



Hunting GUIDE

Gun Safety Rules

Statistically speaking, hunting is among the safest sports in the world. Basic safe gun handling and storage is easy to achieve, especially for responsible gun owners.

Whether you have been taught gun safety by a family member or have enrolled in a training course, it's important to always put your knowledge into practice when heading out for your next big hunt. Doing so will help ensure your safety and the protection of others.

SAFE HANDLING

One of the first lessons every shooter and hunter should learn is to treat every gun like it is loaded and ready to fire at all times. Following this mindset will help you handle your gun with the respect it deserves.

Experts teach that even the safety of a gun — the mechanical device designed to prevent unintentional firing — can become faulty and inoperable. Trusting that a safety will always perform as intended can lead to deadly consequences.

Follow your common sense to realize that a gun can cause serious harm and death if improperly handled. There is no margin for error. You owe it to yourself to know as much about your gun as possible to ensure safe handling 100 percent of the time.

HELPFUL TIPS

The National Shooting Sports Foundation offers the following tips for safe gun handling:

- Never touch the trigger on a firearm until you actually intend to shoot;
- Keep your fingers away from the trigger while loading or unloading; and
- Never pull the trigger on any firearm with the safety on the “safe” position.



Following these tips will help keep your hunting trip enjoyable and safe. Don't forget to pass along these tips to others, especially inexperienced shooters.

One of the tenets of responsible gun ownership is sharing what you know with others, so spread the word.

WEAR THE RIGHT GEAR

Understanding your weapon is the most important aspect of safe hunting. Another key factor is wearing the right protective gear while you're hunkered down in your blind or taking in the view from your tree stand.

Wear shooting glasses and some

form of hearing protection at all times when shooting. If you're exposed to shooting noise without the appropriate buffer, your hearing may become damaged. The right glasses can protect your eyes from debris and falling shot during your hunt.

Choosing an Outfitter

Ready for your next big hunting expedition? You don't have to travel far. Choose a local outfitter to show you the best spot to take down geese or deer in your neck of the woods.

Hiring a local outfitter can help you discover regions in your area that you may not have know about before. Trust these professionals to show you an unforgettable time, hopefully chock full of great catches and plenty of delicious grub.

WHAT IS AN OUTFITTER?

An outfitter is a person who offers services in hunting and fishing that might include guide activities, equipment, accommodation, lodging and food. Depending on the size of the operation, an outfitter may be a multi-staff organization or a sole proprietorship.

The size of the company shouldn't play a big role in your decision, but the quality of its services should. Remember you're looking for expertise in the game you're hunting, as well as the area, so choose wisely based on these factors.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN OUTFITTER

Once you decide to schedule your next big hunting trip, consider the local hotspots. Staying close to home means less time driving and more time hunting. Check in with your region's most popular outfitters to get quotes on an adventure.

Check reviews by others who



© FOTOLIA

have used their services. There are plenty of hunting forums online that allow hunters the chance to give their reviews. Be on the lookout through your local newspaper for upcoming specials. Follow your prospective outfitter on social media as well to stay connected.

TALK TO A FEW

When your research is done, it's time to discuss pricing options with your local outfitters. Make a list of the top three organizations you'd like to interview and reach out through email or phone.

Here are some potential

questions to ask to make sure your hunting needs will be met by an outfitter:

- Can you provide a list of references I can call or email to inquire about the experience you provide?
- What is your expertise and experience hunting the areas

where you provide outfitting services?

- What are your most popular packages, and what can I expect to pay for each of them?
- Are you bonded, licensed and insured?
- What is your cancellation policy?

Finding the Right Dog



How much money should you spend on your hunting dog? If you're like most American hunters, the answer is likely, "A lot!" Hunters in the United States spend \$605 million per year on hunting dogs, according to the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

© FOTOLIA

From buying top breeds and dishing out major dollars for top-flight training, hunters are willing to spend big bucks for the right gundog. If you're looking to add a new partner to your hunting repertoire, there are many steps to take to ensure the right fit for your needs, as well as the needs of your new pup.

