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"It's hard to beat a person who never gives up." —BABE RUTH

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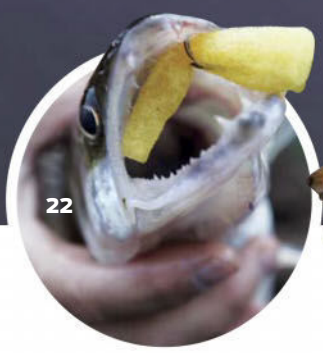

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Doing it Yourself in a Convenience-Driven World

My fascination with DIY projects launched more than 22 years ago. Inaugural attempts ranged from stick bows to treehouses to feathered Indian headbands when I was merely a toddler. I soon graduated to crafting flies for trout fishing and squirrel hunting with my grandpa's .410-bore shotgun. Nearly every free moment was spent "doing something myself."

Time passed, and my parents purchased an archery pro shop in our hometown. I worked eight years for my parents, then another two years for the new owners once my parents sold the store. There, I serviced bows on a daily basis, mastering the finer points of tuning. Building arrows didn't come naturally, but I mastered that, too.

Taking game with equipment I set up and built had captivating effects. Plus, the smiles on customers' faces when they succeeded with equipment I'd set up for them were worth a million bucks.

Today, little has changed. I'm as absorbed by DIY projects as I was during my upbringing—perhaps even more so—only now, my scope of interest has expanded to include far more than hunting and fishing.

To that end, I'm thrilled to be your new *Modern Pioneer* editor. The magazine's very mission synchronizes with my independent spirit. By the way, its new mission statement is, "*Modern Pioneer* delivers proven survival methods to help readers live more naturally and master the art of self-sustainability. Feature stories run the gamut from hunting and homegrown foods to navigation and basic farming techniques, preserving old-time heritage amidst modern culture."

Cover to cover, this issue exemplifies that mission.

One example is Tracy Breen's "Fetching Shed Antlers," which outlines the process of using a pooch to more than double your annual haul.

In "Make Your Own Wing-Bone Turkey Call," Darryl Quidort teaches us that a call made from the bird, itself, is one of the most effective. Native Americans probably made the first renditions long ago, but Quidort shares that a classic never dies.

Then, there's Patrick Meitin's "Hunting for Morel Mushrooms." Prepared properly, these tasty woods gems are second to none. But finding them can be quite difficult, unless you follow Meitin's advice. By the way, the per-pound wholesale price for morels ranges between $30 and $40 or more, with retail prices approaching $80 to $100. I think I'll go morel hunting with Meitin rather than pay those premiums.

In his "Savage Arms Axis II XP Gun Review," gun great Thomas Tabor proves a great-performing hunting rifle need not cost an arm and a leg.

If knives and history excite you, enthusiast James House brings you his time-tested favorites. In "Old Blades Among My Edged Tools," House also describes old-knife sentimental value, suggesting their history and character make them perhaps more desirable than modern counterparts.

Fruit lovers will find Jason Houser's "3 Persimmon Recipes" and Charles Witosky's "8-Step Homemade Fruit Preserves" rather interesting. Houser covers three favorites made from wild fruit, while Witosky outlines the intricate procedure and reward of crafting homemade fruit jams.

Today, our world is nearly driven by convenience. Why wait until we're at our computers to check e-mails when we can do it from virtually anywhere using our smartphone? Or, why would we make our own wine when we can run into a grocery store, grab a bottle and be back in the vehicle in fewer than five minutes? That's the ideal most Americans live by. Granted, we sometimes can't help being lugged into the fast-paced practices of those around us.

Fortunately, some folks still understand the importance of practicing pioneer ways in this fast-paced, convenience-driven world. There are still good-natured people who pause to take in an evening sunset painted by the Creator or woodwork during their noon-hour lunchbreak.

As this issue displays, old-time heritage—Heaven forbid—won't soon fade if we participate at one level or another. My challenge to you is this: Pick out at least two interesting DIY topics in this issue, and launch, head first, into those projects. Bring them to completion before the April/May issue arrives in your mailbox. Ready ... go!

DARRON MCDOUGAL

review

Class and Performance

Benchmade Saddle Mountain Hunter

MY WELL-EXECUTED STALK BROUGHT ME WITHIN 23 YARDS OF THE BEAUTIFUL 4X5 MULE DEER BUCK. ON MY ARROW'S IMPACT, HE SPRANG FROM HIS BED AND TRAVELED APPROXIMATELY 100 YARDS BEFORE BEDDING DOWN. I IMMEDIATELY SNEAKED IN AND ADMINISTERED A FINISHING ARROW. THE WORK BEGAN.

Fortunately, I'd packed a Benchmade Saddle Mountain Hunter knife, which made the job nearly effortless. It's since helped me gut, skin and process elk, grouse, antelope, wild turkey and white-tailed deer with outstanding results.

> Visit Benchmade.com

Hunters who harvest multiple animals each year demand quality cutlery. Let's review why Benchmade's Saddle Mountain Hunter fits the bill.

Premium Steel

The Saddle Mountain Hunter's clip-point hunting blade features premium-grade CPM-S30V knife steel. It's a hardened, powder-made stainless steel that resists wear and corrosion. It dons an impressive satin finish—a look that implies it's made to get down and dirty in the world's wildest places.

Hunter-friendly dimensions suit the Saddle Mountain Hunter for tasks large and small. Its 8.59-inch overall length includes a 4.05-inch-long, .120-inch-thick blade. And, it's perfectly sized for belt carrying, weighing 3.58 ounces (Dymondwood) and 4.08 ounces (G10), respectively.

Razor-Sharp Edge

Sharpness is a must-have knife attribute for hunters who regularly self-process game. The fixed-blade Saddle Mountain Hunter delivers wicked, out-of-the-box sharpness and retains it through repeated use. I also found it re-sharpens easily using my inexpensive G5 Outdoors Sportsman Sharpener.

Quality Craftsmanship

My Saddle Mountain Hunter features a beautiful Dymondwood-finish handle. A tactical G10 finish featuring a black-and-gray laminated look is also available. Both are exquisite finishes.

The handle is simply a two-piece side-plate design that sandwiches the blade. It's moderately textured to improve control and grip, also implementing thumb and finger grooves for superior comfort. Overall, it's a beautiful specimen, but it's not meant simply for admiration; it's meant to tackle tough hunting jobs.

The Saddle Mountain Hunter incorporates a lanyard hole for convenience and functionality. For an additional cost, optional custom lasermarking further personalizes your Benchmade knife.

Dependable Sheath

Benchmade complements its high-quality knives with outstanding sheaths. The Dymondwood option includes a brownish leather sheath with durable stitching to impress quality notions. It's quite stiff and holds the knife securely to avoid dangerous ejections while negotiating unforgiving terrain. And while it secures the knife, it allows smooth drawing for unplanned self-defense encounters. A stitched-on belt loop completes it.

Benchmade Advantages

Edge retention is an essential knife attribute, especially while field dressing and quartering game in the backcountry. Routine re-sharpening breaks are impractical, and the Saddle Mountain Hunter solves that issue. In fact, I didn't re-sharpen mine for an entire year after getting it.

Durability is another key feature every serious hunter expects. The CPM-S30V stainless-steel blade's uniform grain structure delivers unparalleled strength and rigidity.

Finally, wear and corrosion resistance—also characteristics of CPM-S30V stainless steel—mean you get a knife that, with proper care, lasts as long as you.

The Saddle Mountain Hunter carries Benchmade's Lifetime Warranty and Lifesharp Service, which cover manufacturing defects and allow customers to ship their knives to the factory for tuning and re-sharpening. They're then returned with the same razor-sharp edge they had when purchased.

Processing game with Benchmade's Saddle Mountain Hunter is a joy. Test one out for yourself. I believe you'll agree.

—Darron McDougal

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THINKSTOCK

Avoid Treestand Falls

Treestand safety is not addressed as often as it should be. In an average deer season, about 18 hunters will experience a fall. Just last season, deer hunters reported seven falls from elevated platforms during the early archery season, even before the most popular season—rifle hunting—had begun.

What can you do to avoid joining the count of "treestand plungers" this year?

