

TOP TEN HUNTING TIPS FOR KILLING A GREAT BUCK

By Dennis Moser

- 1) **Relax:** This is fun, not work. Having peace in the woods is a great advantage. Prepare yourself mentally, physically, spiritually and financially to hunt.

Physically: Walking (exercising) in the woods is an excellent way to stay in shape while scouting, looking for rubs, sheds, scrapes, bedding areas, feeding areas, retrieving trail cam data, etc. Also planting food plots and putting up stands are very hard work and excellent exercise.

Mentally : Read, study and learn all you can about what you are hunting. With all of the technology available today, simply using Google will provide you with a wealth of knowledge from hunters around the world. Reading will keep you sharp mentally. There are many books and magazines available.

Spiritually: God created an amazing earth for us to enjoy. Some of the greatest times I've spent in the woods have involved watching the sun rise or set, squirrels, birds, deer, raccoons, flowers, leaf changes, the mountains, the valleys, the fields, etc. Also this is one of the greatest times to pray and thank God for allowing you to have the time to hunt and for all the other things with which he has blessed you.

Hunt areas close to your home so you can have dinner and time with your family. You do not need to travel far to get a big buck. Great opportunities exist for a big "city" buck in highly developed areas. Focus on dead-end roads that lead to brushy or wooded areas behind industrial, commercial or residential developments. Common areas of older, established subdivisions are also good. (You need to use your bow only, and make sure you get permission.)

Financially: I will be writing a "Super Strategy" on this topic so stay tuned. It will be titled "Living a Delayed Gratification Lifestyle." Hunting takes great time and expense. Be prepared financially by living a simple lifestyle. The basic principal of this lifestyle and financial plan is as follows:

100% Income

10% Given Away

15% Saved

25% Invested

50% Lifestyle

(Living within this 50% is the most important part.)

- 2) **Listen, listen, listen.** Listen to the old timers. They have seen it all. One of the best hunters I have ever known is a local police chief. He often shared with me the following: "They are full time deer and we are only part time hunters." They are out there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week no matter the weather. They do not have a job to go to, no Wal-Mart to visit, no restaurants to eat at and no schedule to keep. Their only concern is staying alive. You can be a better hunter if you never lose sight of this fact. They are there all of the time. We as hunters just have to find them.

Listen to the birds and the squirrels, as they are great tattletales. They will alert to when something is coming. The greatest noise in the woods is the sound of crunching leaves. My heart races every time like it will explode. Enjoy this sound. Be prepared.

- 3) **Scouting:** Finding deer requires scouting. Scouting should start in February and continue through the end of July. Why? During the winter months you will find you can see further because the foliage is down. In addition, deer will have to travel further and more frequently to find food sources. This way you get to see exactly what the upcoming year will present and where the buck most likely beds, feeds, etc. You will also have the opportunity to lay off of his territory if you happen to walk up on him and run him off. He will return if you get out and stay out. You will find during scouting how the deer change their movement based on needs and traffic patterns. Look for bedding areas, feeding areas, scrapes, rubs, and determine where the travel corridors are.

Before you get too deep into the scouting process, be sure to use technology available today such as Google Earth. This provides a great 1,000-foot level aerial view of your targeted property. Look for topography changes, streams, open areas, hardwoods, pines, etc. Early in the season, I like to hunt around persimmon trees, apple trees and muscadines. They start dropping before acorns and deer love them. So look for these possibilities.

Trail cameras are also a valuable technology used in scouting. Why go into an area blind? You can use technology to learn the deer's patterns, and you will also discover that there are multiple bucks and substantial deer on your property that you've never seen. I personally prefer to use cameras with infra red rather than flash at night. When you are checking the cameras, be sure not to leave your scent trail behind. Reviewing the film is exciting – you should enjoy this.

Walking is the best way to scout, depending on the size of the tract. You can scout fields on existing roads from your vehicle. I use a window-mounted spotting scope and typically travel the roads beginning an hour before and up till dark.

