

Hunting GUIDE



Cook Up Savory Meals

Cooking wild game meat takes different techniques than cooking most meat you find in the grocery store.

It usually has stronger flavors, but given all the work done to harvest the animal, you'll want to prepare it well so everyone enjoys eating it.

AVOIDING COMMON MISTAKES

Jamie Carlson in *Outdoor Life* listed several common mistakes that can make game taste bad. He starts out by saying hunters need to be good shots so that they kill their game quickly; this affects the taste of the meat. Other mistakes include not practicing cooking or giving up after one bad meal, using the wrong cooking method for a particular kind of cut, not using a meat thermometer, trying to cook wild birds whole, leaving the skin and fat on certain kinds of duck and geese, not brining, and not understanding the aging process.

Total Food Service, a foodservice organization, warns that cooking game even a few minutes too long can result in meat that is rubbery, gamey and hard to eat.

PREPARING THE MEAT

After the animal has been harvested, it needs to be kept cold or on ice for 24 hours so it can go through the rigor mortis process. After that process,



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butcher the meat as soon as possible, bagging and marking cuts for how you want to use them.

Scott Leysath, an experienced wild game chef, told *Bowhunters United* that it is important to let the meat age. Do this by letting the meat rest uncovered in a refrigerator for a few days so that the blood can drain and evaporate. Too much blood left in the meat is often what gives it the gamey flavor

that people complain about.

Debone and trim the meat getting rid of anything that isn't muscle, including fat, hair, silver skin and connective tissue.

CHOOSING A COOKING METHOD

Your first step in cooking a delicious meal with your game meat is deciding how you are going to cook each cut of meat. For example, slowly braise tougher cuts of venison cut

from the neck, shank or shoulder in a sauce and then use it in a soup, stew or chili. Tender cuts can be grilled while barbecuing is used for tougher meats that require longer cooking times and indirect heat. Hindquarters are sometimes cut into strips across the grain to use in such things as steaks, sandwiches, kebabs or even salads.

Searing is important when cooking game birds. It creates a

scalded layer that keeps the meat's moisture from escaping. It's a step you want to do in a hot pan before roasting it in an oven. The pan needs to be very hot and you'll want to make sure you sear all sides, according to *Field and Stream Magazine*.

Finally, pick a good sauce for your meat, whatever kind suits your fancy, whether it be barbecue or hollandaise or your grandfather's secret recipe.

Climate Change and Hunting

Hunters have always led the way when it comes to conservation efforts because they recognize the vital role that wildlife and land plays in our world.

One of the biggest conservation needs in today's world is taking action to address climate change.

The National Wildlife Association reported that climate change is "reducing big game populations, stressing cold water fish and threatening waterfowl reproduction." They released a report called "Game Changers" in which they talked about the climate impacts to hunting, fishing and wildlife heritage in the United States.

The report lists several specific climate change concerns that affect hunters and anglers.

WARMING TEMPERATURES

Global temperatures are getting warmer, causing problem for wildlife on land and in water.

When water warms, invasive species are able to move higher up rivers and streams. Harmful algal blooms thrive. In the ocean, warmer temperatures change migration and breeding patterns. It also leads to coral bleaching which can lead to declines in fish populations.

On land, some game, such as moose, are distressed by high temperatures. Ponds needed



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by waterfowl dry up. Vegetation types shift northward. Changing temperatures cause disruptions to what wildlife and plants can survive in a particular area especially if air temperatures warm faster than these species can adapt.

HABITATS CHANGE LOCATIONS

Plants and animals have been moving north and to higher elevations. Once they have nowhere to go, they start to die out. The National Wildlife Federation said that climate change this century is expected to cause shifts in major ecosystems to more than

5 to 20% of North America.

There are now mismatches between wildlife and food sources. This causes problem when the food that wildlife used to eat no longer exists. This can affect migratory patterns and breeding. Some species are already experiencing die-off. Scientists fear this will contribute to reduced biodiversity and possibly mass extinctions.

EXTREME WEATHER AND DROUGHT

Such things as floods, droughts, freezes and winter thaws have a huge effect on wildlife. Warming is expected to cause more intense tropical

cyclones and more destructive hurricanes and tropical storms. These events destroy coastal and inland wildlife habitats.

Droughts and greener winters not only cause water supply problems for humans, but they put a lot of stress on fish and wildlife. They also cause more wildfires. All of these factors make hunting and fishing more challenging and reduces the population available to harvest.