The first step toward elevated platform safety is to make sure the equipment is in working order. Only use an elevated platform that has the approval of the Treestand Manufacturers Association (TMA), and be sure to read the manufacturer's warning and instructions before installation.

If you made your own treestand, make sure to check it thoroughly for stability before using it, especially if it has been left outside and exposed to the weather.

Hunters should also wear a full-body fall-arrest harness system that meets TMA standards. Don't use a single strap or chest harness, and don't leave the ground until you have put on the full-body harness. Be sure to always have three points of contact with the tree when climbing and descending, because most falls occur at those times.

Never climb with anything on your back. A haul line should be used to lift your gun, bow or other gear into the stand. Firearms on a haul line should be unloaded and with the action open and muzzle pointed downward.

Lastly, for additional safety measures, hunt with a buddy, tell someone the exact location of your elevated platform before heading into the woods, get a full night's sleep before the hunt, and make sure you have a cellphone, whistle, flare or some other kind of signal device on you at all times.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY GETTY IMAGES

What's in a Wing?

A lot of useful facts about quail can be gathered by studying their wings and crops (or crop contents). Through the crops, which are the enlarged muscular pouches near the throat that are used to store food, hunters can learn what the birds are feeding on, as well as general information on nesting, including estimated hatch dates of juvenile birds. Biologists can analyze the wing and crop data regionally and cross-reference it to weather trends to monitor the presence and use of native and non-native food resources, agricultural grains and insects. Quail are known for eating a wide variety of seeds, but research shows that these birds have a clear food preference.

Quail crops filled with lesser-quality, little-utilized seed resources may provide an early indicator of decreasing habitat quality, as well as give land managers a head start regarding quail management.

Send an SOS

Communication is a crucial key to survival, even for those who live off the grid. The need to call for help or happening upon someone who needs help will, hopefully, never occur. Nevertheless, it is better to be prepared rather than face the chance of braving winter's freezing-cold environment with no communication resources at hand.

Here are some ways to signal or decode a distress call you might hear:

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THINKSTOCK

The number 3: This is the universal signal number for distress. Anything in sets of three can be a sign for help.

Whistle blasts: According to the International Whistle Code, if you hear a whistle blast, there are a few things it could mean: One whistle blast is the code for "Where are you?" Two are the code for "Come to me." Three whistle blasts are the code for "I need help."

SOS: The SOS distress signal in Morse code is a continuous sequence of three dits, three dahs and three dits, all run together without letter spacing. You can even make this signal with a light. Shine your flashlight or lantern on and off using the same frequency as the SOS signal would sound: three fast flashes, three long flashes and three fast flashes again. SOS is the only nine-element signal in Morse code (all others are eight or fewer).

Did You Know?

One deer provides roughly 200 meals. Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH) knows this, as well as how many mouths can be fed by one kill. This organization is constantly working to raise awareness about hunger in America and how hunters can help.

Established in 1997, FHFH has provided more than 17 million servings of donated venison and livestock to people in need across the United States. The tally for 2015 reflects 75,399 servings of donated meat—mostly from hunters—to the hungry. FHFH donated 377 deer, elk and livestock to the needy; that's 18,850 pounds of meat and 75,399 servings.

Learn more about FHFH at fhfh.org.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY GETTY IMAGES

Practice as if Your Hunt Depends on It

Follow this six-step practice plan to consistently ace difficult bowhunting shots

> By ***Darryl Quidort***

If you hunt from a treestand, practice shooting from an elevated position.

Blowing a makeable bowhunting shot inflicts sinking feelings that instantly sap a bowhunter's confidence. Blown shots are often the result of sloppy practice.

Few bowhunters take their practice beyond the backyard. Most are content with mediocre accuracy, and their shooting suffers when they attempt shots at real game.

Bowhunting shots present many variables that typical backyard practice does not. However, bowhunters can rework their practice regimen to simulate real hunts. Follow these six practice tips, and I guarantee you'll be prepared to make the shot when your next "moment of truth" arrives.

Practice Tip #1

Practice With Your Hunting Gear

Perhaps you've heard this phrase: "Beware of the man with only one gun. He knows how to use it."

The same is true of bowhunters who use one bow for all of their year-round shooting.

You must become intimately familiar with your bow and arrows before going hunting. This includes practicing with broadheads to identify flight variances. Shoot them through cardboard silhouettes backed by sand banks, dirt piles or foam blocks to ensure they fly exactly like field points of equal weight.

Organize your gear and develop a regular shooting routine. Repetition helps you consistently make good shots, even under pressure. Shoot your hunting bow regularly throughout the year to gain subconscious familiarity with it. You'll also build and maintain the physical strength needed to pull and shoot sufficient draw weight during various hunting situations.

Practice Tip #2

Shoot One Arrow at Your Target

In hunting, you normally get only one chance to make your shot count before the situation changes. While practicing, change the situation with each shot by moving to a different angle or distance. This prepares you for unfamiliar hunting shots.

Emptying your quiver from one known distance isn't realistic hunting practice. Concentrate on making "cold shots"; that is, first-time shots you've never practiced. If you hunt from a treestand, practice from one. Remember to bend at the waist without lowering your bow arm. This keeps your head, shoulders and bow aligned so the arrow flies on its intended course.

Forget the score card when you're preparing for bow season. Go for kill shots. Once your arrow impacts the target, hold another arrow in line with it, above the target, to determine where it would have exited. Any arrow that travels through the chest cavity is a kill shot.

"You must become intimately familiar with your bow and arrows before going hunting."

"Emptying your quiver from one known distance isn't realistic hunting practice."

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK

When you practice as if your success depends on it—which it does—you'll identify problems well before they rob a hard-earned bowhunting shot opportunity on real game.

If you hunt from a pop-up blind, practice shooting from its port holes to identify problems with bow clearance. If the windows are equipped with shoot-through mesh, shoot through them with your broadheads to check accuracy. Then, you'll know—rather than wonder—if it works.

Keep your practice sessions interesting by shooting a variety of targets. Don't always shoot at paper bull's-eyes. Shoot pine cones, tennis balls or milk jugs that are hung on a rope. Alternatively, make "rug balls" from rolled-up carpet pieces and shoot them with blunt tips.

Practice Tip #3

Learn Angles

If they are approached with a hunting mindset, 3-D shoots make great hunting practice. Score cards have no value to bowhunters. Accept the fact that competition shooters will submit higher scores than you. Their goal is to compete, and they've religiously practiced hitting the 10 and 12 rings.

Don't concern yourself with scoring rings. Instead, consider the target's angle and where your arrow will exit. After the shot, sight down the arrow to visualize its path of travel. An arrow that travels through the chest cavity is a kill. When you can "kill" every single target on a 3-D course with one arrow, you're ready to bowhunt.

Practice Tip #4

Practice Shooting in Poor Conditions

Be sure to practice under varying—and sometimes extreme—weather conditions. Seldom will you enjoy perfect weather while hunting.

In cold weather, accuracy suffers when muscles and tendons lose elasticity. Stretch often to stay limber. Wear the same cold-weather clothing you wear while hunting during such conditions. This helps expose problems with bowstring clearance on bulky jacket sleeves or cap brims.

Practice in the rain to learn how to handle variables such as water-spotted eye glasses or a squeaky arrow rest. Wear your raingear to make sure it's quiet and flexible. Additionally, determine how your shooting tab or glove performs when waterlogged to avoid a mishap when a buck walks within range.

Don't assume things will automatically go well when hunting. Know it by practicing with your hunting gear under extreme conditions.

Practice Tip #5

Simulate an Adrenaline Rush

Bowhunting can challenge you physically. Shots at game often materialize after long days of walking, scouting, stalking or climbing trees. In addition, your heart rate speeds, and adrenaline courses through your veins when a shot opportunity arises.

Simulate these physical changes by wearing a backpack and walking briskly or jogging between targets. Shoot when you're winded. Practice holding at full draw for several seconds before taking the shot. Concentrate on making good shots when you're slightly uncomfortable. Get in shape for hunting.

Practice Tip #6

Pack a Steel Attitude

I've heard it said, "Controlling the shot is 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical."

