

How To Plan The Perfect Hunting Trip

A comprehensive guide on planning your
hunting trip for ultimate success

The information in this ebook is only a small fraction of
what you will get in [The Hunting Guide](#) - The most
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INTRODUCTION

Hunting is an increasingly popular pastime for the whole family. With growing numbers of women taking up the sport, the opportunity to create special memories with the whole family in the outdoors is better now than ever before. And whether you're an experienced hunter, have been on a couple of duck or deer hunts or are just getting started, there are plenty of questions that need answering along the way.

Most of these are questions you end up musing over for a long time and never bother asking anyone. After all, these folks have been here before and asking what the draw weight of a bow for hunting elk is will mark you out as an inexperienced dullard. But fear not – there are no stupid questions, and the best way to learn about hunting is to experience it. In the pages that follow, we'll aim to give you a useful outline of the information you need to get started on your first hunt or a dream adventure for big game.

The key to success in many areas of life is proper preparation. Hunting is an excellent example of this. Regardless of your experience level, being adequately prepared for the hunt will give you a distinct edge over other hunters in the area and can make all the difference between success and failure.

Of course, if you've planned your hunt to the nth degree, there's still every chance you won't bring home a kill. The most important thing to understand is that hunting is much more than running around the wilderness slaughtering animals. It's an experience – one that generations of hunters around the world have learned, taught and shared with their friends and family across time. And the benefits each individual takes away from that experience vary just as much as the people who hunt.

CHOOSING GAME

There is plenty of wild life out there, as anyone who's ever set foot into the less built-up areas of the world knows. And across North America, you can bet that plenty of people are making plans to hunt at least one thing in their local area in the coming seasons. Commonly hunted animals include the deer and elk, while more exotic species like bear, prong horn and sheep are also hunted in some areas.

If four-legged prey isn't your style, there is plenty on offer in the skies as

well. Many bird hunters make their start on ducks and then move on to larger wetland birds, like the goose or move to upland bird hunting in pursuit of pheasant, grouse or quail. Other bird hunters see ducks as the ultimate hunt experience and see little reason to diversify.

There are many keys to a successful hunt, and the first of these is choosing something you'll enjoy hunting. If you like camping and spending time in the mountains or woods, then deer, elk or even big game might be what's right for you. If you'd rather do hunting in a more limited timeframe, and like the water, then a duck or goose hunt is more likely to match your style and preference.

You'll need to consider your physical aptitude for pursuing some game – animals renown for living at higher elevations can present unique challenges for hunters who aren't in the best possible shape. That isn't to say you need to be superman to hunt, it's just important to consider all the variables when choosing your target.

What can be hunted, when you can hunt it, how you can hunt it and where you can hunt it are variables controlled by regional fish and wildlife departments. And even if you think you know what's allowed, the best option is to consult your local fish and wildlife department for an updated copy of the regulations in your area. The majority of states make the guidelines for hunting available online, which makes researching the regulations for game you're interested in hunting in any given area easy as pie.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT WEAPONS

Once you're familiar with the regulations and decide on the game pursuit that's right for you, you'll need to be sure you've got the right weapon. For some folks, this is simply a matter of checking the family gun cabinet to see what's lying around. For others, choosing a weapon is a completely new endeavor that must be carefully considered to get the best results.

First, you'll have to decide whether you're going to hunt with a gun or a bow. Some game is best hunted with a gun, hands down. But other game can be had with reasonable success using either weapon. It is important to consider whether a bow is right for you – it requires a different sort of fitness and determination than gun hunting.

If you've never used a bow, there are a number of training courses, books and DVDs available to help you learn the craft of bow hunting. Ultimately,

many of the options for bow hunters come down to personal preferences developed over time. So, if you're just starting out look into clubs in the local area that offers a 'get to know the bow' type course that you can take. This will help you get familiar with the ins and outs of bow operation before you're faced with a shop counter or catalog packed with hundreds of bows that you've no idea how to evaluate. Once you're familiar with bow operation, choosing a new long, composite or recurve bow will be easy and you'll be able to readily determine which accessories you'll need to make the most of your bow during a hunt.

Similarly, you can take training in firing all manner of firearms through local gun clubs and other organizations. Whatever weapon you opt to hunt with, the important thing is that you must be able to use it accurately. Far better you go into the woods with an old .270 Winchester you've used thousands of times before and maintained religiously than with a new, state-of-the-art rifle you've only fired twice.