INCREASED PESTS AND DISEASE

As the climate changes, pests and disease-causing pathogens survive and thrive during

warmer weathers, especially without winters that kill them off. The pests and disease threaten wildlife and hunters and outdoor recreationalists themselves. Ticks transmit Lyme disease and their populations are exploding. Pine bark beetles have become more common which increases the risk of fires. Other creatures that are thriving include tiger mosquitoes, poison ivy, jellyfish and fire ants.

All of these factors affect hunting and fishing, putting both sports at risk. It is why hunters, more than ever, need to participate in programs that reduce climate change.

Access for Disabled Hunters

As a sport, hunting can demand a lot on a body. Hunters trek through wild lands, climb trees, lug a lot of equipment and are outdoors for hours and days at a time.

Yet, hunting has been growing more and more accessible as hunting clubs and state wildlife organizations figure out ways to open the sport to people with disabilities.

Buckmasters reports that 1.7 million people with severe physical disabilities enjoy hunting and shooting sports in the United States. Buckmasters founded Disabled Hunters Services in 1993 to help provide hunting opportunities for those with disabilities.

PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS

Many hunters with physical disabilities are people who underwent life-changing events and have to re-learn things they used to know how to do. Hunting organizations and state wildlife departments often have programs to make adaptive equipment available to hunters. Some of these might include mechanical gun rests and trigger systems for people with paraplegia, mobility or track chairs, scope camera mounts and heater body suits.

Often special hunts are held where only hunters with dis-



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abilities can participate in the hunt. Hunters are given guides and adaptive equipment. They may be exempted from certain laws that apply to other hunters. For example, in Michigan, it is illegal for hunters to bait and feed deer unless they are a hunter with disabilities.

Some states give out special permits for people with mobility impairments to hunt from a vehicle. Others allow the use of hunting blinds where they are otherwise forbidden.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

While it may sound odd to have a person lacking vision shooting a firearm, blind people do hunt and states have provided special accommodations and licensing for them.

Hunters who are legally blind are typically allowed to use laser sighting devices so long as they have a sighted adult with them who is also a licensed hunter.

Tom Lealos shared his story with the American Council of the Blind about how he is pursuing his dream of elk hunt-

ing even though he lost his vision completely. He discovered a specialized electronic viewing device called NiteSite. A small camera and monitor is attached to a rifle scope. The sighted guide who goes with him, stands behind him to act as his eyes while he holds and aims the rifle. The guide can tap the hunter to signal how they should move the gun or they can use shooting ear muffs with radio capabilities so they can whisper back and forth. The guide also helps hunters butcher any

prey they harvest.

TERMINALLY ILL

Other organizations and states organize hunts for people with terminal illnesses. Some states give special permission for people who are close to death to hunt outside of the normal seasons.

Buckmasters sponsors hunts for hunters under the age of 21. They started organizing these because foundations that grant wishes stopped granting any wishes involving firearms or shooting.

Falconry Basics

Falconry is a form of hunting in which the hunter uses a trained raptor (a bird of prey) to hunt wild game. It's a tradition with a long history and today contributes to conservation efforts and the protection of endangered species.

HISTORY

Falconry has been around for thousands of years. There is evidence it existed in Mesopotamia, the Middle East and Western Mongolia more than 3,000 years ago. Originally a form of hunting to provide food, it eventually became associated with nobility.

The King Richard III Visitor Center says that falconry is shown in art and writing in India, China, Japan, the Roman Empire and the Middle East. Falconry arrived in Britain around the ninth century and there is even a depiction of it in the Bayeux Tapestry.

BECOMING A FALCONER

The U.S. has only about 4,000 falconers, according to the Michigan Hawking Club. It can be expensive and requires a huge time commitment. It is legal in all states except Hawaii and D.C.

The North American Falconers Association points



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out that completing a falconry apprenticeship requires at least two years and it will take seven years to become a master falconer.

The Michigan Hawking Club recommends answering four questions if you want to be a falconer:

- Do you have the time to provide a wild-trapped raptor with specialized food, health and shelter? (For example, raptors eat only fresh, raw meat,

preferably of the type you want it to hunt.)

- Do you have the finances to support the specialized needs and such things as freezer space, vet bills and special equipment?

- Do you have access to multiple areas of hunting land close to where you live?

- Can you drive whatever distance needed at a moment's notice to get to a veterinarian clinic that

specializes in raptor care?