Through regular training, the physical element of shooting becomes second nature. The problem is keeping it together mentally to make kill shots on game. Manage "buck fever" so it doesn't rob you of a hard-earned shot opportunity.

Use mental imaging to enforce your positive attitude. Practice going through the motions of a perfect shot in your mind, and imagine your arrow arriving on the exact spot you aimed for. Develop confidence in yourself, your abilities and your equipment to maintain a positive attitude during the moment of truth.

Things will go wrong, but learn to be positive when they do. Don't dwell on missed shots or opportunities. Move on. Develop the mental fortitude to carry you through the tough times so you can reach your bowhunting goals.

Get Serious

Generally, shorter practice sessions conducted several times weekly make better hunting practice than all-day "marathon" shooting sessions. Shooting with fatigued muscles or when you're physically exhausted only encourages poor shooting form and habits.

If you're serious about bowhunting, get serious about your bowhunting practice, too. This year, practice as if your hunt depends on it—because it does. MP

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WATERFOWLER'S COMPANION

Keep your shotgun on the left and your decoy on the right with the Refuge Runner Decoy Bag. Built for the diehard waterfowler, this Realtree Max-5 patterned pack has a compartment on one side for a spinning-wing decoy and poles, while the other has a pocket for your shotgun. The pack features a deluxe padded backrest with padded shoulder straps and waist belt—all positioned perfectly on the bag so it doesn't hit the back of your legs when you walk. Additional features include multiple cinch straps to tighten your load for stability or to reduce the volume of the bag for carrying fewer decoys. A large, gate-mouth opening makes stuffing easy, and the tough, durable construction ensures that the bag can endure years of use. Bag dimensions: 24x14x48 inches. **MSRP: $119.99**

> RIGEMRIGHT.COM

RELOADING JUST GOT EASIER

Welcome to the next step in single-stage press technology. The heavy-duty iron frame, 26-pound Iron Press is built to be the heaviest, strongest and most-rigid press in its class. Its tight manufacturing tolerances offer consistency and precision while providing the unique ability to de-prime, pause and remove the case to perform any desired case prep action and then replace and prime. This press is even easier to use because of its ambidextrous handle, the spring-assisted, 1-inch solid steel ram and patented shell-holder. **MSRP: $268.81**

> HORNADY.COM

CALL LIKE A RABBIT

Call hungry predators with the Rabbit Frenzy and K9's Diaphragm Predator calls. The Rabbit Frenzy is a two-reed design with a unique, 45-degree cut that produces high-pitched, young cottontail rabbit distress sounds. The K9's call is a three-reed design with a fang-shaped cut that easily reproduces raspy cottontail, jackrabbit and raccoon distress sounds. Both calls have flex frames for consistent stretch and sound and feature high-quality latex for durability to last over a full hunting season. **MSRP: $7.99**

> HUNTERSPEC.COM

ACCURACY LEGEND GETS AN UPGRADE

The new Mark V Accumark is much like its predecessor, the Accumark, and features unbelievable performance and accuracy—but with all the added features a precision shooter could ask for. The rifle has been designed with a slimmer forearm, as well as sharper and more-distinctive lines and contours. The grip diameter has been reduced, a slight right-hand palm swell has been added, and overall weight has decreased. The lighter weight results in increased comfort, control, quicker-to-the-shoulder mounting and faster target acquisition. The rifle features a trigger with ground, polished and overall tolerance-refined surfaces. With a wider trigger face, trigger-to-finger contact is boosted, providing a more consistent and comfortable pull. The trigger's weight is adjustable down to as little as 2.5 pounds. The Mark V also comes with a SUB-MOA accuracy guarantee, and its hand-lapped barrel ensures that the bullet's flight path will be true and consistent. **MSRP: $2,300**

> WEATHERBY.COM

TREADING COMFORTABLY

Tread comfortably and unseen with a pair of Comfort Trac Boots in Mossy Oak Break-Up Country pattern. These 2,000-gram rubber boots are your answer to going the distance in wet, cold-weather hunts. Constructed with three different strategically placed weights of insulation (2,000 grams in the toes, 1,600 grams in the saddles and 1,200 grams in the heels), these boots ensure optimal thermal regulation. The 3.55mm neoprene and rubber overlays insulate while blocking out moisture, and molded, polyurethane footbeds include nylon shanks for added arch and foot support. Additional warmth is provided by wool felt frost plugs that form a barrier between your feet and the ground. Heel kicks allow for easy removal, while toecaps add durability and protection. A nice bonus any hunter will appreciate is the boots' anti-odor technology that will help keep your feet fresh.

MSRP: $139.99

> CABELAS.COM

STAY CONNECTED

Every adventurer knows that having the right tools on hand can make all the difference in the outdoors, but just as important as having those items is making sure you don't lose them. The RT4 Series Gear Keeper, featuring a carabiner clip, is a general mounting system designed so you can grab your gear, use it and know it will retract back into place until you need it next. The aluminum carabiner has been custom designed and integrated to the mount, resulting in a shorter extension and allowing explorers to keep items as close to their bodies as possible when they are not in use. The carabiner has a wide opening for easy attachment to a large D-ring or belt loop. The mount offers a patented flushing system that clears sand and debris from the unit and is saltwater proof. Its Q/C connector system provides for quick and easy gear connect and disconnect. The mounting device features a retractable line constructed of high-tensile spectra/nylon coupled with stainless-steel spring hardware—all within a high-impact casing. The RT4 has a retraction force of 16 ounces and extends to 22 inches.

MSRP: $19.99–$21.99 (varies by model)

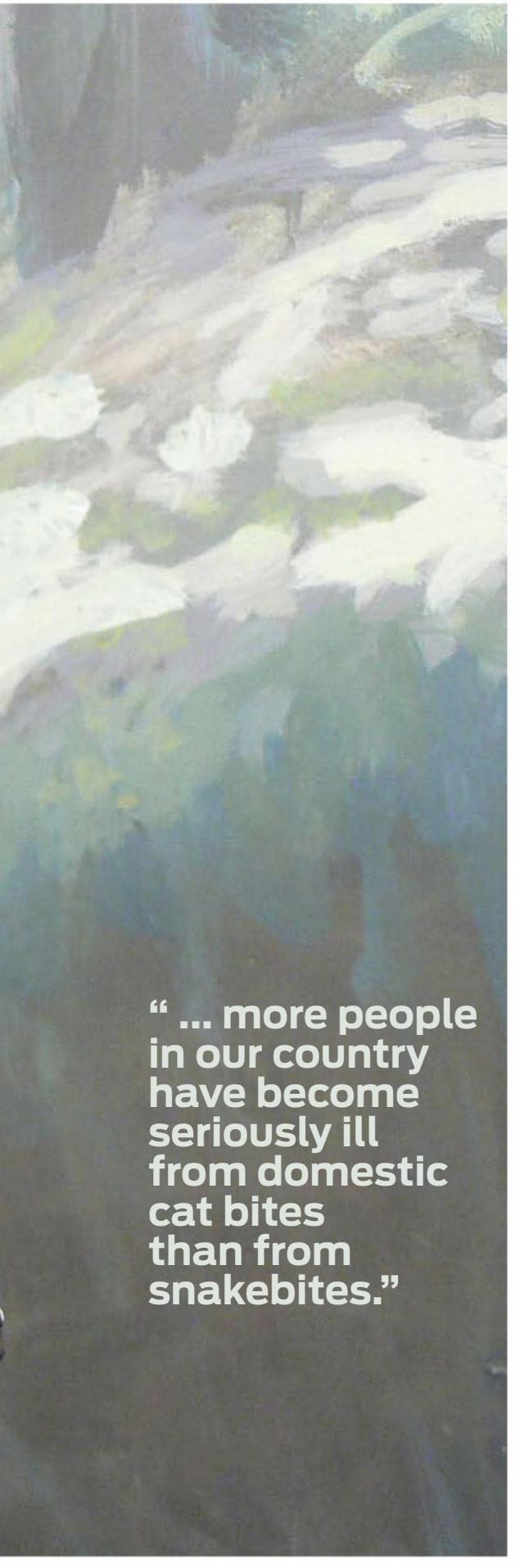
> GEARKEEPER.COM

REEL IT IN

Utilize a reel built for shallow-water jigging—the BV-300 Valiant. This 300-size, single-speed reel is built for inshore and light-action offshore applications, such as live-bait coastal fishing, snapper fishing around reefs, jigging for silver salmon and targeting school-sized tuna, yellowtail and dorado. The unique curvature of the reel's 6061 T6 aircraft aluminum body gives this compact reel the structural integrity of reels twice its size. By basing the BV-300's design on the original premise for the Roman arches or the domes used in early architecture, a stronger reel is created that uses less material. The reel weighs in at just 9.9 ounces, features a deep, wide spool, ABEC 5-class ball bearings, a 6:1 gear ratio and a comfortable power handle that makes it easy to winch in the most determined game fish. The reel also incorporates an easy-find "cam stop" at strike. Instead of having buttons at "free spool" and "strike," the BV-300 has a secure indent in the drag cam that stops the drag lever before going into "full." **MSRP: $399** MP