This isn't the last time we'll tell you that practice makes perfect, or as near to perfect as you can get in the hunting arena. Whatever your weapon, mastering it is another essential key to becoming a well-experienced hunter. Knowing your weapon is about practice – and not just on the range. You'll need to practice aiming and firing, of course. But a number of people overlook the importance of routine maintenance and practicing weapon repairs.

When you're in the field, if something goes wrong will you be able to fix your weapon or will your day be ruined? A number of veteran hunters recommend taking along a spare, or backup, weapon for those just in case moments – but being able to repair and maintain your chosen weapon is just as important.

One final point of consideration is taking the right weapon on the right hunt. This isn't about having the right brand of gun or the right logo on your arrow heads, it's about making sure you've brought the right tool to do the job. You wouldn't try to change a light bulb with a screwdriver – and by the same token, you shouldn't go hunting grouse with a .30-06 unless you're just interested in watching feathers fly up into the air and then delicately drifting back toward the earth. If that's the sort of display you were after, it'd be far simpler for you to stay at home and sink a few rounds into some old pillows.

Assuming you are hunting for something other than a bizarre form of personal amusement, you'll need to do a little research and decide what the best weapon for your hunt will be. Again, this is a point where asking fellow hunters through bulletin boards and community networks can prove invaluable.

ESSENTIAL HUNTING SUPPLIES

There are a number of things you need to remember to bring along for any successful hunt. Sure, there are plenty of hard-core pack hunters out there who go alone into the woods for a week with nothing more than they can fit into a mid-sized pack frame. And yes, these guys get results. However, what they pack is essentially the same as what we're recommending you load up for your own hunting party – just an ultra-light, streamlined version.

First things first, pack your weapon. Pack the right ammo and bring an extra box. Also, bring your gun cleaning kit or bow maintenance bag so you can go to sleep at night knowing your weapon is ready to go at first light. As mentioned, if you can, bring along a spare weapon just in case. While you're at it, include a strap or sling that makes carrying the weapon easier. And, because you don't want to worry about your weapon or ammo going missing while you sleep or being involved in a hunt-related accident, bring along a suitable storage case for keeping the weapon in while you're sleeping. The days when hunters thought it was ok to just throw the guns in the back of the pickup are long gone – what's more, a number of areas and hunt organizers have regulations that prohibit this sort of behavior. It puts you and your hunt pals at risk, making it both irresponsible and dangerous.

In addition to the weapon, you'll want to bring something to help you see what you're hunting – a good pair of binoculars or a solid fog-free scope is highly recommended. If you can manage, bring both. When choosing a scope, consider the lens size and magnification power. A 4x40 scope, for example has a magnification power of four and an objective lens size of 40 – the larger the first number, the closer the object will appear to you, the larger the second, the brighter your image.

Look for a scope that offers an element of eye relief, meaning you can use it without holding it right up to your eye, to avoid self-inflicted eyestrain. Binoculars should be set up ready for use – this means practicing with them before you take them into the field. Similarly, you'll want to be sure to pack sunglasses and any prescription glasses you need, as well.

Get a map of the area if you haven't got one already. You can find all sorts of maps on the internet, but sometimes the traditional, accordion-fold variety are simply better for detail and ease of use. Studying a topographical map of the area can help you find little-known hidey holes and low-lying openings where game are more likely to hide during the high-pressure days of the early season. You can always cut the map down and laminate the two sections you're going to be using to refer to them in the field. Which brings us to another piece of indispensable gear - a good compass.

Today's gadget-oriented society might make you believe a GPS is all you

need. And, in fairness to those folks, a reliable GPS is great. The thing you've got to consider, particularly when hunting in dense, mountainous or unfamiliar areas is: where will you be if the batteries are flat? No one knows. That is precisely why we recommend you still bring a compass and a map of some sort. The old technologies are often best.

Another key area some hunters overlook is what happens 'after the shot' – it is important to prepare for victory if you intend to succeed. This means bringing along the things you need to properly care for and field dress the game you claim while hunting. For birds, this amounts to a sharp knife, some meat bags and a cooler. For larger game, you'll need a pair of sharp hatchets, a small saw, a sharp knife, a sharpening stone and suitable bags for storing the meat.

