

15 Keys to Better Deer Hunting
Want to improve your odds in the whitetail woods?
Give these tag-filling tips a try.
By J Wayne Fears

To a whitetail hunter, "success" can be defined in many ways, but if your definition involves taking your share of large-racked bucks, you need more than luck to achieve it. Any lucky hunter can sit on the right log at the right time and occasionally shoot a big buck. Only a hunter who pays attention to detail can do so consistently.

If you want to have more than luck on your side when whitetail hunting, try these proven tips:

1) Put your total effort into the hunt. Hunt with a winning attitude. It's not easy to put your all into a hunt when you're freezing cold, the wind is blowing, it's raining hard, you need more sleep, the bucks won't move, or you want to get back to camp for lunch. Hunt every chance you get, with enthusiasm, regardless of the weather. Deer are unpredictable, and only one thing is certain--if you don't hunt, you won't be successful. Hunt with the same zeal and alertness the last hour of a hunt as you did the first.

2) Outfit yourself to be a good deer hunter. Buy a good pair of hunting boots and have them well broken-in before deer season opens. Select your hunting clothes for comfort based on the anticipated weather and method of hunting you will do. In cold weather, dress in layers to retain your body heat. Get yourself a day pack and make it a necessary part of your hunting gear. Properly outfitted, it can enable you to stay comfortable in the back country under most conditions

without quitting the hunt early. Carry a rain suit, flash-

light, a change of socks, gloves, binoculars, rope, a compass, a map of the area, a survival kit, lunch, a canteen of water, and whatever else you think necessary to stay comfortable. An uncomfortable hunter is seldom alert or successful.

3) Hunt the difficult-to-hunt areas. One of the main reasons many hunters never see large bucks is that they hunt only the easy places. A buck that has lived long enough to have a large rack--three or more years--is smart enough to spend a lot of time in the thicker, more remote areas within his territory. This is especially true when the woods are suddenly full of hunters.

Some of the most successful trophy hunters I know hunt only the thickest deer cover they can find. They prefer beaver swamps, creek bottoms thick with cane and honeysuckle, timber cut overs that are several years old, and overgrown, long abandoned fields. These hunters will scout the area thoroughly, locating trails that appear to be used often. Using a portable tree stand, they will set up so that they can observe these trails and may watch such an area for several days from daylight until dark.

4) Get to know the buck's habits and habitat as if he were a close friend. Read everything you can about the life history of the whitetail buck, and spend some time with a wildlife biologist. Listen to hunters who take bucks regularly. From all these sources you can learn to anticipate a buck's actions and how best to plan your hunts. This will take some time and field work. For example, when a biologist tells you the favorite fall food of deer in your area is Japanese honeysuckle, don't be satisfied until you can recognize it in the woods.

5) Look for old home sites when scouting. They often provide deer a perfect hideout. Grown up and usually overlooked by hunters, they make choice bedding areas. There may be an abundance of food in the form of recurring garden plants, fruit trees, nut-bearing trees, shrubs along fence rows, etc. The site of the smokehouse or

outhouse may have become a salt m lick. Water may be available at a spring, stock tank, or even a windmill. Older topo maps are a good way to locate any former homesites.

6) Develop an eye and ear for deer. Many hunters fail to see deer in the wild because they are looking for an entire deer or a deer standing in an opening. Unfortunately, whitetails, especially mature bucks, don't often present themselves this way. Learn to watch for any slight movement at a distance. The slightest flick of a tail or twitch of an ear can reveal a buck to an alert hunter. Learn to watch for parts of a deer: the glint of an eye, the tip of an ear, sunlight shining on polished antlers, or a horizontal line--the deer's back or belly--that seems out of place. If you are still-hunting, occasionally stoop to look below the limbs and brush.

Knowing the color of a deer's coat during hunting season also helps. Deer coats vary from reddish, usually in the summer, to dark brown or gray, usually in the fall and winter. However, this can vary from one locale to another. Local biologists or conservation officers can set you straight on the color of deer coats in the area you hunt

Listen to sounds around you that may alert you to a deer's presence. Deer walk very noisily in dry leaves, a buck may grunt during the rut, and a deer feeding on acorns makes a popping or crunching sound. Resist the temptation to make any quick movement to identify a sound.