> ACCURATEFISHING.COM

Arizona Black rattlesnake; Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (Photo: Dana Benner)



Living With Snakes

THESE REPTILES ARE THE VERY BEST FORM OF RODENT CONTROL THERE IS

By Dana Benner

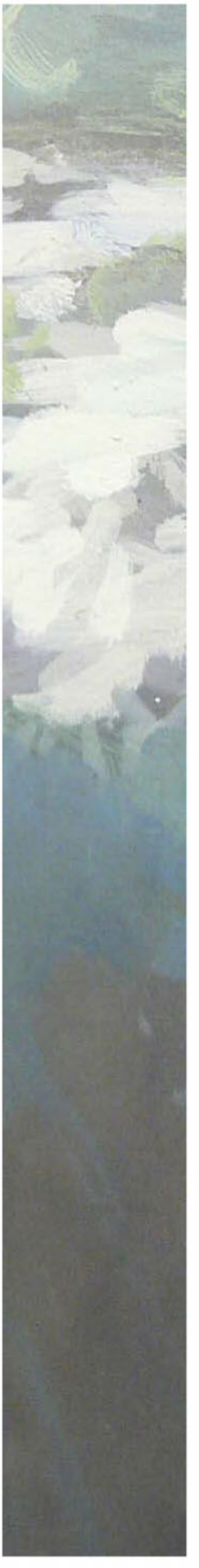
There seem to be numerous programs on television about the plague of pythons taking over Florida. Even the evening news is giving this topic a great deal of coverage. These reptiles, native to Southeast Asia, are a danger to pets, native wildlife and people.

A problem clearly exists regarding the pythons in Florida's Everglades. While the majority of snakes in the United States are native and part of the ecosystem, pythons are not native, having been introduced by people. Pythons are not part of the ecosystem and therefore have no natural enemies. We put them here; we need to get rid of them.

However, with the increased media coverage of these invasive snakes, much more (negative) attention is also being paid to our native snakes. Snake phobia is on the rise, and there is no need for it.

I have spent the better part of 55 years in our country's woods, fields and mountains, and I have seen venomous snakes only twice. That doesn't mean they weren't there; I just rarely saw them. The first was a rattlesnake while doing Army training at Fort Bliss, Texas. The second was a copperhead while I was in the Smoky Mountains in North Carolina. It was heading in the opposite direction as fast as it could.

" ... more people in our country have become seriously ill from domestic cat bites than from snakebites."



Believe me, most snakes want as little to do with us as we do with them. Despite this, some people feel that the only good snake is a dead snake. That is the wrong way to think. Our native snakes are the very best form of rodent control there is. Our ancestors knew this—and so should we.

According to *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians*, there are about 2,700 species of snakes worldwide.

BOTTOM:
A gopher snake at Devils Tower, Wyoming (Photo: Dana Benner)

Of the 11 families of snakes, only five are native to the United States and Canada and total 115 species. Of these, only 17 species are venomous.

This data tells us that the chance of running into a venomous snake is very rare. The likelihood of being bitten by one is even more rare, and the chances of dying from the bite are rarer still. In fact, in the United States, more people die each year from bee stings than from rattlesnake bites; similarly, more people in our country have become seriously ill from domestic cat bites than from snakebites.

Venom Facts

In fact, adult venomous snakes can control the amount of venom they use when they bite. This means that sometimes, the bite might not contain any venom. Experts have told me that when a snake bites out of fear, it usually results in a "dry bite"—that is, a bite containing no venom. Venomous snakes only produce so much venom, and they usually save it for subduing prospective food.

Baby venomous snakes are another story. They are more dangerous, because they almost always give a full dose of venom when they bite; they have not yet "figured out" how to control themselves.

"Pit vipers (copperheads, rattlesnakes and cottonmouths) can be distinguished by the two dents, or pits, in their triangular heads."

LEFT: **Mexican garter snake; Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (Photo: Howard Byrne)**

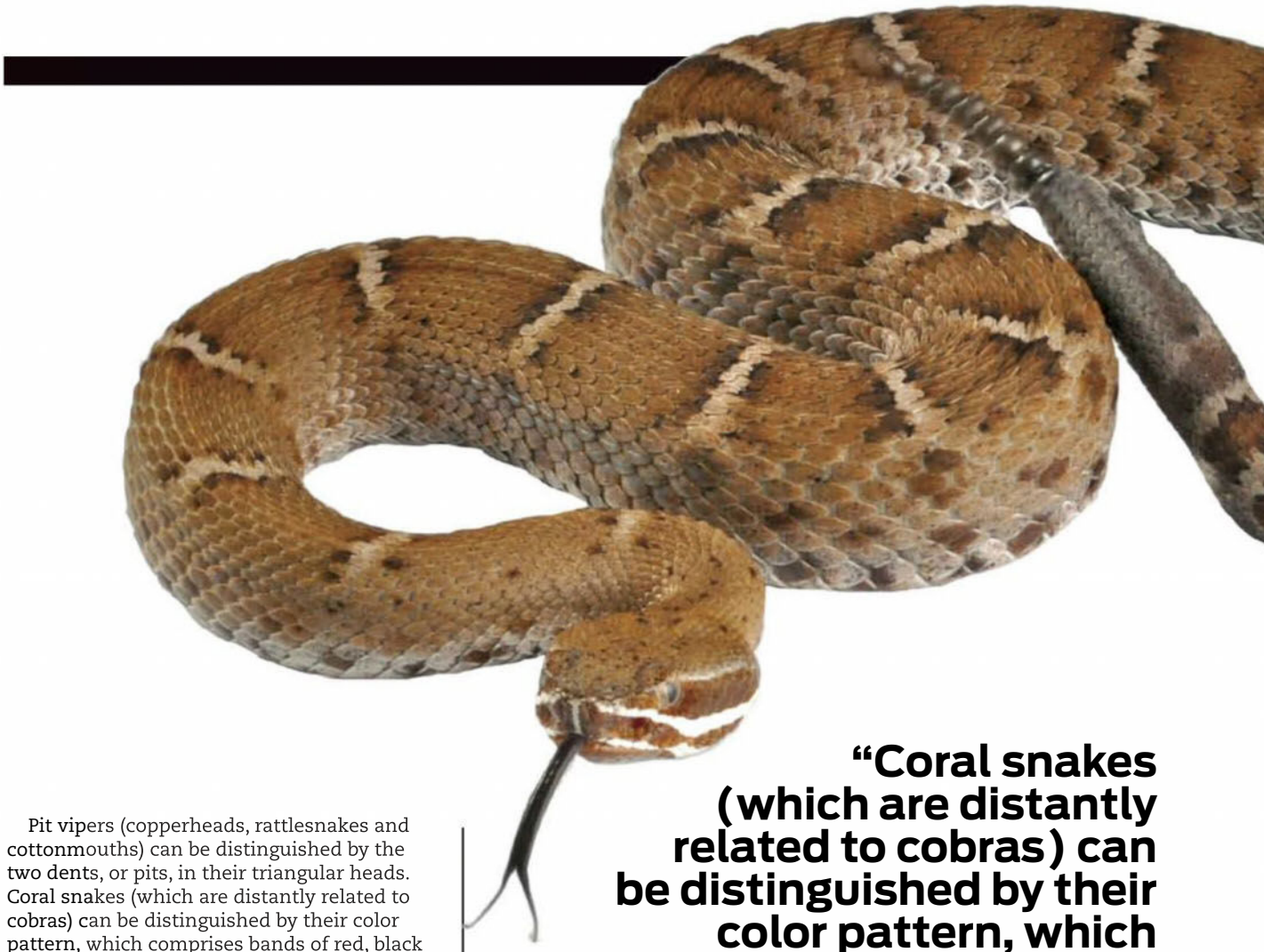
Most snakes in North America are nonvenomous. They also don't carry rabies, fleas, mange or skin diseases—meaning that they are no threat to humans. Snakes do no damage to the environment. They do not dig holes or chew plants, and they try to avoid humans at all costs. Even those snakes in our nation that are venomous are nonaggressive and attack humans only when threatened, stepped on or cornered.