You might want to consider bringing a hanging kit to help you in your effort to gut, quarter and otherwise prepare the animal for transport. There are brief details later in this guide of what you'll need to do with these tools – for more specific information, you'll want to consult your fellow hunters, read a book and ask your butcher for any preferences they have regarding the handling of your animal.

PREPARING FOR YOUR HUNT

Hunters who go into the field with all they need for each phase of the hunt do better, it's as simple as that. Prepared hunters get better results, have fewer accidents, enjoy their time on the hunt more and are always keen to learn how they can perform better the next time. The old saying, prior planning prevents poor performance, is definitely true when it comes to the hunt – and we make no apologies for reminding you that being prepared is the key to success. So, prepare for your hunt in every conceivable way.

First, know the habits of the game you're hunting. If you're hunting quail for the first time, talk to people who've hunted it before. Ask them for tips, and more importantly, evaluate the advice you're given against your own research – some people like to talk the talk, but that doesn't mean they can walk the walk. It's important to know that the advice you're given checks out in the field.

Don't be shy about checking out books from the library, making enquiries with online game hunting forums or pitting the opinions of your friends and family against one another – the results could surprise everyone, and a little information goes a long way when it comes to planning a successful hunting adventure.

The next key to planning a successful hunt is knowing the terrain you'll be hunting in. This takes two forms – first, understanding the type of ground you're likely to encounter, and second, physically scouting the territory you're going to be hunting. Researching the habits of the animal you're going to hunt will give you a fair indicator of how the animal behaves, what sort of cover it hides in, where it likes to eat and sleep. You can take that information and apply it to the actual ground you're going to cover.

Visit your hunting ground and get a feel for the likely areas you'll find the animal in question. Seek out areas where you'll be able to watch for animals, as well as areas you'll be able to hide in and take that perfect shot. If you're unable to visit the area in person, ask people who live nearby what their experience of the land is – granted, they're unlikely to reveal their favorite duck blind, but they might be able to give you pointers that will help make your trip more fruitful.

Pack well – don't overlook the standard items you should include and don't leave things out in the name of saving space. Truth be told, you don't know what you'll rely on most until you're in the field and by then, if it's something you've left at home, you're simply out of luck. Make a survival pack, which doesn't need to be any larger than a fanny pack, and keep it with you always. This should include a space blanket, a bottle of aspirin, a few nutrition bars, two eight-ounce juice cartons and a packet of water purifying tablets.

In addition to this, be sure you take a properly-stocked first aid kit. Refer to the basic Red Cross guide for what should be in a first aid kit and you can't go too far wrong. Bear in mind you need enough first aid supplies to tend to more than one wounded person – accidents happen, and so do stupid things. You need to be prepared for both, so stick a mini first aid kit in your vehicle, a full-sized one at base camp and another mini kit in your daypack in addition to your survival pack.

When you're packing for camp, include enough supplies for everyone in your party plus at least one spare of everything. Always bring more food and drink than you'll actually get through, in case you end up staying longer than you intended. Pack a box of waterproof matches into any nook or cranny you can find – matches are one thing you can't do without, and you never realize they're gone until it's too late.

Finally, the most important part of properly planning your hunt is letting people know where you're going. This should include: a rough schedule of when you intend to be where and when you will return; a map illustrating where you'll be hunting with any areas you know you'll explore highlighted; emergency contact numbers; and, details of who else is in your party. Leave a copy of your plan with a relative or close family friend, as well as a work colleague.

You should also post a copy of your plan in the appropriate area of the recreational park or forest that you're hunting. The point of this is to give search and rescue teams a fighting chance of finding you if there's an emergency or if you don't return home in due course. Making a proper hunt plan at the outset of your journey gives them a place to start – without it, they're charging blind into thousands of acres of woodland.

HUNTING WELL

Some beginning hunters opt to engage the services of a hunt operator – this limits the amount of planning and discovery you'd usually have to do on your own and offers a solid opportunity for you to get acquainted with a variety of the common aspects involved in successful hunting. These operators are available for groups or individuals, but prices can be high and it's important to go with a widely-renown operator to get the most of your experience.

Another tip for having a good hunt is making sure you go with like-minded hunters. If you're a beginner, it's ill-advised to go trekking into the brush without someone who has at least a little more experience than you. However, if you go hunting and haven't got anything in common with the rest of the party you'll be awfully bored during the down time. And depending on the weather, there could be a lot of down time.