7) Shoot from a firm rest. Many good bucks are missed simply because during the excitement of the moment, the hunter failed to take advantage of a firm support for his firearm. The stand or blind hunter should plan ahead of time how he will take possible shots. The stalk or drive hunter should use a sling and know how to shoot using a tight sling position. Most experienced still-hunters move from tree to tree so that they will have a shooting support readily available. The hunter who takes his time, gets a firm support for his firearm, and takes only well-placed shots doesn't

have to make excuses.

8) Use binoculars regularly. All whitetail deer hunters should invest in a pair of quality binoculars and use them on every hunt. Many eastern hunters think only western hunters need binoculars in their vast, open country. Wrong! Many successful hunters say they spot more bucks with binoculars than with the unaided eye. Binoculars are especially valuable during periods of low light such as dark days, early morning, or late in the afternoon, and for studying the edges of clear cuts, agriculture fields, or creek banks.

9) Wear yellow shooting glasses on dark days or when hunting in dark timber. By filtering out ultraviolet rays, these lenses increase contrast and improve visibility. They are good to use whenever the light is poor. It's also important to wear them when scouting, as they help in spotting sign in dark shade. They are good protection for the eyes any time you're moving around in brush.

10) Pay attention to wind direction and air currents. A deer can detect an upwind hunter by scent from as far away as half a mile. Within 100 yards, a buck can pinpoint the location of a hunter with the slightest air current. Considering this, hunters must be very aware of wind direction and air currents. Many seasoned hunters tie a length of sewing thread--about four inches--to their rifle's upper sling swivel or the upper limb of their bow to be able to check even the slightest movement of air. It is surprising how much air movement occurs on what appear to be calm days.

An important air movement that many hunters are not aware of is the up slope and down-slope movement of air near the ground caused by the heating and cooling of the earth's surface. Starting fairly early in the morning as the sun heats the ground, air movement is up slope as warm air rises. In the late afternoon, as the earth's surface begins to cool, the direction of air movement has changed to down-slope. This can play a major role in

determining where to place a stand or the direction of a stalk. For example, if you are hunting in an area with hills and valleys, you might hunt hilltops during the warm part of the day and valleys at daybreak or late in the afternoon. Knowledge of this air movement can be especially helpful when you know the bedding and feeding areas and travel routes of the deer in a specific area.

Another air movement that can quietly carry a hunter's scent a long way, especially on clear days, is the movement of air from cooler to warmer spots. As the air is warmed and rises in a spot where the sun hits it first, a flow of cooler air is drawn from cooler spots to fill the void. How can this affect the hunter? Let's say a bow hunter has his blind in a forest adjacent to a clearcut where bucks are known to bed. As the sun warms the clearcut first, the scent of the hunter in the cooler forest is pulled into the clearcut, warning the bucks of his presence.

11) When deer are feeding on agricultural crops, set up stands on the approaches to the field rather than at the field edges. Bucks feeding in open fields most often feed at night. They follow a trail to a spot near the field during the late afternoon and hold up there until dark before entering the field. A stand on a heavily used trail some 100 yards into the woods from the field may catch the buck slowly approaching the field or milling around awaiting darkness.

12) Use only masking scents that are common to the area you are hunting--pine scent in pine woods, sage in sagebrush country, cedar in cedar hills, etc. Don't overdo it and don't think wearing the scent replaces the necessity of watching wind direction and air currents. In fact, some of the best deer hunters I know never use a cover scent. They keep their hunting clothing and themselves clean, avoid taking any foreign odors (smelly soaps, aftershave lotions, gun oil, hair tonic, coffee, or food) into the woods with them. They watch the wind religiously.

13) Learn to sit motionless for long periods. Nothing gets a keen eyed old buck's attention any faster than a squirming hunter.

The best tree stand or camouflage clothing won't conceal a hunter who is swatting at mosquitoes, scratching his nose, wiggling his feet, or constantly turning his body to look behind him. We hunters are within view of mature bucks much more than we know, and movement is our biggest giveaway.

14) Exercise patience. Successful whitetail hunters take their time in planning a hunt and don't change plans midway through the hunt. If they select a stand, they stick with it, even though after sitting there a couple of hours they see several other locations that look better. They can spend several days hunting an area they like even though they don't see any deer moving. When still-hunting, they will take an hour to cover 300 yards.

