



DO I NEED A HUNTING MENTOR?

BECOMING A HUNTER:

Mentored vs. Non-Mentored:

Research has indicated that only 2 percent of hunters begin hunting on their own, but up to 14 percent of hunters choose to hunt alone after some initial experience. Does one NEED a hunting mentor to begin hunting? Absolutely not, but as indicated, most choose the “companion” route before going it solo feeling both unprepared and lacking confidence common to first-time hunters. The main difference between going solo vs. hunting with a mentor is PREPAREDNESS! Whereas the “mentored” newbie has the advantage of an experienced tutor, the un-mentored needs to do a bit more initial planning and exhilaration lies in the planning!

There’s a “do it yourself” attitude common to many contemporary hunters, especially new adult hunters, and they make up for inexperience by “doing their homework” taking advantage of resources not available to the boomer’s decades ago. In fact, several books written by self-taught hunters include: Call of the Mild (Lily Raff McCaulou), The Mindful Carnivore (Tovar Cerulli) and Omnivore’s Dilemma (Michael Polan) can be very informative and inspiring. Moreover, technology via the internet and social media has opened a wealth of information and resources to the novice easily accessed by letting your “fingers do the walking,” at least initially anyway!

STILL INTERESTED IN FINDING A HUNTING MENTOR?

Consider ASKING hunting friends, family members, coworkers, classmates as all are a valuable resource for a mentor or hunting companion and often simply for the asking. In fact, research has indicated that the number one reason hunters took someone hunting (44%) was because they “showed interest and asked me to take him/her.” Gaining hunting knowledge and experience is not unlike attempting other avocations in life whether an education or career. The way to get started is proactively taking the necessary steps and gaining experience over time.





SO, YOU WANT TO HUNT?

The following list of resources will assist any novice (mentored, or un-mentored) in the journey toward becoming a hunter! So, let's begin with state wildlife agencies.

NC WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION Short List of links: www.ncwildlife.org

- **Hunter Education:** Gateway to safe, responsible and knowledgeable hunting.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Before-the-Hunt/Hunter-Education-Courses>
- **Licenses and Permits:** Requirements and exemptions specific to individual participants and species.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Licenses-and-Regulations>
- **Apprentice Program:** Novice hunter entry via accompanied participation.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Before-the-Hunt/Hunting-Heritage-Apprentice-Permit>
- **Laws & Regulations:** State specific extending to localities, access, equipment and methods.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Regulations>
- **What to hunt:** Species specific information, seasons and bag limits.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Hunting-in-North-Carolina#89841747-what-to-hunt--seasons--limits>
- **Where to Hunt & Shoot:** Public and private hunting/shooting access opportunities and information.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Hunting-in-North-Carolina#89841748-where-to-hunt-and-shoot>
- **How to Hunt:** Seminars, workshops and conservation partner facilitated events (GREAT for newbies!).
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Hunting-in-North-Carolina#89841829-new-to-hunting>
- **Harvest Reporting:** Critical to management, hunter ethics and conservation of species and habitats.
<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Big-Game-Harvest-Reporting>

FEDERAL AGENCIES:

Primarily as a resource for land access and migratory game species information via the following links.

- **U.S. Forest Service (USFS):** www.fs.fed.us/
- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM):** www.blm.gov/
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS):** www.fws.gov/

SPORTING GOODS RETAILERS:

Suppliers of outdoor hunting, angling and trapping equipment (type and variety varies by retailer). Most have knowledgeable and experienced staff including in-store archery/firearm pro shops dedicated to the first-time buyer. A short list of national chains with websites listed below:

- **Cabela's:** www.cabelas.com/
- **Bass Pro Shops:** www.basspro.com/

- **Dick's Sporting Goods:** www.dickssportinggoods.com/
- **Field & Stream:** www.fieldandstreamshop.com/
- **Academy Sports and Outdoors:** www.academy.com/

PERMIT HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES: Allows for managed participation and provide unique opportunities for special areas or species. <https://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Permit-Hunting-Opportunities>

SHOOTING/HUNTING PRESERVES:

<https://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Where-to-Hunt/Public-Places/Controlled-Hunting-Preserves>

Available in some states (typically for game birds) and for individuals interested in a controlled, guided (or semi-guided) hunting opportunity based on some of the following personal reasons:

- Lack of time for a traditional hunt due to travel and/or other obligations.
- Opportunity to gain hunting experience in a managed setting.
- Opportunity to hunt game that may be limited elsewhere due to lack of existing habitat.
- Prefer the all-encompassing social aspect otherwise unavailable via a traditional hunt.
- Desire for onsite amenities including lodging, game processing/preparing and dining.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS (NGO's):

Often working in cooperation with state and federal agencies, some have their own R3 (or similar) programs and a wealth of hunting-related "how to" information. The following is a short list including websites:

- **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:** www.rmef.org/
- **National Wild Turkey Federation:** www.nwtf.org/
- **Quality Deer Management Association:** www.qdma.com/
- **Whitetails Unlimited:** www.whitetailsunlimited.com/
- **Ducks Unlimited:** www.ducks.org/
- **Delta Waterfowl:** www.deltawaterfowl.org/
- **Pheasants Forever:** www.pheasantsforever.org/
- **Quail Forever:** www.quailforever.org/
- **Ruffed Grouse Society:** www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/
- **Mule Deer Foundation:** www.muledeer.org/
- **Boone and Crockett Club:** www.boone-crockett.org/
- **Safari Club International:** www.safariclub.org/
- **U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation:** www.sportsmensalliance.org/





BEGINNING DEER HUNTER'S EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

Get started but think small, at least initially, regarding gear while considering the following:

- **Laws and Regulation Review:** Determine what species, when, where and how to hunt per chosen state.
- **Hunting Implement (gun/bow):** Research online, visit a retailer/pro shop, or borrow if possible.
- **Shooting Practice:** Become familiar with your hunting implement (gun/bow) prior to the hunt, not during.
- **Place to Hunt:** Public (research lands per state), or Private (acquire landowner written permission).
- **Pre-Season Scouting:** Familiarizing yourself with the habits and habitat of game species is paramount.
- **Start Small:** Although new hunters may feel their first hunt should be for deer, squirrel hunting is a much better alternative for many reasons including less complexity, less equipment and patience, potentially more harvest opportunities and teaches valuable skills necessary for hunting deer and other big game.
- **Clothing:** Camouflage coveralls, hat, gloves, socks, boots and required hunter orange per season of year.
- **Miscellaneous Equipment:** A simple internet search of "basic hunter checklist" provides examples of more than you could ever carry. Over time, a hunter determines whether something is "needed or nice" while discovering that less is more! A few essential items include gun or bow, flashlight, or headlamp (w/spare batteries) binoculars, map/compass, knife, tissue, water, snacks, small first aid/fire kit and spare clothing.
- **Hunting Trip Plan:** Whether hunting alone, or with others, it is a good idea to leave a hunting trip plan with a family member or friend in case of an emergency. A simple hunting trip plan would include the following:
 - Hunters name and name of companions (if any)
 - Date and time of departure
 - Departure and return route
 - Destination (if in remote area, provide a detailed map)
 - Plan B alternative destination
 - Expected date and or time of return
 - Vehicle make/model/color/license plate number
 - Mobile phone number
- **Hunting Lifestyle - 365:** Not unlike other activities, hunter participation, passion and avidity fall within a bell curve from casual to dedicated. Although knowledge and equipment acquisition are a typical starting point, dedicated hunters physically and mentally prepare throughout the year so as to develop skills and stamina necessary for the rigors they may encounter contributing to a safe, enjoyable and rewarding hunt!





TIPS FOR RECOVERING GAME ANIMALS

All hunters are ethically required to stop the hunt for the purpose of searching for game animals after the shot. The following is a list of some simple steps to follow:

- **Immediately after the shot** visually note the location of the hunter, game animal, and the last place the game animal was seen before disappearing into the woods or brush. Sounds can indicate direction of travel when game animal is out of visual range so listen carefully.
- **Pay attention** because game animals often react a certain way when hit with a bullet or arrow. For example, deer shot in the vitals may jump in the air and kick before running. A gut-shot deer may hunch-up and wobble as it runs off. Crashing sounds usually indicate a well-placed shot, fatal wound, and short tracking distance.
- **Wait** at least 15–30 minutes or more before tracking unless the game animal goes down within visual sight of the hunter. Poorly-hit game animals require longer waiting periods (1 hour or more) especially in the case of a gut (stomach) shot.
- **Begin searching** the ground and low-hanging brush for signs of blood, hair, bone fragments, tissue, feathers and tracks. Kicked-up woodland debris can also provide direction of travel.
- **Blood color** provides valuable information. Bright and frothy (lung shot), Bright non-frothy (severed artery), Dark (muscle or liver hit), Dark with vegetative material (gut shot). As a general rule, large amounts of bright frothy blood equal short tracking distance.
- **Mark the trail** with biodegradable material like tissue and step along side the trail (not in it) to avoid erasing sign. This is important if backtracking becomes necessary.
- **Seek help** from hunting companions when tracking because several sets of eyes are better than one especially when tracking is difficult due to low light or inclement weather conditions.
- **If you lose the trail** change strategies by walking in ever-widening circles or parallel “transect” lines. Remain ready for a follow-up shot in case the game animal flushes from cover.
- **Approach** downed game animals from behind. If eyes are closed and breathing apparent another shot may be required. If eyes are open, touch near the eye with a stick or branch to promote a response. If the game animal does not blink or move it is likely dead.

Ethical Law-Abiding Hunters:

- **PRACTICE** before the season to prevent the loss of game animals through wounding.
- **NEVER** use equipment in which they are unfamiliar or unable to accurately shoot.
- **KNOW** that the goal of every hunter is a quick-clean kill and not wanton waste of wildlife.
- **DO NOT** give up tracking until convinced that all reasonable efforts to recover have been exhausted.





NEW TO DEER HUNTING? HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

RULE #1: Firearm Safety. Always assume your firearm is loaded; maintain muzzle control at all times. Keep your finger outside the trigger guard and keep safety on until ready to shoot. Point your firearm only at what you intend to shoot (don't use your scope as binoculars). Know your target and what's beyond.

RULE #2: Have a hunt plan. Always let someone know where you are. If you move stands, let them know

RULE #3: Enjoy every hunt! A safe hunt is a successful hunt. Watching nature and wildlife that doesn't know you are there is a gift. Don't let technology or science ruin the experience. Always project a positive, law abiding and ethical image.

HUNTING TIPS

Firearm selection: Hunt with the most powerful firearm that you can shoot accurately also considering lethality and recoil. Practice the fundamentals of an accurate shot. Practice with the same ammunition you plan to use for hunting

Dress for the weather: Comfort is key. Bring water and food if planning to stay out for an extended hunt.

Good optics and flashlights: Consider having a head lamp and handheld light. Buy the best optics you can afford.

Spend time in the woods: the best way to learn deer is to watch them any chance you get.

Scent is a major obstacle to overcome. You can never be 100% scent free; so always hunt the wind if possible. Consider bathing with scent free soaps before the hunt and wash with special focus on hands, face, hair. Use unscented or Scent-masking detergents; keep clothing, shoes in sealed plastic bag between hunts. Scent masking clothing might help too. These extra efforts may not be absolutely necessary but could help tip the scale in your direction.

Vision comes in a close second. Deer look for movement. The more still you can sit, the slower you move, the less likely you will draw attention to yourself. Survey the area before you move. Raise binoculars slowly and close to your body. Don't jerk around to check out a noise – deer are always watching.

Sound isn't far behind. Approach your hunting stand as quietly as possible and then remove leaves and twigs to avoid making

unnecessary sounds. If an unnatural sound is made (metal, plastic, Velcro, cough, cell phone alert) don't move - deer will be alert and looking in your direction so as to identify whether or not that sound means danger.

Deer move to eat. Hunting near deer trails, or travel corridors between seasonal food (acorns, privet, greenbrier, persimmon, honeysuckle, agriculture) and the cover, may improve your odds of seeing deer.

Deer are creatures of the edge. Look inside the tree line/woods for movement. Watch for flashes of white or horizontal lines. Mature deer will often circle a field before entering – hunting the woods often offers shot opportunity.

Stand locations. Whether scouting pre, or post-season, look for sign (animal and human), seasonal food sources, and cover. Consider locations that have good back cover, good access, nearby cover (thickets, woods, shrubs, ditches, agriculture). Great sites are near edges, trails (deer follow path of least resistance), near seasonal food, funnels, and/or travel corridors. Having evergreen cover around/near/behind the stand provides great cover. Use a compass to set up to take advantage of prevailing wind and sun. Simulate a hunt when setting a stand – anticipate and test shooting possibilities; clear branches if necessary but avoid leaving yourself too out in the open. Clear shooting lanes as needed. Use tacks to guide you both in and out – trails disappear in the dark.

