Put it in the freezer, and let it get firm but not frozen throughout. Then, remove one or two cuts, and with a sharp knife you can slice away the silver skin.

Tendons, which connect muscles to bones, and ligaments, which connect bones to bones, also should be trimmed and discarded. If they or the silver skin are not removed, the heat during cooking will cause them to shrink, and you'll have a nasty, chewy, shoe leather hunk of venison that even your dog might not enjoy.

Trim carefully and well for better meals.



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TEXT & PHOTO BY STEVE BARTYLLA

STACK THE ODDS IN YOUR FAVOR

I'll never forget the advice that longtime outfitter and friend, Tom Indrebo, gave me so many years ago. Although the exact words are lost, his message was easily remembered. After you've given the hunter directions to the stand, and they've said they understand, have them repeat the directions. More than half are so excited about the hunt that they aren't hearing a word you're saying. My experiences made me thankful for that lesson many times over.

What follows are a handful of other, super-easy lessons I've learned over the years that help stack the odds for a successful hunt. After all, if you can't find the stand, odds are against a great hunt!

DIFFERENCE MAKERS

Sticking with stands, unless just you and those that know the ground extremely well will be hunting them, or unwanted attention is a legit concern, no one will complain that a stand was too easy to find in the dark. Assuming theft or unwanted sits aren't an issue, mark the routes to and from stands well, as well as doing so on a sharable mapping app. If unwanted attention is an issue, the app is enough, assuming acceptable service.

Since on the topic of ease, few if any will ever complain that a stand is too safe and easy to get into. I know talking stand safety can come off



Addressing details has helped the author make sure a lot more close encounters resulted in filled tags, than otherwise ever would have.

preachy, but I'm betting your loved ones would appreciate the snot out it being a top priority. At the same time, I bet you'd appreciate it if any of your loved ones are climbing into those stands, particularly if they aren't as hardcore as you may be. Do an Internet search for Hunter Safety System and you will find a glut of how-to information about treestand safety methods and products.

When talking ease of getting in, remember that layers subtract flexibility and stride length, not add to it. Those steps that are plenty close together when setting stands in August, may be a sweat-generating challenge in November, adding to the cold and odor factors at the same time.

Of course, none of this matters if one can't get off an ethical shot. We certainly shouldn't be clear-cutting the woods or creating logging-road-wide shooting lanes, but you better have some windows to shoot through the brush, as well as have the stand area obstacle free enough to shoulder or draw your weapon. In fact, having several windows and the ability to shoot in as many directions as reasonable has proven invaluable countless times. Balancing adequate cover with shooting abilities is an art worth striving to perfect.

Speaking of cover, stands right on top of deer activities are often near impossible to go undetected or even pull off shots from. Being just off to the side of the action is almost always more effective, both for staying hidden and being able to shoot.

Finally, for as much as we are hugely benefitted by getting in and hunting undetected, if you're planning on hunting the stand again, getting out undetected is just as critical for future hunts. Particularly on hammered grounds, the less we can let the deer know we're hunting them HERE — the better future hunts will likely be.

CONCLUSION

One of the most awesome things about hunting is the excitement level so many of us feel for it. However, that same excitement can force us to overlook major details. Merely reminding myself of these things every so often has helped me MAKE my hunts way more effective.

— Watch Steve's "Grow 'em Big!" videos at www.YouTube.com/DDHonline



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STANDING TALL

**SPECIALIZED FEEDING
BEHAVIORS INCREASE
SURVIVAL**

TEXT & PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Whitetails are known primarily as grazers and browsers who derive the majority of their food from ground level to 5 feet off the ground. Hunters can just look closely at browse lines in habitats where the deer population is out of balance to see this feeding zone. In such habitats, virtually every preferred whitetail food is missing at this level, leaving behind a band barren of any vegetation.

Although it is assumed that foods more than 5 feet off the ground are safe from a whitetail's cravings, it is not always the case. Deer are creative when it comes to finding food, and they often use their athleticism to meet their requirements.

NEED AND DESIRE

Whitetails live and die with their noses, so when it comes to food, they rely heavily on their sense of smell to find the foods they prefer. When a food source is stressed or exhausted, deer will do what they have to do to find food in other places.

Unfortunately, not all whitetails have the ability to harvest foods that grow above their normal 5-foot reach. But for those that do, the rewards can be significant.