Perhaps what is most impressive about these hunters--and I am convinced it is the reason they take more large-antlered deer--is that they have the patience to pass up small-antlered young bucks. By exercising some self discipline and passing up smaller bucks, they sooner or later get a chance at a mature one. In most areas, when you pull the trigger on a buck, your hunt is over. If you take small bucks, you will rarely get a chance at a wall-hanger.

15) Take advantage of natural cover when selecting a stand site. Hunters often rely totally on camouflage clothing for cover when on a stand. This is usually not enough. In a tree stand, be mindful of your background from the perspective of a deer on the ground. Have a tree or thick branches and leaves breaking up your outline. Don't leave a rope dangling from the stand to wave in the wind.

When selecting a ground stand, find a tree or stump large enough to lean against to break up your outline. Clear an area for your feet and legs so that any movement won't make a lot of noise. Use grass and saplings to help break up your outline, but don't forget to clear out any obstacles to shooting in the logical directions.

The more comfortable your stand is, the more likely you are to sit still. It is also a good idea to wear a camo face mask and

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gloves when on the ground, in a tree stand, or stalking.

From : Tom Sat 17 Jun 95 06:36

On [06-10-95 00:05] Rex Lesly spoke to James Roberts about Hunting

JR> Are there any whitetail deer hunters on this conference?

RL> james, I hail from the mountains of Northern Calif. Spoken proudly

RL> because I just escaped from the city last year.

RL>

RL> I earnestly hope to get back into hunting, something I haven't done

RL> since childhood, and am looking for sources of information,

RL> educational material, tips etc.

RL>

RL> My boy and I are practicing with bows and rifles, We are both very

RL> good shots already, but neither of us knows squat about deer, bear,

RL> whatever. So, we are empty vessels, so to speak, awaiting an

RL> experienced voice in the wilderness.

I think that you will find it a most rewarding experience, especially if you include your son with you. I enjoy getting out even if I don't see or harvest a deer. The number one point in deer hunting is to always hunt into the wind or at least a cross wind. Number two is to remain silent and if hunting with a partner use hand signals. Do a lot of scouting for places to hunt and look for rubs on bushes and trees where the bucks rub their antlers. A long row of rubs in a generally straight line area indicates that a buck is frequenting that area. I personally like to wear rubber bottom boots (LaCrosse) as you leave neo scent while walking. Another thing is about my clothing, my wife never washes it, I do. I wash my clothing in 20 Mule Team Borax and Baking Soda, gets the smell out and leaves no phosphates to glow. The deer can see the phosphates even though you can't. That a trick that was used by snipers in Desert

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Storm and it worked for them. I will include some more tips in a later message.

--James

... A bad day hunting beats a good day at work anytime.

___ Blue Wave/QWK v2.12

From : Tom Jun 95 06:33
To : All
Subj : Forwarded message from old area.

- * Forwarded (from: BAD_MSGS) by Tom Lane using timEd/2 1.01+.
- * Originally from James Roberts (9:6900/8) to John Mudge.
- * Original dated: Jun 11 '95, 12:11

On [06-08-95 00:36] John Mudge spoke to James Roberts about Hunting

Hello John,

JR> Well mostly when the deer go into rut, I have them pretty well figured
JR> out and manage to get a few each year. I have found that Tink's #69
JR> really does the trick and pulls the bucks right on in if placed around
JR> a little. I wear rubber bottom boots and use a drag rag with a few drops
JR> of Tinks and walk the last 200 or 300 yards to my stand with the rag
JR> dragging. Before I get settled in, I place two or three rags with the
JR> Tinks about 20 yards out and around me. I have had bucks come looking

JM> I have very rarely heard of anyone using scent (or dogs) for hunting
JM> deer up here. Dogs may be illegal. Scent is sold for use in bow
JM> hunting though. Maybe I should keep some on hand. When I hear of a

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JM> "stand" I think of a small platform up in a tree. Folks here used to

Dog hunting is legal here in Alabama, although I don't like to hunt deer with dogs. I like stalk hunting and just sitting on stand. A stand around here could be a climbing stand that can be moved around, a ladder stand with a seat on top or a shooting house overlooking a green field or a powerline or gasline. It is legal to have green fields here and hunt around them so long as the crop in them is not knocked down on the ground. We have a few stands up in the forks of trees also. The scent is only effective during the rut though. A lot of hunters around here use the same scent as I do and have found it to be very effective during the rut. I have watched as many as 25 deer in a greenfield at one time and it is very interesting. You get to pick what you want, although the older bucks won't come into the field, they stay back and you have to watch back into the tree line for them and make some long shots to get them. An accurate bolt action with very good light gathering scope is especially popular with this type of hunting around these parts.