If you still want to become a falconer, find out what your state regulations are. You will likely have to take a falconer's exam, build raptor facilities, gather equipment, apply for the proper licenses and permits, and trap or purchase a raptor.

TRAINING A RAPTOR

In the United States, the most common species used for

falconry are red-tailed hawks, kestrels (sparrow hawks), goshawks, cooper's hawks, Harris hawks, prairie falcons, gyrfalcons and peregrine falcons. According to the North American Falconers Association, sponsors will require most apprentice falconers to trap at least their first bird from the wild.

The initial training stage can take about a month, but many falconers say that the training never ends. You are constantly working to improve the teamwork between human and bird.

Training, according to the Michigan Hawking Club, begins with gaining the trust of the bird. The bird needs to learn that the falconer will help it hunt and get food. A falconer needs to have care, patience and understanding of raptor behavior and biology. A falconer will always use positive reinforcement techniques.

The Ohio Falconry Association points out that the basic method of training a raptor hasn't changed for thousands of years. You condition the hawk to accept the falconer as a partner in the hunting process. "Manning" helps the raptor overcome its fear of people, get used to the falconer and associate food with the falconer's glove. "Entering" takes place when a raptor is released to fly completely free to hunt a certain type of quarry. Once the raptor eats all it wants, the falconer approaches and coaxes the raptor back up onto the glove with a food reward.

Follow Hunter Safety Rules

Hunting is ranked as one of the safest sports.

How safe is it? In 2019, more than 15 million people paid for hunting licenses. The Hunter Incident Database that year reported only 56 hunting-related shooting accidents, eight caused by handguns, 23 by shotguns and 25 by rifles. Most of the incidents were nonfatal.

Of course, not all hunting accidents involve guns. Some involve bows, boats, injuries from wildlife or even vehicle-related accidents. The International Hunter Education Association reports that the U.S. and Canada combined see around 1,000 accidents on an annual basis with close to 10% of these ending in death.

One of the reasons it is so safe is that many states require hunting safety classes and the U.S. Department of Interior always recommends them. New York was the first state to require hunter education certification to legally hunt. It did this in 1949. Most other states followed suit.

According to Steve Hall, a hunter educator coordinator for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, data shows a definite correlation between hunter safety and the decline in firearms-related hunting accidents. He said the primary causes of hunting accidents are careless handling of firearms, swinging on game



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and victims in the line of fire being mistaken for game.

The following guidelines are from state hunting sites and the U.S. Department of the Interior.

GENERAL SAFETY

- Tell someone when and where you will be, how long you plan to be there and schedule check-in times.
- Hunt with a partner and know your zone of fire.
- Carry a two-way communications device that gets service in remote areas.
- Wear your life jacket when hunting in or near water.

- Wear proper hearing protection and safety glasses.

FIREARM SAFETY

- Treat every gun as if it is loaded.
- Never point the muzzle of a firearm at anything you don't intend to shoot.
- Keep your finger off the trigger and out of the trigger guard until your sights are on the target and you are ready to shoot.
- Know your target and what is beyond it.
- Unload the firearm when getting in or out of a tree stand.

- Make sure your barrel and ammunition are free from obstructions.
- Use the proper ammunition.

TREE STAND SAFETY

- Maintain three points of contact with your hands and feet when climbing up or down a tree.
- Use a full-body harness that is attached to a secure fall line positioned above your head.
- Use a secure pull system to lift your firearm or crossbow into a tree stand.
- Make sure your tree stand is securely attached and stable before you use it.

HUNTER ORANGE AND TRESPASSING

- Obey no trespassing signs.
- If your game goes into property marked "no trespassing," get the landowner's permission to retrieve your game.
- Wear as much hunter orange as possible to increase your visibility. Orange does not affect deer behavior.
- Wear hunter orange as the outermost layer of clothing that is visible from all directions. This can include a cap, hat, vest, jacket or rain coat.
- Orange garments must be at least 50% hunter orange to meet legal requirements.

Why Hunt With a Blind?

There are many tools to make a hunting trip more successful. In recent years, hunting blinds have surged in popularity according to those who manufacture them.

Hunting blinds help to camouflage the hunter while providing a place to sit and wait for the animal being hunted. They range from very simple shacks to ones with such amenities as seat cushions, weatherproofing, hooks for bows or guns and silent windows.

