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OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN

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Getting Started

There are several things to consider if you're new to hunting or are considering the sport.



It's a time-consuming activity with a variety of entry points. Even the weapon used can have a huge effect. In some cases, you may want to start by pairing up with a more experienced hunter:

ARE YOU OUTDOORSY?

Many hunters find that being immersed in nature is one of the greatest rewards of the sport. Watching wildlife wake up at dawn, learning to read the landscape and spending quiet time outdoors are experiences that keep people coming back season after season even in the face of extreme weather situations and the need to hike across rugged landscapes.

WHERE YOU'LL GO

Beginners often find success by choosing abundant game species and public lands that are easy to access. Local wildlife agencies and hunting organizations can help identify good places to start and communicate which days are open for hunting each type of animal.

MAKE THE TIME

Hunting takes time and preparation, so set realistic expectations. You'll spend time planning your trip, preparing your gear and practicing with your equipment before heading into the field. A hunt may involve long periods of waiting, and not every outing results in a harvest. Many hunters find that the experience itself, from learning new skills to spending time outdoors, is just as rewarding as the outcome.

SMART CHOICES

Your weapon of choice will determine many things. Some can only be used during certain seasons. Your personal level of experience might mean that more practice is involved. Your weapon dictates how far away you'll have to be when firing. Hunting with a bow, for instance, requires much more practice – and happens at a much closer distance.

ASK A FRIEND

If you're unsure about the process, talk to others in your circle who hunt. Expertise in this sport is hard-won, often after many, many years spent in duck blinds, tracking bigger game and learning the lay of the land. Talking to experienced hunters could help you avoid obvious pitfalls so that when you start to hunt it is enjoyable and exciting.



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Getting a Hunting License

Getting the proper license before heading out on a hunt is more than a mere formality.



If you can't show the proper credentials to game officials, the consequences may be quite severe. Hunting out-of-season often results in the stiffest penalty. But keeping your registrations up-to-date is about more than following the rules. The fees you pay go back into the sport of hunting by supporting upkeep initiatives for public lands and conservation efforts for local wildlife. Here's a look:

BEFORE REGISTRATION

If you're unsure which license or licenses are required, get in touch with the local wildlife and fisheries office. You can find additional registration information on its website, along with any required forms. The game and weaponry that you choose are usually key elements in this process. In many states, you can get the proper licenses at area outdoors stores or other retailers specializing in hunting gear. You can purchase needed equipment for your trip while you sign up. Some states offer registration over the phone.

WHICH LICENSE?

What and where you decide to hunt may mean registering for more than one license. For instance, each wildlife refuge may have their own procedures and fees. There are specific requirements for hunting along inland and coastal waterways, for trapping and for fishing. Fees may be higher for non-residents. Hunter safety courses are sometimes mandatory, particularly for younger hunters and those getting a license for the first time. In some cases, combination hunting and fishing licenses are available. Ask about lifetime options.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Game wardens enforce hunting regulations and ensure hunters are properly licensed and following local laws. Hunting without a license or violating season dates can result in fines, loss of hunting privileges and other penalties which vary by jurisdiction. Like the revenue from license fees, the many hunting-related fines help support wildlife conservation, habitat management and hunting and fishing programs.

Water Safety Tips



Hunting trips can last days and they may require trips deep into the woods.

That can make safe water for drinking and cooking a scarce resource. You can bring water with you, but it won't last forever – and it's going to weigh everyone down on the trail. Better to purify water you find from local waterways, ponds and lakes.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

When you're hunting and thirsty, it might be tempting to drink from the nearest outdoor water source. This can be very dangerous, with a risk of several nasty illnesses. Some are even fatal. Learning to purify water is an outdoor survival skill that can make the difference between life and death.

ILLNESSES AND SYMPTOMS

Avoid drinking water from an unknown source unless it's been thoroughly decontaminated. Among the best-known possible water-borne illnesses are caused by the very contagious norovirus, which can lead to nausea, stomach pain and vomiting. The bacteria Shigella and the microscopic parasites Cryptosporidium and Giardia all cause intestinal issues, including severe diarrhea.

WHAT TO DO

The most common way to purify water is over the campfire or other heat source. Bring the water to a boil to eliminate bacteria and other dangers.

How long it must be boiled depends on where you are hunting. If you are at or around sea-level, water is generally safe for drinking after it has boiled for at least a minute.

Those hunting in higher elevations, particularly above 6,500 feet, should allow boiling to continue for three or more minutes. In both cases, planning is key since the water will have to cool before it can be used for drinking or cooking. Water takes longer to reach its boiling point the higher you go.

A faster way to get clean water is to bring along a portable filter. This is handy if there isn't a nearby source of heat. Bring along extra filters. You may want to bring bottles to store water if the hunt will eventually take you away from lakes and streams.



Hunting Folklore

Campfire stories are a huge part of the hunting experience, but the narratives around this sport go back much further.



There are rituals and traditions that span generations, even centuries. Superstitions and folklore have always been a part of it, too:

HUNTING'S HERITAGE

Traditions vary across the country, by geography and by family lineage.

Hunting traditions have long been part of many Indigenous cultures in North America, although practices varied among nations. Historical accounts describe some communities preparing for the hunt through purification rituals, ceremonial chants, fasting or other spiritual practices. Some individual traditions include hunters purifying themselves by dipping in streams and lakes as the sun went down or taking part in ceremonial chants. Some took part in ritual fasting or abstained from sex. In some places, ashes from campfires were applied to the face or chest.

Many hunting traditions, including making use of as much of a harvested animal as possible, were shared across cultures. European settlers in the U.S. sometimes prayed before or after a hunt. Respect for wildlife and responsible stewardship of natural resources became important values within many hunting traditions and continue to shape modern conservation efforts. President Theodore Roosevelt's experiences as a hunter and outdoorsman helped shape his conservation ethic. During his presidency, he greatly expanded federal protection of wildlife by establishing dozens of wildlife refuges and other protected lands.

Cranberries have long been associated with hunting traditions in North America. Indigenous peoples combined dried meat, animal fat and wild cranberries to create pemmican, a nutrient-rich food that traveled well on hunting trips and other long journeys. The tart berries also paired naturally with venison, wild turkey and other game, a culinary tradition that continues today. That connection may help explain why cranberry sauce remains a familiar accompaniment to turkey and other wild game dishes.

NEWER CUSTOMS

Not every hunting tradition centers on food. Some customs are specific to a region, hunting camp or family. In some camps, hunters celebrating a first successful harvest may take part in a lighthearted initiation, such as having their faces marked with a small amount of blood from the animal. Others hold a playful "hunting court," where those who came home empty-handed good-naturedly plead their case before an appointed "judge." The penalties are usually little more than jokes and friendly teasing.

More recently, some hunting groups have adopted "no-shave" traditions, with participants who grow facial hair letting their beards or mustaches grow as a sign of camaraderie and, perhaps, a bit of good luck. In other camps, the evening before opening day is marked by a shared meal or celebration. If alcohol is part of the festivities, moderation matters, since many hunts begin well before dawn.

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