FINDING THE RIGHT RETRIEVER

Waterfowl hunting is the major segment of the sport requiring a quality retriever. Hunting dogs come in all shapes and sizes, so be sure to do your research before shelling out your cash for

one.

A few of the main factors that should guide your decision-making process are temperament, size and trainability. Talk with your fellow hunters and work with your local breeding professionals to find out what kind of retriever will be best for you.

The commitment of training a new gundog can be a costly one, so covering all your bases before the purchase is a smart move.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BREEDER

Finding the right hunting dog starts with finding the right breeder. Choose an experienced

breeder with proven bloodlines and a long-standing reputation for producing healthy dogs.

There are desirable traits for gundogs, depending on how you plan to use yours, so work with your local professionals to talk through some of your requirements and expectations for your new dog. They will be able to match you up with the right personality traits and genes for your needs.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

The best hunters have strong instincts. Follow yours when choosing your next gundog. Avoid picking litters based solely

on pedigree designations. These are titles used by buyers to identify pups that may have award-winning blood in their pedigree.

Some of these titles from the American Kennel Club include Amateur Field Champion (AFC) and National Field Champion (NFC). While these designations are important characteristics to consider, these traits are not guaranteed to be passed down to your pup.

Trust your instincts to uncover positive genetic traits, including calm temperament, tractability, nose, retrieving desire and natural delivery to hand.

Consider Bowhunting

Looking to take your hunting skills to the next level? Bowhunting may be the next natural step for you. Many hunters across the country have taken to archery, and there are many reasons. Bowhunting has a way of connecting you with nature as you discover a more primitive approach of hunting.

It also teaches you discipline and patience as you hunt your game and opens up a world of new equipment and gear to explore.

According to a recent study by bowhunter-ed.com (provider of recreational safety education materials for all 50 states), 24 percent of those who claimed they hunt with a bow cited the longer season as their top reason, and 11 percent said it was because bow season had an earlier start.

No matter your reason for entering this fast-growing hunting segment, it's easy to find the right equipment and get started on advancing your newfound passion.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BOW

Before heading to your local outdoors shop, you have to decide what type of bow you want to use. Do some research on the variations, including compound, re-curve or long bow. If you're just starting out, the compound bow will most likely be your best bet.

That's because they are equipped with various accessories to increase your shooting accuracy and improve your sight. The other types of bows require more training and practice before you can expect to feasibly take down your game of choice, but you may



be up to the challenge. Sign up at your local range for training sessions to start sharpening your skills.

When it comes to what you're looking for in a bow, draw weight is one of the biggest factors to consider. Defined as the amount of force it takes to pull the bowstring back to the full draw, this measurement can vary by weapon.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources recommends 40 pounds or greater for a clean, ethical shot.

BOWHUNTING SAFETY

According to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, there are two general bowhunting practices that lead to injuries: not being safe in tree stands and having arrows out

of the quiver when they shouldn't be.

Equally important is making sure your equipment is in good shape. Shoddy equipment can lead to personal or animal injury, both of which should be avoided at all costs.

Here are some things to check on before heading out on your hunt, according to the UDWR:

- Make sure the laminations on your bow are not flaking or separating;
- Check the strings on your bow for fraying;
- On a compound bow, make sure the pulleys and cables are in working order; and
- Assess the stiffness of the arrow's shaft to make sure it matches your bow's draw weight.

Gadgets for the Hunter

There is something wildly primitive about tracking down your next trophy, but there also is room for technology in the hunt. From Bluetooth trackers and hearing protectors to mobile applications that function as game call systems, there are a ton of options on the market for the tech-savvy hunter.

Whether you're planning for the perfect Christmas gift or buying a present for any occasion, you shouldn't have a problem tracking down a unique item — even for the hunter who seemingly already has it all.

WIND DETECTORS

A few companies have recently come out with innovative wind detectors that use advanced technology to identify wind direction and air movement shifts. These handheld devices can even pick up wind that may be undetectable to humans.