I credit the anti-snake movement to the exaggerated, if not outright false, information being put out there. Don't get me wrong; venomous snakes are dangerous animals and should be avoided at all costs. But even venomous snakes, like their nonvenomous relatives, have their place.

Protect Yourself; Know the Difference

While most of the snakes found in North America are nonvenomous, those species that are poisonous need to be avoided. These snakes fall into two categories: pit vipers and coral snakes.

BOTTOM: **Tiger rattlesnake; Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (Photo: Dana Benner)**



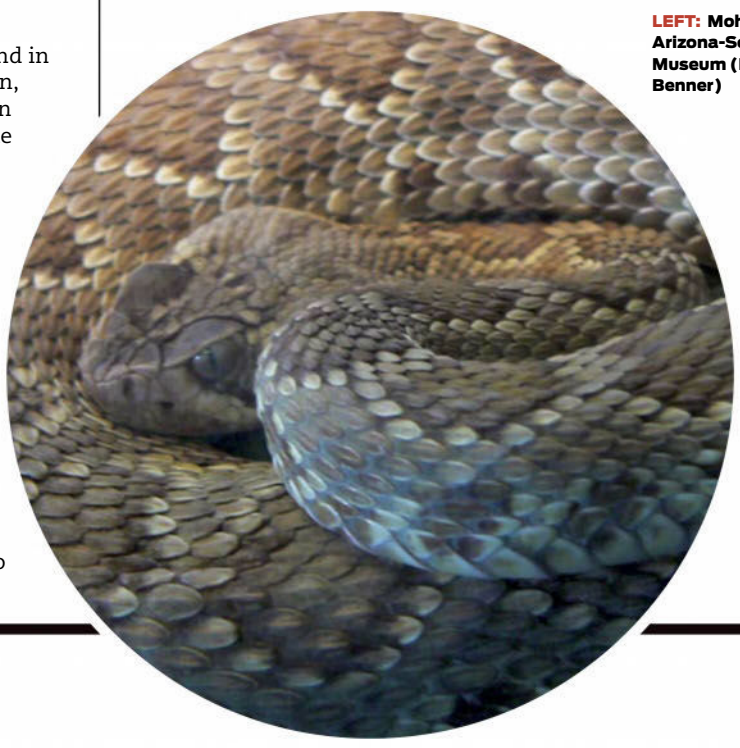
“Coral snakes (which are distantly related to cobras) can be distinguished by their color pattern, which comprises bands of red, black and yellow.”

Pit vipers (copperheads, rattlesnakes and cottonmouths) can be distinguished by the two dents, or pits, in their triangular heads. Coral snakes (which are distantly related to cobras) can be distinguished by their color pattern, which comprises bands of red, black and yellow. They are often confused with King snakes, which also have these colors. When you see colorfully banded snakes, remember this saying:

“Red touch yellow, kill a fellow.” (coral snake)
“Red touch black, friend of Jack.” (King snake)

So far, the only non-native snake found in the wilds of North America is the python, currently only found in large numbers in Florida. Although it is not venomous, the python is still dangerous and should be avoided. It has no natural enemies in North America, and it is capable of killing animals much larger that itself. They grab and hold their prey with their sharp teeth and then use constriction to kill. They tend to be large snakes and are easily recognized.

Always watch where you put your hands and feet, whether you are in the woods or around your homestead. Stone walls, piles of rocks and stacks of firewood make great places for snakes to hide. Old barns and sheds, especially those left to rot away, are also



LEFT: Mohave rattlesnake; Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (Photo: Dana Benner)

LEFT: Ridge-nosed rattlesnake; Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (Photo: Howard Byrne)

good places for snakes, because these areas can also harbor rodents. (I always carry a walking stick and tap it on rocks and logs as I move along to warn snakes I'm coming.)

Leave it to Nature

Every year, rodents cause millions of dollars of damage in the United States, and this damage is not limited to crops. Rodents make dens in just about any space they can find. Their urine and feces can lead to structural damage and disease over time. In fact, rodents transmit a number of diseases that can be fatal, and they host fleas and ticks that, in turn, present their own problems.

Rodent control is big business, with billions of dollars spent every year in an effort to control them. Traps and poisons are the most widely used methods of dealing with unwanted rodents, but they have their drawbacks. Both methods are only mildly effective and are a danger (although unintentionally) to other species, livestock, pets and children.

So, what is the answer? It is very simple: Let nature take its course.

Rodents are part of nature's circle. They are food for many different types of animals. Birds of prey (owls, hawks) feed on rodents, as do fox, bobcat and members of the weasel family (skunks, badgers, weasels, marten, etc.). When predators are eliminated from the ecosystem, the rodent population explodes.

While these predators are viewed positively, snakes—despite all the good they do—are looked down upon and are even feared. But, unlike their mammal and bird counterparts, snakes are able to get into the smallest of holes and areas in which rodents might be hiding.

The Bottom Line

All the native snakes found in the United States and Canada are carnivorous, eating once every three to four days. While the smaller ones feed on insects such as grasshoppers, larger snakes feed mainly on rodents. (In fact, one snake, the King snake, also eats rattlesnakes.) One rodent-eating snake can eliminate a family of rats in weeks. Several smaller snakes will also control a grasshopper population over the course of just one summer.

Our country is home to numerous venomous snakes, so common sense dictates the need to use caution when dealing with them. Nevertheless, they all serve a purpose and have a place in the ecosystem. Although introduced snakes, such as pythons, have no place here, our native snakes need to be appreciated for the work they do controlling rodent and insect populations. MP

TOP:
Corn snake (Photo: Arizona OffRoad Tours)

BOTTOM:
King snake (Photo: Arizona OffRoad Tours)

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THINKSTOCK

All Natural—At Least for FISHING

FOUR NATURAL DIY BAITS THAT WILL PUT A FISH ON YOUR STRINGER

By JASON HOUSER

Many fishermen tend to gravitate toward natural baits, or at least bait that was once alive but no longer is, in their quest for freshwater fishing for carp, catfish, trout and even panfish. The key to good natural bait is its ability to attract fish and entice them to strike.

Are you ready to go "all natural?" Let's take a look at the available options.

Dough Baits

Many people have no use for carp because of things they have heard about this rough fish. If given the opportunity, I'll bet they would enjoy catching them—and eating them, as well. Carp swim in most United States waters and put up one heck of a fight when hooked.

A dough bait is one of my favorites when targeting carp. It is simple to prepare and can be nothing more than a small piece of bread rolled into a ball. In fact, bread balls work even better when dipped in bacon grease.

Other anglers have their own recipes for making dough baits using flour and grain and adding "secret" ingredients to give them unique flavors; usually, those flavors are nothing more than Kool-Aid or Jell-O.

Dough Bait Recipe

1 pound chicken livers
1 box bran cereal

Purée chicken livers in a blender and slowly add cereal until the mix forms a ball inside the blender. Pinch off pieces of dough and roll them into balls the size of a golf ball. Place them in a ziptop bag or plastic container with a lid and refrigerate. Before using the dough baits for fishing, leave them out in the sun for a few hours.