I've taken hundreds of photos of whitetails eating food in the 5- to 8-foot range. Food can be abundant in this zone, but it takes a good deal of athleticism for a deer to get its mouth to it. Most hunters agree that whitetails are incredible athletes when they are able to use all four legs. But don't think for a minute deer aren't gifted when it comes to maneuvering on just their hind legs. The problem with getting at food more than 5 feet off the ground is getting there.

HOW HIGH?

A whitetail's nose is like a radar. It is what alerts the animal to a possible meal from above. Then, the deer begins to search overhead until it pinpoints where the food is.

After a deer knows exactly where the food is, it will position its front legs under the food to help guide it when its hind legs thrust its body into the air. Proper leg positioning is critical because if the launch pad doesn't offer good footing the deer cannot reach maximum height.

How high a whitetail can elevate for food is dependant on age, the length of its body, and how well it can balance as it stretches out to reach for food.

As with humans, not all deer have equal balance. If a whitetail lacks good hind leg balance it will shy away from putting itself in a near vertical position to get food. Those deer with the ability to go nearly vertical to the ground are usually the ones that can stay standing on their hind legs for an impressive length of time, often from 5 to 15 seconds.

I raised one buck that had the ability to stand on his hind legs in a vertical position for 20 seconds. However, to do so he had to take a few short steps to steady himself — otherwise, he couldn't stay up very long.

Even if a deer cannot stand vertically for more than 10 seconds, it will often take short steps to keep its balance. This allows the deer to maneuver for specific foods, like apples hanging on a tree. On average, most adult deer that will rise on their hind legs can easily reach food 5 to 6½ feet off the ground. Food growing in the 7- to 7½-foot range, and even as high as 8 feet off the ground, can only be reached by exceptionally tall and well-balanced whitetails.

DO THEY ALL DO IT?

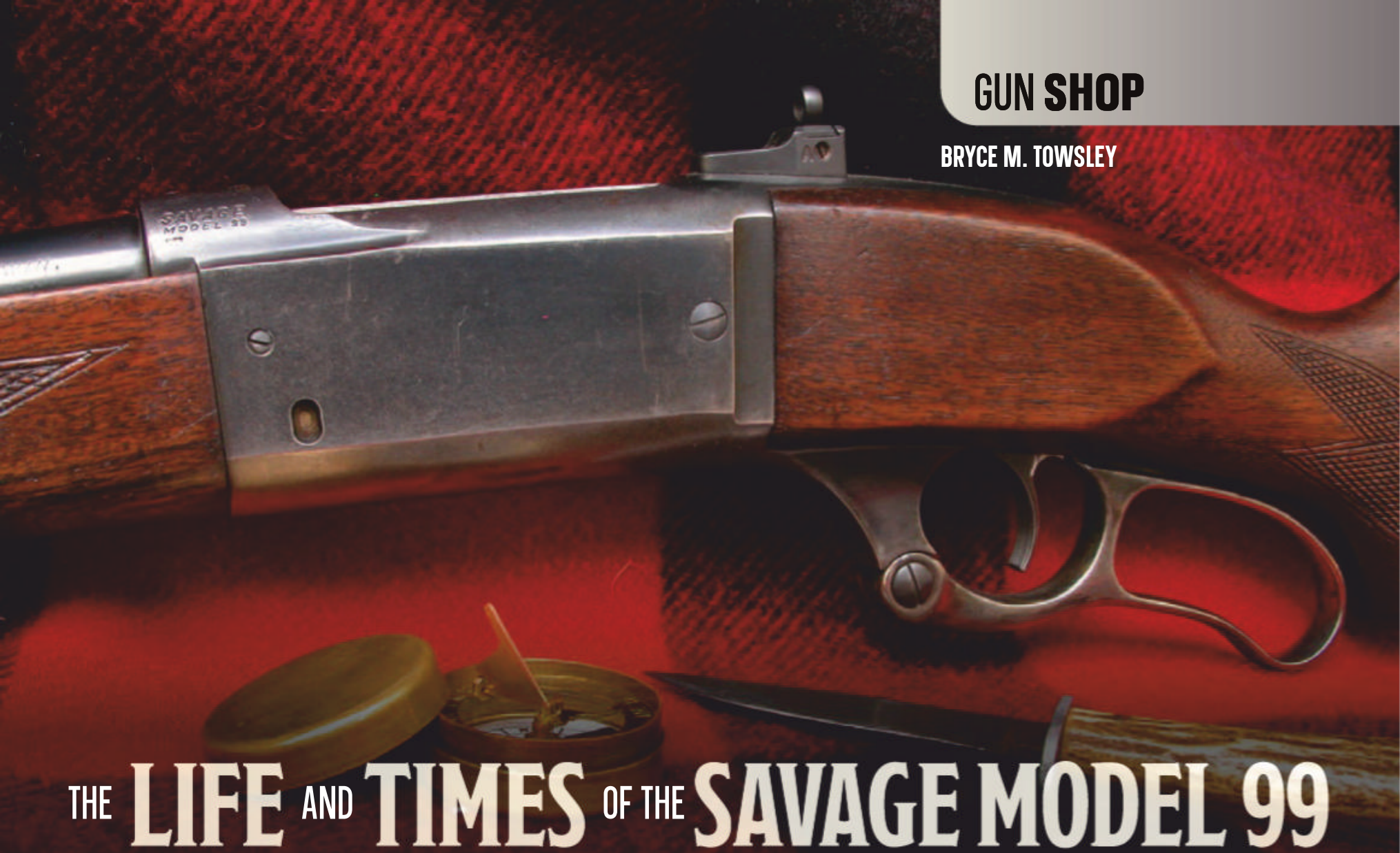
Of course, some whitetails avoid standing on their hind legs. In my experience from raising whitetails, about 40 percent will not attempt to stand on their hind legs to find food.