There are a handful of unwritten rules for hunting, and it would serve you well to know them. For starters, always treat the weapons, wilderness and wildlife with respect. The majority of rules for a successful hunt are common sense things, such as: carry weapons pointed in the safest possible direction, never toward people; don't store firearms with chambered rounds overnight; don't sleep, climb a tree or jump down from a tree stand with a loaded weapon; only take a shot when you've got an unobstructed view of your target; and, don't drink alcohol while pursuing game, don't drink alcohol around loaded weapons and only consume limited alcoholic drinks following the day's hunting.

Another big thing that all hunters should remember is that a successful hunt isn't necessarily going to end with you bagging a trophy. Sure, that's the idea, and it's a great bonus if it happens – but a successful hunt will teach you something more about the game you enjoy pursuing, educate you about the terrain you've covered and hopefully improve your senses and other hunt-related abilities. Hunting is an opportunity for all of us to learn a little, teach a little and appreciate the natural wonder that surrounds us all year long.

And finally, you may've noticed, our greatest belief is that people get the most from their hunt experience if they're properly prepared for it. We're often told to hunt smart rather than hard – and that's solid advice. By preparing for all aspects of the hunting process, you're less likely to waste time covering terrain you needn't have bothered with or straining yourself physically due to inappropriate commitment. So prepare, pack and plan your socks off and when the big hunt comes your way, you'll be able to enjoy it.

HARVESTING YOUR HUNT

If you intend to make a plush rug out of that gorgeous brown bear's hide, you'll need to be prepared in advance. The same goes for getting the most from that elk or caribou meat you're eyeing up – that's right, we said it before and we'll say it again: plan ahead.

When you're hunting for a big game trophy or the aforementioned bear skin rug, you'll want to consult a local taxidermist for specific instructions regarding handling your animal carcass. Though the principles for preserving the head and antlers of most four-legged species are relatively similar, each taxidermist has their own way of mounting a trophy – and if you fail to follow their specific instructions, you're unlikely to get the best possible result. So talk to a taxidermist, or if you intend on doing the mount yourself, read up on the best practice and take a brief how-to guide written on a 4x6 recipe card that you've either laminated or sealed in a small zip-top bag. Having the card to hand will ensure you're able to get the best of your catch in terms of display.

In brief, a head mount will need to be carefully removed, and this is best done by stringing the animal up so you can 'cape' the animal without worrying about blood or debris getting on the head. Think of how a cape falls across your own shoulders, and don't cut anything on the animal above the place that line would translate to them. This will make doing the rest of your field dressing tasks a bit more complicated, but overall the job of meat preservation takes priority for most hunters.

Now, to preserve your trophy, make an incision around the animal along this cape line. Then, work to carefully roll the hide forward from there, right up to the ears. You'll always want to leave more hide than is absolutely necessary for your taxidermist to work with – after all, it's easy to cut off any excess, but impossible to 'make' more hide if what's available falls short of requirements. Next, cut the neck about three inches below the junction of the head and neck. Once that cut is complete, you should be able to twist the head off by gripping the base of each antler firmly and applying a reasonable

amount of pressure.

The other leading consideration for hunters is how to best preserve the meat they've won. Again, this is something with basics that remain the same across virtually all species we hunt. The most immediate concern is getting the meat cool, as this helps protect the meat from spoiling.

To field dress most birds and small game, all you'll really need is a good hunting knife. For larger game, you need significantly more than this. The essentials are a good hunting knife, a compact folding saw, a hatchet and a sharpening stone. You'll also want to take along some rope to stabilize the carcass while you're working and a kit to hang the animal if you need to.

Whether you're field dressing your kill for meat preservation or to create an exquisite trophy, a good tip is to bring a couple pairs of rubber gloves while you're working – they'll keep some of the grot off your hands, give you a truer grip on the slippery bits and, most importantly, provide a little protection against nicks and cuts.