(above) **The remains from a filleted bluegill are a favorite of big catfish.**

(below left) **A small sponge will help hold dough baits.**

Stink Baits

Besides live bait, stink baits, whether rolled or dipped, are your best bet for catching a lot of catfish. Stink baits can be used in the form of dough that is rolled into a ball and then placed on the hook or in more of a liquid form into which the hook is dipped. Normally, a small sponge or cloth is used for dipped baits to help hold the smell and to give the fish something to look at. The best thing about dipped baits is that you can normally manage to keep your hands almost odor free.

Stink baits can be bought or homemade. When making these at home, remember that they *do* stink; the odor will stay in your home for a while. So, choose an appropriate place to prepare them.

"The key to good natural bait is its ability to attract fish and entice them to strike."

PHOTOS BY TOM SMITH

Sponge Stink Bait

2 cans mackerel in oil
½ ounce garlic oil
½ ounce anise oil

Mash the mackerel and pour it and the oils into a pint jar with a screw-on lid. A glass jar is good at first, but transfer the mixture to a plastic container when you go fishing. Set it in the sun and allow the mackerel to decompose. Dip the hook in a sponge to coat it well.

Across much of the Midwest, a new stink bait has hit the market. It is made by Cole Cheese Bait and is my bait of choice. It is made in central Illinois but can be found on the Internet, in many bait stores or ordered via phone (www.colecheesebait.com; [217] 849-3012).

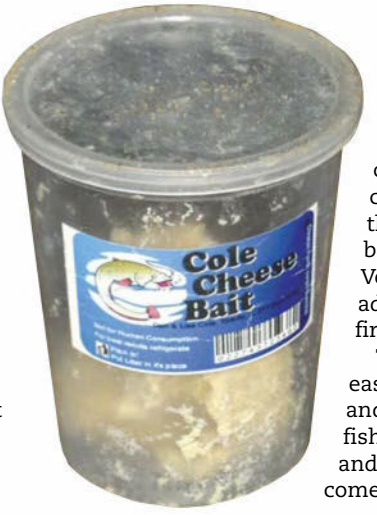
Used together, bread and left-over bacon grease make a good choice for carp bait.

Cut Bait

Cut bait comprises leftover bite-sized pieces of fish that have been caught and cleaned for human consumption. I keep all carcasses of any fish (especially bluegill) and fillet them for later catfishing expeditions.

Cut off a small piece of the cleaned fish, leaving whatever meat there is attached to the skin. This will make it easier to cast without it being flung off and harder for smaller fish to rip off the hook.

Shad and chubs are popular for catfish. Many anglers also know how effective chicken liver can be as cut bait for catfish. Livers might seem obsolete because of all the new baits on the market, but they are still very effective.



Cheese

Cheese, whether it is manufactured for fishing or for humans, makes excellent bait for both catfish and carp. Use a soft cheese with plenty of smell that can be rolled into a ball. I like to start with Velveeta cheese and then add a little flour to make it firm enough for good bait.

These bait suggestions are easy to make or purchase and will help you put more fish on the stringer this year—and for many more years to come. MP

(above) **The author holds the bounty reaped from smart bait.**

(left) **Good commercial stink baits will load your fish basket in a hurry.**

Old-School Turkey Hunting

DO YOUR HOMEWORK BEFORE VENTURING OUT

BY DANA BENNER

TURKEY HUNTING HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE DAYS MY NATIVE ANCESTORS AND THE EARLY COLONISTS HUNTED THESE BIRDS. FIRST OF ALL, OUR NATION'S WILD TURKEY POPULATION HAS HAD MANY UPS AND DOWNS. OVERHUNTING RESULTED IN CLOSED SEASONS IN SOME AREAS OF THE COUNTRY.

Thankfully, that has all turned around. The ways we hunt turkeys have changed. Modern firearms have made turkey hunting more efficient—but not less challenging.

The third major difference is where we can hunt. Despite an increase in the turkey population, more and more land has been turned into nonhunting areas. That means turkey hunters need to do their homework before venturing out.

If you read any hunting magazines or watch hunting shows on television, you will get your fair share of the "must-have items" to make you a successful turkey hunter: a certain type of camouflage clothing, a "special" blind, a certain seat—the list could go on and on. They make it sound as if you will never get a turkey if you don't use these items.

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

“Native hunters didn’t carry all the gear modern turkey hunters do.”

(top left) **Jack Hanley with a recent turkey kill** *(top center)* **The author's view from his natural blind** *(right)* **A spring turkey taken down with the Federal Heavyweight rounds**

" ... what weighs nothing at the beginning of the day weighs a ton at the end, especially if you are also carrying a 20-pound turkey."

At one time, I fell victim to those pitches. But remember: Everything you bring out with you has to be brought back, and what weighs nothing at the beginning of the day weighs a ton at the end, especially if you are also carrying a 20-pound turkey.

After weighing myself down like a pack mule for a number of years, I took stock of the situation and decided to look back at how my native ancestors would have hunted *naama* (Abenaki for "turkey").

What Did They Do Differently?

Native hunters didn't carry all the gear modern turkey hunters do. They didn't need to. The forest was the native people's "grocery store," so they were out there all the time.

They learned to travel silently by becoming one with the land. Hunters would leave the main villages and hunt in organized groups, each group covering a specific area. They would study an animal's behavior and patterns throughout the year. They knew where the turkeys would be and when. It is like knowing what is in each aisle of your local grocery store.

Before every hunt, prayers would be offered up to the turkey's spirit, asking for a successful hunt. There was a direct spiritual connection between the native hunters and the animals they hunted. Prayers were also offered after the kill, giving thanks to an animal's spirit for giving its life. There was proper respect given to the turkey, as well as the land in general.

As far as gear goes, native hunters traveled light. Because they would normally be out for days at a time, they carried the items they needed in a woven basket they wore on their backs. Into this basket would go a hammock, some woven cordage, material for snares and traps, and perhaps some food.

Basic hunting items included a knife, bow and arrows. After the arrival of the Europeans, firearms replaced the bow and arrows for many native hunters. In some cases, traps and snares were set for turkeys—although that is illegal today.

My research has produced no evidence of native hunters using blinds as we do today. More than likely, they would try to hide themselves in nearby brush, if necessary. If they did build blinds, they would have been simple and made from the natural materials around them.

Lessons Learned

I have learned many lessons. First, it is not enough to go out into the field once or twice

“ ... do your homework. Go into your hunting area during all times of the year and during all weather conditions.”

(left) **Brandon Hinton with his gobbler** *(above)* **The author with his spring-turkey kill**

during the year. To fully understand the terrain and the animal you have chosen to hunt—in this case, turkeys—you need to do your homework. Go into your hunting area during all times of the year and during all weather conditions.

See where the turkeys are and where they are not. Observe what they are feeding on and when. Find the paths they take when they travel from one area to another. This information cannot be gathered the day before hunting season.

Second, it is important to have proper respect for the land and the animals you are hunting. That means making sure you know your own limitations and those of your equipment. It means making only kill shots. If you aren't sure, don't shoot.

The third lesson is to travel light. Carry only what you really need. Extra baggage leads to noise and fatigue. Leave the extra stuff at home.

Today, I travel extremely light. If it doesn't fit into my backpack, it stays home. Gone is the commercial “must-have” blind. I hide myself in natural cover instead. My camouflage clothing is a mix of my old Army fatigues and bits and pieces I have picked up over the years.

My turkey call (which I rarely use) is an inexpensive box call I picked up at Bass Pro Shops. My pack always contains my first-aid kit, compass, bottle of Green Mountain Tick Repellent, and some food and water, the last of which is carried in a Hideaway collapsible flask. (I prefer this product to water bottles or canteens, because it decreases water sloshing and the noise that goes with it).

Lastly, I carry my shotgun and four rounds of Federal Heavyweight Turkey loads (one for the turkey and three in case of an emergency). That is it.

I also find I am spending more time in the areas I hunt, even when it isn't hunting season. I find likely places the turkeys will be. Because I do this legwork, I always have a plan B—and even C—in mind when hunting season arrives. If the turkeys aren't at my first spot, I will move to another area.

When you are carrying all that extra stuff, moving from one spot to another is almost impossible. Traveling light allows me to move positions with a minimum amount of effort and noise.

Long before all this fancy gear existed, hunters were successfully killing turkeys. Sometimes, we get carried away with the “latest and the greatest,” and we forget about getting back to the basics.