But to be fair, it should be pointed out that none of the deer I have raised ever lacked for food. I observed a long time ago that whitetails learn much from the deer they live with. Plus, I am confident that wild deer that are desperate for food will attempt to reach for food when the going gets tough.

— *Charles J. Alsheimer (1947-2017) was Deer & Deer Hunting's contributing editor of deer behavior for more than 30 years. His insights helped educate generations of American whitetail hunters and enthusiasts.*



BRYCE M. TOWSLEY



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SAVAGE MODEL 99

While the Winchester 94 was the deer rifle for the masses in much of the early 20th century, the hunters who “knew stuff” had a different pick. The Savage Model 99 lever-action rifle was often their choice. While the tube magazine on the Winchester and Marlin lever actions limited the rifles to use with blunt nose bullets, with its rotary box magazine, the Savage 1899 could use pointed bullets. It was also strong enough to handle powerful cartridges using that newfangled smokeless powder.

The lever-action Model 99 featured an internal hammer and many advanced features like a cocking indicator and even a counter to show the number of cartridges in the magazine.

The introduction of the .250 Savage cartridge for the Model 1899 in 1915 ushered in a new world of deer cartridges. At the time, most cartridges barely broke the 2,000 feet-per-second barrier, but this one hit 3,000 fps with an 87-grain bullet. Those gun-savvy hunters recognized the advantage over the big, slow, hard-kicking, straight-

wall black-powder cartridges that were still in vogue at that time.

Five years later in 1920, Savage changed the name to the Model 99 and introduced the .300 Savage, a cartridge that at the time matched the ballistics of the .30-06. With these advanced cartridges, the Savage Model 99 rifle became the thinking man’s deer rifle.

It took courage to open a gun company in a field that was dominated by Winchester, Remington and Colt, but Arthur William Savage recognized that the newly invented smokeless powder was about to change the rifle world. Along with the Model 1895 rifle, Savage also introduced a new cartridge designed for smokeless powder, the .303 Savage.

Savage started running testimonials in his catalog about the effectiveness of the new cartridge. In those days the catalog not only displayed the products, but it was a source of information for hunters and gun owners in the era before Internet, television or radio. Savage ran first-person accounts of one-shot kills with the .303 Savage on moose, deer, caribou, sheep and even grizzly bears. But the clincher was from an Alaska resident who

killed a whale with a single shot from the .303 Savage.

The Model 1895 evolved into the Model 1899 rifle. That went on to become one of the most successful hunting rifles in history. On March 22, 1960, Savage presented the NRA with the 1 millionth rifle made. I can’t find the total sales number, but it would continue to be made for 38 more years.

The Savage Model 99 features a hammerless design with a much faster lock time than a traditional lever action. The lever is connected to the breech bolt by a long, wide, curving piece of metal. This gives the rifle a distinctive profile when the action is open. The breech block locks into the action as the lever is closed, creating a strong action design that is suitable to modern high-pressure cartridges. While it’s not often noted, the Model 99 action is a controlled-round feed design. That means that the extractor captures the cartridge as it exits the magazine and holds it against the bolt face during its travel into the rifle’s chamber. There is a cocking indicator in the form of a pin that sticks out of the top of the action when the gun is cocked, and recedes inside when it is not.