--James

Kinkel

Subject: Re: UV-Killer clothing spray

Bill wrote:

>>I can't comment on the question about scents. But on the UV question, I
>>can only attest to the fact that I do NOT use UV killers, I wear blaze
>>orange from head to pant cuff, and I have on MANY occasions had deer stand
>>5-10 feet in front of me. It's not what color you're wearing, or if it
>>glows, it's MOVEMENT. You don't move, they don't care.

>>

>> [snip]

>

> [snip]
>
> ... Many, and this is debatable, see in black and white or shades of
> greys... I don't know why... has something to do with the 'rods and cones' in
> the eye... I am not a biologist but I think that's close to the reason...
> anyway, the movement and the smell are the two most important... in my book.
>
> whitetail
> Bill

Are deer color blind? No they are not; they just don't see color the way humans do. The 'rods and cones' concerns the light receptors in the eye. Rods are the more light sensitive receptors which pick up shades of dark and light, in essence black, white, and all shades in between. Cones are the color receptors. There are three different types of cones, one for each of the primary colors that make up the color spectrum or 'wheel' - red, blue, and yellow. Deer do not have as many cones as the human eye, and far more rods than the human eye; thus scientists first felt that deer were color blind. Further research has shown that deer do see color, but in a unique way - they are dichromatic. Dichromatic means that they only see two of the primary colors instead of all three. Deer have no cone receptors for the color red, thus they only see the primary colors blue and yellow (and all shades of colors that can be created by mixing blue and yellow, such as green). What humans see as red, deer would see as dull yellow. The high number of rods in deer eyes give them a peak vision in the ultraviolet light range. Deer have greater visual sensitivity during twilight (peak ultraviolet light) than humans do at high noon (peak visual light).

How does this translate into hunting and "UV Killers"? The UV Killers probably would help most during first light, before sunrise, and at dusk, just after sunset, when ultraviolet light is at its peak during legal hunting hours. Once the sun comes up over the horizon, visual light (color light) predominates. Do I use UV Killers? Yes, because I feel they give me an advantage during low light conditions. The number of

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deer which saw me in my tree stand, decreased dramatically once I started using UV Killers. Of course I completely agree with Bill, MOVEMENT is the key. Many of the deer that saw me before I started using UV Killer, did not spook and run as long as I didn't move. Still, I prefer to have the deer not see me at all, thus I use the UV Killers because I want every advantage I can get.

Bryan

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From : James Thu 08 Jun 95 11:46
To : Tom

Hi Tom,

TJ> the message from you, James. I am an avid hunter from many years back
TJ> and I want to talk and read about HUNTING. I have hunted blacktails,
TJ> mule deer, and whitetails. I have found whitetails to be the hardest
TJ> to hunt by far. I am still trying to learn how to hunt them however.

TJ> I am also an avid elk hunter, duck hunter, upland bird hunter, and
TJ> rabbit hunter. I grew up in Alaska and still go back there every few
TJ> years for another trip into nostalgia.
TJ> Where are you hunting whitetails? And how successful have you been?

I'm down in the midst of whitetail country (Alabama). I'm just like you, I've been hunting whitetails for about 35 years and I still find them hard to hunt. I have found a few secrets about them in that span of time and use it to help me put meat in the freezer. I have found them to be curious creatures in that if jumped they will generally only run about

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100 to 200 yards and stop to see what jumped them. If you can circle or quietly approach from downwind after jumping one you will get a second chance. I have heard from some old-timers that it is no use in hunting them in the middle of the day, but I have had most of my success during that time also. Another little trick that I have found is, if you kill a buck in a good stand spot, more than likely another buck will take over his territory within a few days and you can literally use the same stand to take 3 or 4 bucks from. I have had a life ambition of getting to go Elk hunting, so clue me in on some good techniques. I will give you some more info in next message.

--James