Although times have changed, the old ways still work. This coming turkey season, put in the time, along with the legwork. Give the old ways a try and see if they work for you. MP

Introducing dogs to antlers when they're young helps shape them into shed-hunting champions once they've been thoroughly trained.

Fetching Shed Antlers

HAUL HOME A SHED-ANTLER HEAP USING THE SERVICES OF "MAN'S BEST FRIEND"

By Tracy Breen
Photos by Roger Sigler

MANY DEER HUNTERS TARGET A SPECIFIC BUCK. MOST OFTEN, HE'S LOCATED VIA SCOUTING CAMERA. The hunter sometimes even develops a history with the deer, spotting him and capturing countless scouting-camera images over several years. The buck often gets nicknamed and, once mature, the hunter buckles down and devotes his or her entire season to killing him. If unsuccessful, the hunter at least tries to collect the deer's antlers—shed antlers, that is.

Shed-antler hunting has become extremely popular, largely because finding them helps hunters piece together the proverbial big-buck puzzle. Finding a buck's shed antlers helps you determine his core area, where he beds and his most traveled routes. I know hunters who've found sheds from the same buck year after year, only 100 yards apart. Simply put, finding sheds crafts most people into better hunters.

Granted, finding sheds can be difficult. It can require walking miles just to find one or two, if any at all.

In recent years, most hunters who are serious about finding sheds employ the services of "man's best friend." That's right; dogs can be trained to find and bring you more antlers than you'll ever find on your own. Like bird dogs that retrieve downed pheasants, antler dogs can find antlers much faster and easier than their masters.

Roger Sigler of Antler Ridge in Smithville, Missouri, has found mountains of shed antlers over the years. His secret isn't super-power eyesight; it's his canine companions' acute senses that yield the annual haul.

Training Canines

"I've spent several decades training dogs and other animals," Sigler said. "I've trained dogs for prisons and police departments and worked with people who train them for show business.

"Several years ago, I placed dogs under prisoners' care. Many of the dogs were abused or abandoned and needed care. They had someone to look after them, and the prisoners had the responsibility of caring for them. The dogs lived with the prisoners 24 hours a day. It was a great program that changed prisoners' attitudes," he added.

Sigler wanted to launch a training program for the dogs and prisoners but knew he would hit several roadblocks.

"I knew the prison system wouldn't let me instruct the prisoners how to train the dogs for law enforcement, so I began researching specialized training we could teach dogs while still involving the prisoners," Sigler said. "My options were training dogs to hunt morel mushrooms or shed antlers. Since I already enjoyed hunting birds with dogs, antlers just made sense," he added.

The program was a hit. Sigler soon retired and began training shed dogs full time. He and his well-trained pooches find hundreds of sheds every year, and he now sells puppies and "started dogs" trained to find sheds.

Getting Started

Sigler believes the Labrador Retriever is the best shed-dog breed.

"Labs make great shed dogs, because they mind well, love to retrieve, have good noses and aren't high-strung like most hunting breeds," he stated.

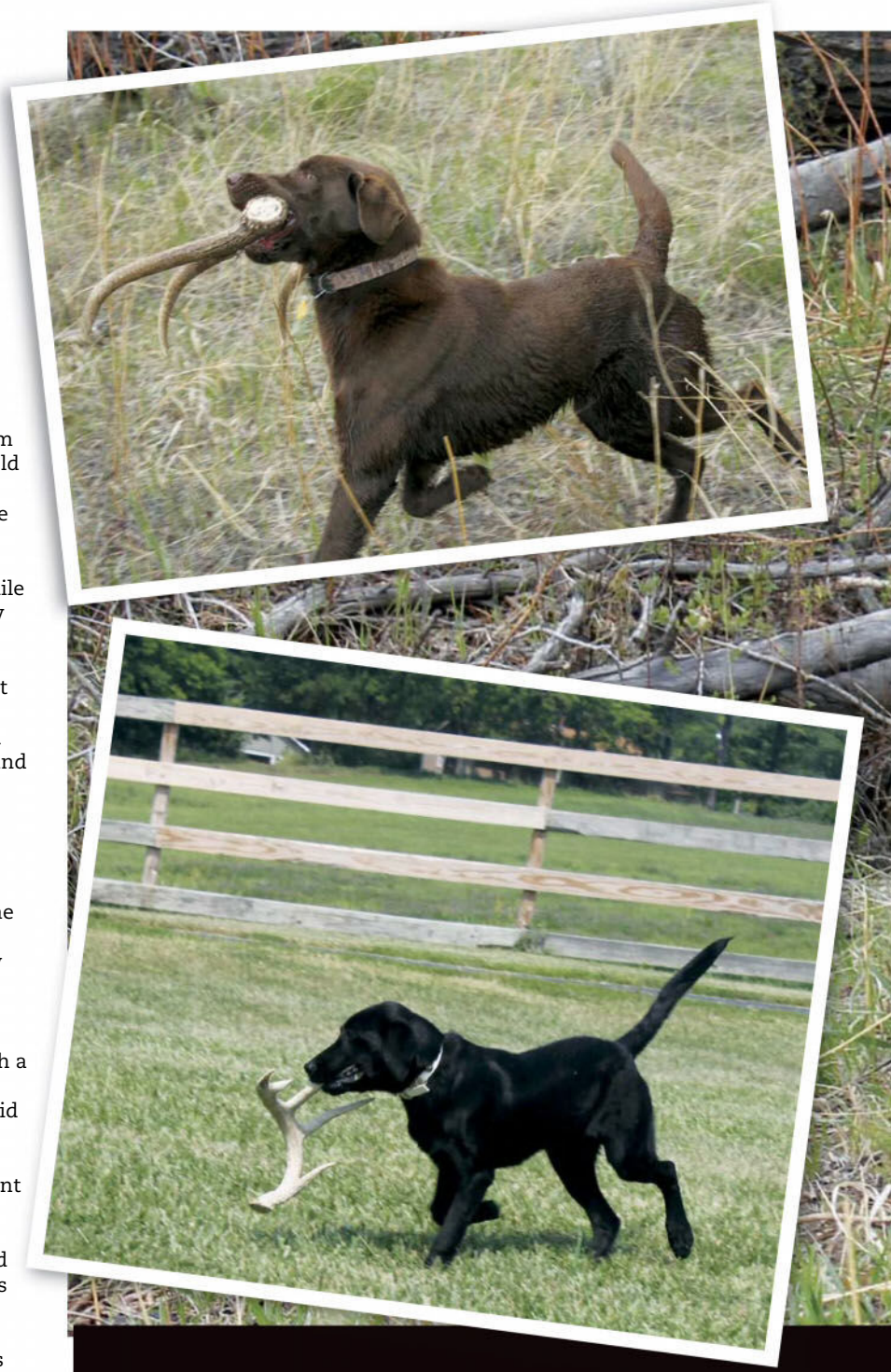
While Labs are arguably best, any dog with a great nose might be trainable. But if you already own a Lab for bird hunting, Sigler said teaching it to find sheds is possible.

"Experience has taught me that bird dogs will hunt birds first," he said. "Fresh bird scent typically distracts them from their shed search. I give my dogs sheds to play with when they're only weeks old. They're trained to find sheds first and birds second, which is the way it must be if you want an excellent shed-hunting companion. Bird dogs can be trained to find sheds, but the best shed dogs are ones started as puppies."

Pup Boot Camp

Training Labs—or any breed—to find sheds begins in the puppy stage.

"I start playing fetch with puppies when they're 8 weeks old," Sigler explained. "When purchasing a puppy, it's crucial to understand all Labs aren't created equal. Finding a dog that loves to retrieve is a necessity."