THE CARTRIDGES CHAMBERED IN THE SAVAGE MODEL 1899 AND SAVAGE MODEL 99 OVER THE YEARS.

- .303 SAVAGE
- .32-40 WINCHESTER
- .300 SAVAGE
- .30-30 WINCHESTER
- .25-35 WINCHESTER
- .250 SAVAGE
- .22 SAVAGE HI-POWER
- .22-250 REMINGTON
- .243 WINCHESTER
- .308 WINCHESTER
- .358 WINCHESTER
- 7MM-08 REMINGTON
- .284 WINCHESTER
- .38-55 WINCHESTER
- .375 WINCHESTER
- .410 SHOTGUN

The stock is two pieces with separate fore-end and buttstock. The bottom of the metal action is rounded, which makes this rifle a delight to carry in your hand.

The .303 Savage was the first cartridge introduced in 1895. It was more or less a ballistic twin to the .30-30 introduced the same year. The .22 Savage High Power was next. It was designed by Charles Newton and introduced in the Model 99 in 1912. It was based on the .25-35 Winchester cartridge, necked down to take a .228-diameter bullet. With a 70-grain bullet and a muzzle velocity of 2,800 fps, it was marketed for big game. In fact, Savage ran testimonials of foolish feats like a 400-pound tiger taken by Reverend H. R. Caldwell with a .22 Savage Hi-Power. Or W.M.D. Bell, the demigod of inadequate rifle cartridges, shooting a Cape buffalo with one.

Next came the Newton-designed .250-3000, which is simply called

the .250 Savage today. Newton designed it with a 100-grain bullet, but the marketing folks at Savage wanted that “3000” in the name and reduced the bullet weight to 87 grains to achieve that goal. Terminal performance was erratic until the ammo companies finally listened to Newton and made ammo with a 100-grain bullet. Sadly, he never saw it as he died just before the ammo was introduced.

It was 1920 and the war was over. The doughboys coming home had seen the .30-06 in action and they were impressed. Savage knew that the cartridge would not work in the Model 99, so they created one that would. They shortened the .30-06 case, made a short neck and a sharp shoulder so they could pack all of the powder possible into the case. The result was a 150-grain bullet at 2,700 fps. That matched the sporting load for the .30-06 at the time. (The velocity was later increased in the .30-06 to 2,900 fps.) In 1952 the .308 Winchester hit the market and killed off the .300 Savage.

It was a sad day in 1998 when I got a call from the marketing director of Savage to inform me that the Model 99 was being discontinued. The folks currently running Savage tell me it’s never coming back.



BOB ROBB

AVOID A COMMON PEEP SIGHT PITFALL

LEARN HOW TO MOUNT
YOUR BOW'S SIGHT AND
PEEP IN TANDEM.

I have spent a considerable amount of time experimenting with peep sights through the years. I've tried all sorts of peep sight designs and aperture sizes.

In the old days, we all used the original Fine Line peeps with rubber tubing that made sure the peep turned perfectly every time. This style of peep is still available and many bowhunters like them, because they are reliable and work well. The downside is that the tubing can rot and break, and the peep is useless without that rubber tube. If you use this type, make sure you always carry a spare piece of tubing in your backpack. These peeps are also noisy at the shot.

Today's no-stretch bowstrings make it possible to use peeps without the tubing, because they will come back perfectly aligned shot after shot. This is the style most serious bowhunters employ today.

I have tried the small, 1/8-inch aperture peeps like many tournament shooters use, but I have found they are way too small for hunting for two reasons. First, they do not let in enough light at dawn and dusk. Second, you cannot see anything but the target, giving you no sense of what is happening on the periphery.

I next tried both 3/16- and 1/4-inch aperture peeps. I like both sizes, but I have now settled with the 1/4-inch

size for all of my bowhunting. These peeps allow a lot of light in, and they are large enough that I can center the outside round housing of my bow sight, which helps me get a very consistent anchor point.

I make sure I mount my bow sight so that the housing is centered in the peep when my head is in the correct position at full draw. This is something that cannot be overemphasized. You should not have to move your head out of the proper shooting position to see through your peep!