TYPES OF BLINDS

There are four major types of hunting blinds. The first two are permanent or portable. Permanent ones can be set up on private land (or sometimes state wildlife departments set up blinds that hunters can sign up for) and stay in place all year. Some hunters will keep supplies in their hunting blinds so that they can travel light to it each season. Portable blinds are carried by the hunter and can be put up on the day of the hunt or moved at any point.

The next two classifications are ground blinds and elevated blinds. Ground blinds are, as the name suggests, placed on the ground. They are often painted or camouflaged. Elevated blinds are small cabins that stand on legs and have



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a roof, walls, windows and a ladder or stairway.

REASONS TO USE BLINDS

Heath Wood at GoMuddy, a hunting goods supplier, recommends using hunting blinds because:

- It makes it a more enjoyable experience for a first-time or youth hunter. Not only are they more comfortable, but they're able to move a little without alerting prey.

- It can help you stay dry on

rainy days.

- On very cold days, a blind can protect you from the wind and weather. You can also put a heater in the blind.

- A blind can help with scent control, though Wood still recommends spraying the blind with scent neutralizers.

PLACING A BLIND

Where you put the blind, especially a portable one, is a key factor to a successful hunt. In an interview with Outdoor Life, Brooks Johnson,

president of Minnesota Bowhunters, provided advice on placing a blind when deer hunting, though the advice can apply to other forms of hunting as well.

Make sure you don't surprise deer with the blind. Either put it where they can't see it or put it where they can see it from at least 100 yards away so it doesn't surprise them. If you can, put the blind out a few weeks before you plan to start using it so the deer get used to it.

Johnson recommends using decoys around the blinds to draw other deer in. He typically uses a full-body 3D buck and pairs it with a doe.

Places to avoid are random deep woods sites and obvious travel corridors. If you can find an isolated waterhole, especially in an area where water is scarce, that will be better than if there are multiple trails to a watering hole. Alternatively, you can place a blind where there is bait or a small food plot.

Hunting Traditions and Rituals

Not everything done during a hunt is solely about finding and harvesting prey.

How a person hunts is often steeped with traditions, ritual, folklore and superstition. Some are born of cultures, others are passed down through families.

NATIVE AMERICAN HUNTING TRADITIONS

Native Americans are not a single group with a single culture. Traditions vary by tribe and geography, but many of them have traditions around hunting.

For example, Jacob Broadley wrote about Cherokee Traditions at the site Classroom.com. Men purified themselves in a sacred ritual before the hunt. Cherokee would abstain from sex for four days before and four days after a hunt. Before the hunt, they'd dip in a pool of water at sundown while singing an ancient chant. The next day, the hunter would not eat at all and would again dip in the water while chanting at sundown. On the second night, he'd cook a meal, eat it and then spread the fire ashes across his chest. On the third morning, the hunt would begin.

Ojibway tribes believed that everything was created for a purpose and that the purpose of animals were to feed the Anishnaabe people. They were taught, according to the Tribal



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Trade website, that they should be thankful for the gift. Any time a hunter killed an animal, he would pray and give thanks. They were also taught that if they stopped hunting and fishing, it meant they were being ungrateful for the gifts they had been given.

MODERN TRADITIONS

Modern hunters carry on a variety of traditions and customs, some widespread, some practiced by only a few.

Some are very superstitious

about what they eat s, such as eating cranberry sauce on Thanksgiving Day; others require the consumption of buckwheat pancakes the morning of the hunt.

Other traditions include:

- **Blooding:** The faces of hunters are marked with blood from their first kill, usually applied by a parent or an elder member of the camp with their fingers. This ritual dates back to the eighth century, when it was a mark of receiving St. Hubert's blessing.

- **The last bite:** Valerius Geist, a retired zoology professor and hunting expert, said Germans and Austrians would break a twig from such trees as oak, pine, spruce, fir or alder and then pull the broken twig through the animal's mouth from one side to the other and leave it in its jaws.

- **Eating raw organs:** Hunters report that in deer camps, hunters would bring the liver or heart of their first kill back to camp, slice it into small pieces and each of them

would eat a piece of it raw.

- **Cutting shirt tails or hats:** When a hunter shot and missed, the others on the hunt cut a piece of his or her shirt or vest off, often an inch per missed shot. Some camps hold "courts" where judges decide who had each missed shot. The shirt tails are sometimes hung at the camp with names and years on them.

- **No shaving:** There are some hunters who maintain that it is bad luck to shave their faces during hunting season.