ATV's are the best and the worst thing to happen to deer hunting. I own them and use them quite often. They are great for low ground compression, thus not rutting up roads and giving access where there are no roads. However, keep traffic to a minimum during hunting season. Deer are one of the most adaptable species ever. Deer get used to traffic, but they will change their pattern based on the traffic once hunting starts. Big bucks will change their patterns real quick. May to August is the best time to repair your stands, cut trails, shooting lanes, and other projects where an ATV is helpful, but try to keep your ATV use to a minimum from August to January 1st. During season, walk to your stand as much as possible. Only use the ATV to transport your harvest.

You can also use traffic of hunters on neighboring parcels to your advantage. Big bucks will seek refuge on your site if there is little to alarm them and good food sources.

As part of scouting, consider your food sources. Keep in mind that deer are browsing animals, not grazing animals like cows. If you want to plant food plots, use brassicas or other broadleaf plants. Most of these are annual crops with the exception of clovers and vetch. Don't just plant to have something green on opening day. Think about the needs of the deer through the season. Plant early spring mixes to help when fawns are young and feeding on mother's milk. Plant fall mixers with some seed that can survive through much of the winter. Winter peas and turnips are good for this. (Also, the turnips are great to eat. This past fall I had a tremendous crop of turnips and we enjoyed them over Thanksgiving and Christmas, and I was able to share with my family and many friends).

Don't forget native food sources. One of the most important naturally occurring browse species in the south is honeysuckle. You can fertilize honeysuckle with just 40-50 lbs of 17-17-17 fertilizer and it will prosper tremendously. Both white oak and red oak are good sources of acorns, but take the time to find which of those trees are better producers. Don't forget to fertilize these trees individually. To do this, dig 6 to 10 holes 2 feet deep around the drip line of the canopy and fill them with fertilizer. (Here again, I like 17-17-17, putting about a gallon of fertilizer in each hole.) You only need to do this every 3-4 years and it will make a big difference in the acorn production.

Corn is good for stopping deer, which gives you time to evaluate the deer and get a good shot. However, it is like us eating rice cakes. If you use corn, it contains lots of sugar but not protein, which the deer really need. If you want to help the deer herd, supplement the deer feed with protein and mineral blocks. I prefer a product developed locally called Buck Yum. Pay attention to how often you have to replenish corn. That is a good indication the deer are using it as a food source. Also I got a neat pointer from a local at Tractor Supply about a small pond I built for the deer to have a year around water supply. To control algae, add salt blocks to the pond. They are cheap and effective, and I believe the deer are attracted to the salty taste. When water is down, they scrape and paw at the salt in the dirt. (Research is continuing on this topic.)

- 4) **Clothing and Footwear:** Having the proper clothing and footwear is one of the most important factors. Rubber boots in my opinion are the best. Put them on and take them off at your hunting areas. Footwear will always pick up some type of scent such as grease, mud, etc. if you wear it all the time. The deer will smell these scents from far away, know something is wrong and will leave the area. Also, today's hunters have the opportunity to wear scent free clothing, which offers a great advantage. The less scent you expose increases your chances tremendously of seeing deer and/or the buck you are after.
(Also "look good". You never know when you're going to kill the buck of a lifetime and need to have a lot of pictures takenjust kidding.)
- 5) **Stand location:** After substantial scouting using aials and walking, you will find the bedding areas (flattened grass, weeds, etc.), transitions areas, travel corridors (clear, worn paths and

hoof prints) and feeding areas. You'll want to have 2 or 3 possible stand locations around each of the areas you are planning to hunt, depending on the wind direction. **Wind is one of the most important factors in deer hunting.** Study the wind and understand it, and this knowledge will help you kill big bucks. Hunt the stand that doesn't have your scent crossing the area where you think the deer will be moving. Determine the wind direction hourly during the hunt. A good idea is to tie a small feather to your gun or bow, or use the technology available on your cell phone. In locating your stand, do not position it on top of the travel corridors. Put it back 30 to 40 yards. Do not locate directly on the edge of a field. Get back off of the field 10 to 20 yards with a vision line and clear shooting lane into the field. Do not create a silhouette.