Whether you opt to skin your kill, bone, quarter or simply haul the animal out whole, there are a few things you've got to consider. First, heat is the enemy. You need to cool that carcass down if you want to eat the meat at a later date, the fastest way to do this is to gut and skin the animal. The quick and simple guide to gutting is as follows:

- Slit the animal from anus to brisket (or lower, depending on your requirements) – take care not to puncture the innards
- Cut carefully around the anus and genitals, again taking care not to puncture anything
- Reach inside the upper-end of the cavity and work to roll the innards down and push them out the end of the animal. Cut away the diaphragm to gain access to the upper body cavity
- Continue cutting organs from the upper part of the body cavity out, carefully going along making precise cuts the whole way. The innards should slough out through the bottom of the carcass easily enough, bear in mind that if you intend to save the heart, kidneys or liver, you'll need to pack them in bags and get them on ice as soon as possible.
- Once the innards are removed, you may need to quarter your animal to pack it out

Second, once you've packed the animal away from the kill site and have it back at your base camp or in your rig, you need to find a way to keep it cool. Avoid storing the carcass in an enclosed space, like a car trunk. Third, you've

got to keep the meat clean – that means free from debris as well as bugs.

One good tip for fending off insects is dusting your kill with a can of black pepper, and a solid piece of advice for keeping dirt at bay is to skin with great care so there's a layer of fat remaining around the carcass. Finally, secure your game properly for transport – the last thing you should do is tie it to the hood of your vehicle. Instead, be sure it's properly bound in the rear of your ride. On the other hand, you should be careful not to limit air flow around the meat – limiting air circulation can lead to spoilage and make the rest of your efforts all for naught.

REWARDS OF THE HUNT

Whether it's a stunning trophy buck mounted on the wall or a delicious meal made from meat harvested by your own hands, the rewards of hunting are many.

On average, a deer will yield around fifty pounds of meat. You'll convert just under half the weight of most commonly hunted game into meat if you wish to do so. You can opt to butcher the animal yourself or take it to a local butcher – there are advantages to handling the carcass either way, but most people will opt to take the easier road of using a butcher. Bear in mind that all butchers operate differently, what's common practice to one guy will be a completely unthinkable process to another. So, as with all other things, you'll need to be prepared.

If there's a local butcher you know and trust, use it. Otherwise, check with fellow hunters, friends and family in the area and see if you can come up with a couple of butchers to talk to. Once you've had a chance to discuss the butcher's working approach, you'll know which one is most suited to your own needs. Butchers will produce a variety of cuts of meat for you – so it's important to discuss your requirements both before the hunt and as you're handing the hard-won carcass over to the butcher afterward.

As part of your planning process, remember to ask the butcher for any recommendations you should follow when field dressing your kill as this will allow you to get the best results in terms of meat yield and quantity. Some butchers are able to fix your mistakes, in terms of how you've quartered the animal, for example. But, if your meat was too hot for too long and spoiled, was tainted by debris or some other substance, even the best butcher won't be able to do anything about it – and he shouldn't. At the end of the day, tainted meat will only make you ill, so there's no point arguing with the butcher about it. Of course, you can take the carcass to another butcher for a

second opinion, but if the meat is spoilt, it's spoilt and there's nothing you can do but learn from your mistakes to avoid them in the future.

If you've been fortunate enough to get an animal worth mounting, you'll be gutted if you roll up to the taxidermist's shop and present something he tells you can't be mounted. So, as always, prepare yourself for success by visiting the taxidermist beforehand. Follow the instructions your taxidermist gives you in the field, pack the mount according to his guidelines and the odds of having a gorgeous memento of your best hunting experience are greatly improved.

One final tip for successful trophy mounting, be sure the wall you're going to hang the mount on is up to supporting it. The rack on an elk can weigh twenty pounds alone. Add to this the weight of the skull, stuffing, mounting board and accessories and you'll quickly be beyond the support rating of a mere nail in drywall. You'll also be out of the range for a normal picture hanger – so find a good stud wall and get the right sort of bracket to avoid having your trophy come crashing down.

Perhaps the most lasting reward of the hunt experience is one of the most often overlooked. Your memory. Of course, you and the other guys in your party will each have your own take on the whole experience, which will lead to amusing late-night arguments for years to come. But more than this, particularly if you've hunted with younger family members, you'll have a lasting image of something truly special. An experience that friends and family across generations come together to learn, teach and experience together.

The meat, if it isn't spoilt, will last a few months. The mount will stay on the wall until it goes out of fashion or is replaced by something bigger, better or rarer. But your memory of each hunt experience sticks with you until the lights go out. And that's something truly special.