Why is wind so important? Its direction and velocity can send your scent downwind to your target game and can wreck havoc on a bow shot. Knowing the specifics of the wind around you can help you be a more prepared, focused hunter.

RANGEFINDERS

You can purchase a rangefinder that attaches directly to your bow. The newest models emit a constant beam that displays a real-

time reading. This helps prevent misses and gives you an accurate understanding of the distance between you and the animal.

Rangefinders have long been friends to hunters looking to fire accurate shots. Being able to affix one to your weapon will help you avoid toggling back and forth between a handheld option and your bow, which can waste precious time.

HANDHELD RADIOS

Communication can be everything on hunting day, especially if you're with a group of friends spread across a field or forest. You can find a rugged, reliable set of handheld radios to help you keep in touch during inclement weather.

Most are waterproof and able to attach to your hunting vest. This makes working with your hunting party convenient. Many radios come with a desk charging station and USB cables to make sure you're always charged up.



Kids and Hunting

Youth represent one of the fastest-growing segments in the sport of hunting, making it more imperative than ever for comprehensive gun safety education in our communities. Your state's department of natural resources likely has child shooting safety programs in place, including certification classes that cover basic gun handling techniques.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, for example, offers a firearms safety certification course for children starting at age 11. This designation is focused on teaching children the following principles:

- Treat each firearm as if it is loaded;
- Always control the muzzle of your firearm; and
- Be sure of your target and what is beyond.

There also are numerous national shooting programs dedicated to not only providing a safe learning environment for our youth, but also to developing the next generation of safety-minded, responsible gun owners.

TALK TO YOUR KIDS

If your child shows a real interest in guns and taking up the sport of hunting, it's important to have open, regular conversations with them. After all, you are their best teacher when it comes to safely handling firearms and respecting the animals you hunt.

As a parent and teacher, it's important to display responsible firearm ownership. This includes keeping your guns locked and out of reach of children, as well as locking up ammunition separately from the weapon. Remember to also teach your children to never pick up a gun if they see one left out at a friend or family member's house, even if it looks like a toy gun.

SHOOTING PROGRAMS

Youth can sharpen their hunting skills by joining programs centered on their development. For junior shooters seeking an introduction to Olympic-style shooting sports, the USA Shooting Youth Programs and Athlete Development division may be available in your area.

The national organization is present in many cities across the country and is focused on teaching patience, determination, organization skills, mental and physical control, safety awareness, goal setting, problem solving and good sportsmanship.



Hunting Ethics

Any responsible outdoorsman or woman knows there is a certain respect that comes with the sport. Not only must you respect your fellow hunters to ensure their safety, but you also must show reverence to the game you are hunting and the grounds upon which you hunt.

Big-game hunters in particular have made the news recently, with their actions being criticized by animal activist groups. In this age of technology and information sharing, it is critical to maintain a healthy hunting discipline at all times, even when you think there is no one watching.

FOLLOW THE LAW

There are a number of laws you must follow as a hunter. Rules and regulations are in place for a reason. Taking them seriously is paramount if you hope to have a safe, successful hunt.

Hunting out of season is a major regulation to which you must adhere, as your state's department of natural resources has put in restrictions to protect animal populations. Hunting seasons for all types of game vary from state to state, so be sure to check in with your local offices to make sure you are in compliance.

TIPS ON HUNTING ETHICS

Here are some tips from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources on hunting ethics and how to follow them:

- Always think of safety first and shooting game second.
- Respect the rights of landowners. You should never go



on private property without permission, and remember that cooperation and respect are the keys to getting permission to hunt.

- Know your gun and what it can do. Maintain your equipment so it functions properly

and does not pose a safety threat.

- Shoot only when absolutely certain of your target, and make every effort to locate crippled or lost game.
- Pick up spent shells and other litter.

• Clean and care for your game properly.

- Alcohol and hunting can make for a dangerous combination.
- Be mindful of local regulations, and always be properly licensed. Taking game out of

season and before or after legal shooting hours is poaching, not hunting.

- Realize that just being out there is what a good hunt is all about and you can have a great day without taking the bag limit.