After I install my peep in the proper location on the bowstring, I tie it into place with serving material or dental floss so it cannot move. I also mark the top and bottom of the peep location on the string with an indelible marker so that, with a quick glance, I can tell if it has slipped up or down the string. If your peep moves, your shots will begin to hit high or low. That's never a good thing.

— Bob Robb is a professional outdoor writer and accomplished whitetail bowhunter from Washington state.



BUCK SHOTS

JOSH HONEYCUTT

YOUTH HUNTER HARVESTS

MASSIVE KANSAS WHITETAIL

Brigham J. Bruna is a young fellow, but he's already making big moves as a deer hunter. During the 2021 season, he tagged a 6½-year-old buck that stretched the tape ... a lot. It scored a whopping 242 inches (gross) and 223⅜ inches (net).

They first captured trail-camera photos of the deer in 2017. They continued to do so in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. They started hunting the deer hard in 2019, and finally caught up to him in 2021.

"I grew up hunting with my dad, as long as I can remember," Brigham said. "I was in a blind with him and my younger brother and watched him shoot a buck when I was 6 years old. I harvested my first buck with a rifle at 9 years old in 2014."

With some experience under his belt, he hoped to keep it together if he got a shot at this giant whitetail. November 12 brought cloudy, overcast, chilly conditions, which is just about perfect for a November rut hunt. Settling into the treestand for the afternoon, the guys started scanning the rolling bluffs above, and food plots in the winding creek bottom below, for any sign of life. The table was set. The cards were dealt. The game begun.

While the action started slowly, the fall colors throughout the landscape made for a breathtaking scene. Brigham took in the smells of the fresh-cut crops. Leaves floated to the ground, making light sounds as they reached their final resting places. Full of anxious hope, his heart started beating just



a little faster. With several days already invested in this deer, he hoped it would be the final sit. With numerous encounters spreading out over multiple years, he had the history. Now, he wanted the buck.

As he sat there, Brigham envisioned the giant deer they called "TNT" stepping out, and him making a great shot. He replayed that in his mind over and over as deer started to move. First, two does. Then, a small buck. After that, TNT himself materialized in the distance. "My heart started pounding, and Dad kept telling me to breathe easy," Brigham said.

That's exactly what he did. He continued to focus as the deer slowly walked within range. Then, with the buck standing broadside at 30 yards, Brigham settled the crossbow sights, exhaled one more time, and then sent it. The bolt found its mark, and the deer took off.

After giving it some time, they returned to look for blood. They

couldn't find any. So, they waited until the next morning to search for the deer. They recovered the buck about 100 yards into the search.

Thinking back, Brigham said that the hunt "seemed so simple, but a lot of hard work and patience went in to that one moment. Dad was with me that evening, but my entire family and friends helped along the way."

Of course, after the recovery, an onslaught of backslapping, high-fives and big smiles ensued. "It's just very gratifying and proof of what a lot of hard work, discipline and management can make possible," Brigham said. "A high like no other. Spending quality time with family and friends in the outdoors — doesn't get any better than that."



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Sometimes, though, no matter what you do, boredom wins. Today is one of those days. I managed to sneak out of work early, keeping an eye on an approaching front I assumed would have deer moving. I climbed into the stand more than five hours ago but haven't even seen the red or gray squirrels that frequent the white oak tree a few yards from my stand. At this point, being barked at by a red squirrel would be a treat. There's not even a blue jay around to squawk at me and reveal my location to any critters that might be paying attention. You know the kind of hunt, I'm sure: tedious.

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

Darkness approaches, but I've been numbed into catatonic indifference. In the approaching gloom, a lone fat gray squirrel scurries slowly through the leaves and stops only briefly to glance up at me. He doesn't bark, though. I recognize him from other evenings by the odd white tip on his tail. We have a simple gentleman's agreement that involves no barking and no squirrel stew. It's a win-win. It's almost pathetic how relieved I am to at least see him — to see anything.

I hang my head, knowing that shooting light will be gone in less than five minutes. What a long afternoon. Looking down, I discover the squirrel is gone. Turning my head left to look for him, I catch the faintest movement to my right. The wall of brush around the stand of trees I'm in gives away little in the increasing darkness, but something has moved. Trusting my peripheral vision, I turn my head slowly, remaining focused on the small area 25 yards away where the movement originated. Might be a bird — maybe one of the tiny wrens that always show up before dark. Maybe a fox, hunting for rabbits. Could be almost anything, but the movement seemed long and slow — somehow deer-like.