Tree stand safety. Always test ratchet straps before using the stand, replace no less than annually. Clear debris from base of stand. Use a safety harness and a fall arrest system (lineman's belt, lifeline & tree tether) and equipment haul line. Remember that steps can be slippery on cold mornings. Maintain 3 points of contact while climbing up and down and take your time. Keep mobile phone, relieve strap, and knife on your person. Use only TMA approved stands.

Timing. Although deer are spotted most often early morning and late afternoon, the more time you spend in the woods, the more opportunity you'll have. Many suggest that mid-day is a great time to spot mature animals. Coming in when deer are not likely to be in the field (avoiding pre-dawn, for example). You may also improve sighting opportunity – especially mid-day during the rut as bucks (males) may be on the move all day long.

Rain is a great time to hunt. (Provided it's not a down-pour). Some believe that deer move to feed with change of barometric pressure - just before, after a storm.

Plan ahead. Test (and continue to monitor) wind direction. Identify shooting lanes. Clear as needed if this can be done quickly and quietly. Practice shooting positions before you load a cartridge/arrow. Set scope on lowest effective power (it's always easier to dial up on game far away than dial down on close game). Settle yourself, by remaining as still as possible. Have binoculars ready to identify deer. Don't ever use your scope as binoculars.

Understanding behavioral clues can help. Young deer are usually the first deer in the field. Deer are curious. Deer have short attention spans- the longer they stand at alert the more likely they won't run. Head bobbing is a strategy they use to keep track of their surroundings - watch their eyes before you move. Ears forward, raised hair, stiff stance, foot stomps and raised tail are all signs of suspected trouble. Wheezing lets other deer know to get out and a good sign the deer is ready to bolt, but could also be used to startle a predator (hunter) and get them to move. Deer vocalizations are not common but important to recognize; listen to a phone app - Grunt, Bleat, wheeze. Watch a deer's focus - they'll spot other deer before you will.

Young deer (especially button bucks) are often the first deer onto the field. Wait, Watch. If a deer looks back, look in that direction as well. Wait if you can. There is almost always more than one deer in the woods.

Seasonal calls. They may work. Just don't overdo it. Rattling antlers during the rut may be worth a try. Calls are always a great way to stop a deer walking for a good shot - just be ready; they'll be looking in your direction.

Spotting a deer. You won't always (usually don't) hear a deer coming. Don't look for a whole deer. Instead watch for movement, horizontal lines, white flash, anything unusual (might smell them if during the rut). Look through the trees.

Taking the shot. Know your limitations. Take a shot only if confident of a clean, ethical kill. Be sure of your target; know

what is in front of and beyond your target; execute as practiced. Use a low whistle/call to stop a moving deer, but be ready to shoot before you draw attention to yourself. Aim carefully, deep breath, 1/2 release, squeeze, follow through.

After the shot. Identify shot location, especially how things look differently when you get down from the tree stand! Then wait - 15 minutes to an hour. Give time for the animal to lay down and expire quietly.

Blood trailing. Move quietly along the trail. Avoid stepping into/erasing the blood sign. Mark your trail w/ toilet paper so you can retrace your steps and start over if you have to. Look for blood sign on the ground and brush. Don't give up; circle back as needed. May not bleed immediately. Be prepared to hike. Bring firearm/bow, license & big game report card. Consider bringing a pack if the animal is not found quickly: headlamp, good flashlight, cell phone, knife, rope, small tarp & water recommended. May need to wait until morning if cannot locate quickly.

Downed deer. Approach slowly; be prepared for finishing shot. Watch for breathing, movement. Throw stick/rock before getting too close. Eyes should be open if deer is dead.

Punch your big game tag before moving the deer - but don't punch until you know the deer is dead!

Dead deer are heavy! Doe (females) are hard to grab onto with no antlers - a small tarp may help drag a deer from the woods; a length of rope or deer drag are very helpful; a deer cart or 4-wheeler can make it much easier. Mark the trail if you have to leave the deer to get assistance. Leave your name, phone number, harvest ID number on carcass if you must leave it.

CALL 1-800 I GOT ONE. Within 24 hours of your harvest or before transferring your game to someone else for butchering. Keep evidence of sex until call in is made and authorization number recorded on your big game tag.

HAVE FUN; APPRECIATE WHAT NATURE OFFERS TO SHOW YOU; PRACTICE LOW IMPACT; PROTECT OUR HUNTING HERITAGE!