For hardwoods: where bedding areas meet up with mature oaks, approach the stand location through the bedding in the morning and through the hardwoods in the evening.

For clear-cuts and cutovers: Place permanent stands on both sides so you can have the sun rising or setting behind you.

For creek beds: Where paths running parallel with the creek meet up with a creek crossing (with visible hoof prints), I like to be high in a climber. Deer seem to get nervous while crossing creek beds. *(Note: If hoof prints exceed 3 inches and are 3-pronged – hunt hard and don't leave the area till you get that big buck!)*

Pinch points and funnels: Place a permanent stand. This is a good rut ambush area.

Property lines and agricultural fields: Great stand options.

- 6) **Entering the woods:** In hunting with others, one mistake I see so many make is being in a hurry to get into the stand. Some sound like a bull in a china shop entering the woods. You should never be in a hurry to get into your stand. Deer hear so much better than us. A stick breaking is like a burglar alarm to them. Take your time and move slowly and feel what you are stepping on. Move around things that will give you away. Otherwise, you may lose the opportunity to take a buck on your way to your stand.

Try not to spook the other wildlife around you and they will not tell on you the same way as they tell on the deer. You can bet the deer are paying attention. All wildlife - deer, hogs, fish, etc. - use an edge. Fish hang on the edge between cover and open water, or between shallow and deep water the same as deer will walk along the edge between cover and open ground. An edge does not have to be a defined area of thick growth meeting an open area either. It can be a low spot on an open field, a gully or an old fence line. Like other wildlife, use the edge to stay hidden. Be patient, since big bucks don't become big by being stupid. They are usually the last to enter the fields, and if moving through transition areas they usually follow well behind other deer.

- 7) **Smell and scents:** Look to see what's indigenous to the area and use it. For example don't use apple scent in a pine forest. Pay very close attention to smell. Many times you can smell a buck before you can see it. A rutting buck can be detected from a long way off. I've seen very little written on this, but if you pay attention to the wind direction you can often smell deer before

you see them. Take a shower before hunting, and keep your clothes clean with scent free products.

- 8) **Equipment and Practice:** Learn to shoot your gun or bow. **Practice, Practice, Practice.** If you have ever had to track a deer that was wounded, you understand. Why spend hundreds of dollars on a bow or rifle and then not devote the time and money necessary to be proficient with the equipment? Try to make every shot count and only take the shot you know you can make.
- 9) **Be Quiet:** Keep your movement to a minimum in the stand. Deer can pick up on the slightest movement. How many times do you remember making mistakes in movement and then hearing the deer running off?
- 10) **Shot Selection and Patience:** Be patient. It is worth repeating that big bucks don't become big for being stupid. The most important deer management tool every hunter has is the trigger finger (or release finger for bow hunters). Choose wisely what you shoot. Learn how to age deer on the hoof and do not shoot 1 to 3 year old deer. If you want big racks, you have to let the deer get older. Never shoot a deer that you're not planning to eat or mount. Don't waste the meat since there is someone out there who can use it.

Shoot does. Here in the Carolinas where I hunt and throughout much of the south, we are upside down on our deer ratios. During the rut, the big bucks do not have to go far to find does because our ratio of does is typically much higher than that of a well managed deer herd. A lot of the breeding in the areas where I hunt is done by the younger bucks.

Shoot coyotes. A lot of hunters will say they saw a coyote while they were deer hunting and did not shoot it because they didn't want to mess up their deer hunt. With 100% assurance I can guarantee you it not only messed up today's hunt but a lot more hunts in the future. This is one predator we can do without. There are numerous studies showing that a high percentage of fawns are killed by coyotes before the end of the first year. Coyotes have become a great problem in my area. The best time to kill a coyote is when you see it. Plus it is a great hunt during the off season and a lot of fun. Always take youngsters and new hunters with you to help create the passion for them to enjoy in the future.

And remember - safety first in all 10 tips.