Another minute passes when the dark eye patch of a deer suddenly pops out at me from the darkening brush. No movement, no nothing. There is just an eye. And with that eye comes a small sliver of hope.

EARLY LESSONS

You've probably read the hunting articles or have been told by a more

experienced hunter that you're not supposed to look for an entire deer but just bits and pieces. You know, an ear twitch here, a tail flick there, a horizontal line in the brush that could be a deer's back. It's old advice but still sound.

With archery hunting, having deer at close ranges demands carefully measured movements and attention to detail when it comes to wind direction and scent control. What's equally important, though, is being able to see deer. In my home county of western New York, thick tangles of brush hold the biggest bucks — and some of the wariest deer I've hunted. Spotting them in that dense cover can be as important as not letting them see you.

My first deer with a bow 23 years ago was a small button buck. Much like this afternoon's hunt, it had been a quiet sit — that time in an apple orchard — when something suddenly was different. A small brown blob was bobbing up and down about 50 yards to my left. It could have been a squirrel, grouse or rabbit. Might have been anything.

But after five minutes, that blob bobbed a little bit higher, and I recognized the head of a deer plucking fallen apples from the ground around the base of a tree. Several impatient moments passed before the deer was within range, and a few moments later, I had my first bow kill. Had I stood up or made a wrong move when I first saw that tiny sliver of a deer, the opportunity would have been blown. It was an early lesson — and a good one.

FINDING THE PIECE

Through the years, many of the deer I've taken began as something slightly out of place or just a hair different from the previous time I scanned the area. One year, after braving four hours of a treacherous snowstorm on a Catskill mountaintop, I saw what looked like a twig poking up from the creek bank below me. It wasn't of much consequence, considering I was in a dense forest full of twigs, but that stick was somehow out of place. When it slowly began heading north along the creek, the twig materialized into an ear, a head, a neck and then a deer. I arrowed the old, wide 6-pointer at 12 yards.

Becoming one with the scenery is the main reason I don't usually read, nap or surf the net on stand. I like to scan back and forth, up and down, getting visually familiar with every inch of the woods, so when something shows up out of place, I notice it. Despite how careful I usually am, I've had deer walk in and bed within 50 yards of me. I only spotted them after they drifted off to sleep. It pays to be vigilant. You never know what the next split-second might produce.

The biggest deer ever taken by my circle of friends started as a dark eye in the middle of a thicket. One of the biggest bucks I've ever seen was a mere oblong shadow among some brush — before it jumped up and ran away. The most heart-pounding moment I've ever had on stand was when the moist, black snout of a tremendous 8-point buck materialized directly below me. Only his nose was visible at first through the mesh floor of my treestand, right between my feet. That little glimpse made for one of the most exciting days of my bowhunting career. There were many other hunts that started with just that "piece of a deer."

HERE AND GONE

I watch the eye. In the increasing darkness, the deer blinks once. Suddenly, the area around the eye moves as the dark, gray body of the deer becomes apparent. Of course, he's right there. It's all so clear now. I can make out the legs and neck. But until a minute ago, he was invisible.

The deer is still mostly shrouded in the thicket, and I can't make out his head until darkness is almost upon us. A glimpse of antler point here, a piece of bright, white main beam there. He's a good buck, but it's too dark to shoot, even if a shot presents itself. Too late, too risky, but the point is moot. He never comes the rest of the way in.

I watch the buck sneak away. He's again consumed by the thicket, merely a shadow moving silently among the other shadows until he's gone.



SMALL SLIVERS *of Hope*

SUDDENLY, THE DARK EYE PATCH OF A DEER POPS OUT FROM THE DARKENING BRUSH. NO MOVEMENT, NO NOTHING. THERE IS JUST AN EYE. AND WITH THAT, THERE IS HOPE.

DON JONES

Archery season is only a few days old, yet I already find myself lulled into that familiar hypnotic trance that goes hand in hand with stand-hunting during the early part of the season.

I've been at this for more than two decades, and I know a lot of tricks. I've tried everything

through the years, from reading on stand, to writing, playing video games and, more recently, even surfing the Internet on my cell phone when the lack of deer activity is overwhelming. I don't recommend any of those activities, and I usually just watch the woods because there's plenty to keep my interest.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 95

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