(top) **The best shed dogs are as obsessed with antlers as their owners. To them, the antler is the reward for their hard work and obedience.**

(below) **During the early stages, shed-dog expert Roger Sigler trains canines in a contained area. When a dog masters a given space, Sigler adds difficulty by expanding the playing field.**

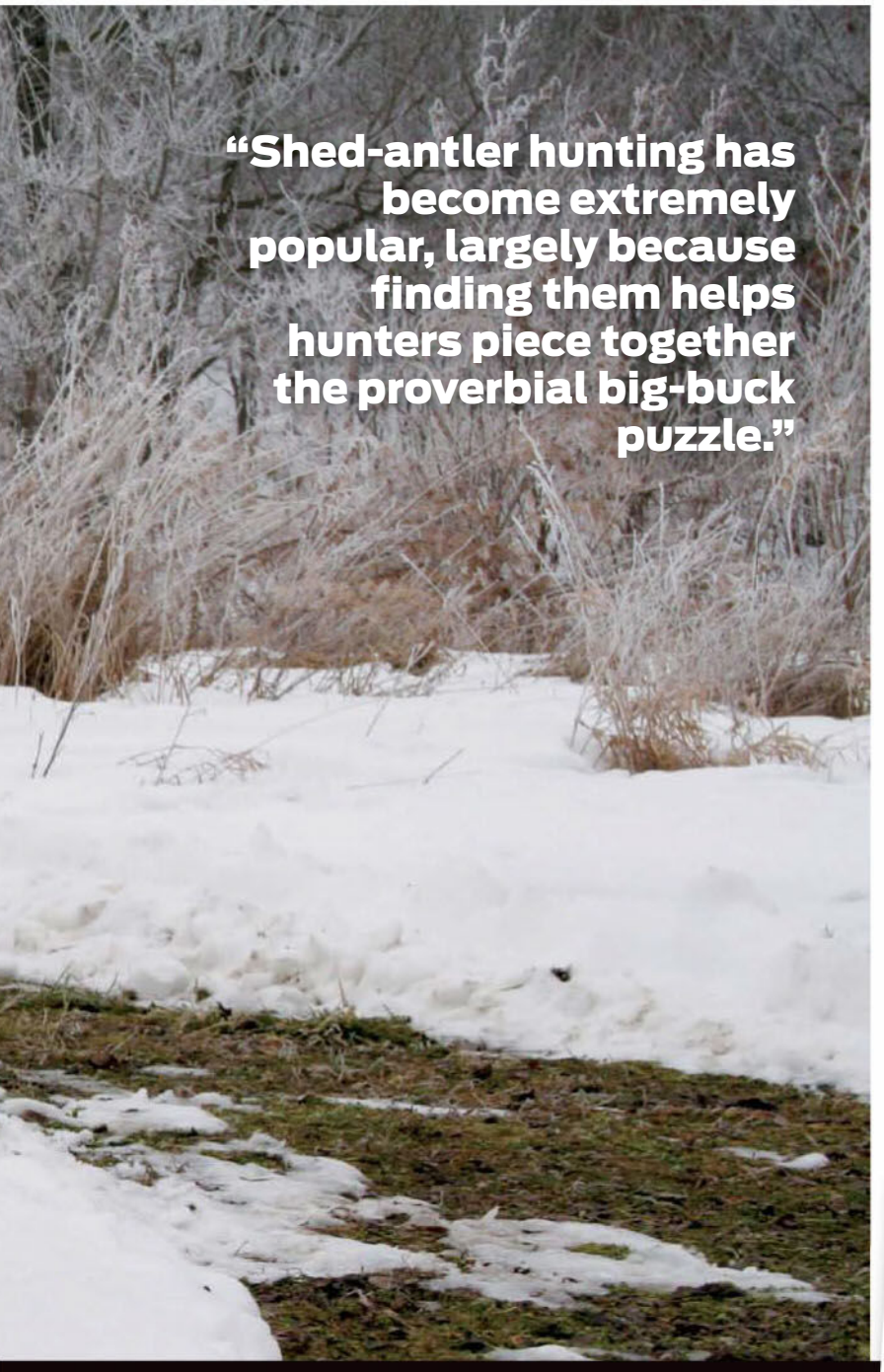
(main photo) **Two dogs team up to transport a hefty elk antler.**

OBEDIENCE IS KEY

Along with training dogs to fetch antlers, Roger Sigler teaches them obedience. They must know whom to obey and do what their master instructs. He introduces them to the sound of a gun and water. This produces a well-rounded, dual-purpose dog. Sigler avoids shock collars and never hits his dogs.

"We want our dogs to work for us because they love to retrieve," Sigler said. "To them, the antler is the reward. Food is used as a reward early on, but we train them to want sheds. Finding the sheds, returning them to me and getting praised drives them; not the fear of being beaten."

An obedient Labrador Retriever makes an outstanding shed-hunting companion. Plus, they're big and burly to handle the cold weather.



Sigler continued, "We have them begin retrieving antlers immediately. Grabbing an antler doesn't come naturally, so sometimes, we stick an antler tine through a ball. From early on, the dog is taught to retrieve antlers. We want them to become obsessed with the act."

All About Antlers

Once puppies understand basic obedience, the trainer gradually introduces more antler time. They begin playing fetch so the dog becomes accustomed to its scent.

"The goal with this training approach is teaching the dog scent discrimination," Sigler explained. "Antlers are no more important to dogs than sticks. However, they begin realizing sheds are what we want. Making that transition isn't easy, but dogs eventually learn that their job is finding antlers."

The best shed dog is one that understands what you want it to do and becomes obsessed with it.

"I have a dog that, every time a visitor arrives, runs and finds an antler to play fetch," Sigler said. "Getting a dog to become obsessed like that takes time and repetition."

Expanding the Playing Field

Once a dog is 5 months old, fetches antlers and displays basic obedience skills, Sigler teaches it to find sheds in larger areas. He notes that training during the early stages should take place indoors, where the trainer is always nearby and in complete control.

"We begin in a large indoor arena," he said. "Once they consistently find sheds in the arena, we move outside, where we let them find sheds in an area about half the size of a football field. Next, we move up to an area the size of a football field and then to about 5 acres. Then, we graduate to a 50-acre parcel," Sigler explained.

Roger Sigler (left) is pictured here with two of his shed dogs, along with a pair of happy shed hunters and their antler findings. Sigler and wife Sharon have made a business of training shed dogs professionally.

Purchase a Started Shed Dog or Have Yours Trained

Roger and Sharon Sigler of Antler Ridge in Smithville, Missouri, have trained hundreds of dogs to hunt shed antlers. They can train your qualified dog; alternatively, you can purchase a started dog from them. This can be a great option for those with busy schedules.

For more information, call (816) 289-1154 or visit Antlerdogs.com.

(above) **Be patient when training dogs to hunt shed antlers. Never hit them when they misbehave. This only instills fear and makes training more difficult. Instead, praise them when they succeed. The positive reinforcement will drive them to champion status over time.**

Sigler’s training process takes several months to complete. When the dog consistently obeys in the controlled environment and finds hidden sheds, he graduates to bigger challenges.

“After a dog masters finding hidden sheds in large, open areas, we sterilize the antlers so they’re free of human odors,” he said. “We hide three or five of them in a field. After the dog finds sheds in one field, we don’t return for a week or longer so it doesn’t become too familiar with it. The goal is to make the dog search for the sheds. Switching things up forces the dog to use its eyes and nose.”

Long-Term Commitment = Rewards

As with finished gun dogs, it takes years to turn a puppy into a shed-finding champion.

“The training process is long, but in the end, a well-trained shed dog doubles your shed count,” Sigler said.

On a recent spring trip to Canada, Sigler and his dogs found 210 sheds in five days—many more than Sigler would have found without canine assistance. Most of the dogs on the Canadian shed-hunting excursion were older, well-trained dogs—ones that want sheds almost a badly as Sigler.

“Training a shed dog is a long-term commitment,” he said. “Many people don’t have the time it takes to produce a finished dog. If they make time, though, they’ll be rewarded with a great shed-hunting companion. Those without the time can purchase a started dog from me that has mastered the basics. I’ll offer finished dogs within the next couple years,” he added.

Sigler believes dogs excel after training for two reasons. The first is scent.

“Dogs can easily smell the antler, especially if it’s fresh. Sheds several years old are harder to find, but dogs still sniff them out.”

The second reason is that trained dogs understand what they’re looking for. Plus, their heads are only inches above ground level.

“A dog covers twice as much turf as a person, and they’re so close to the ground that they see or smell sheds we’d walk right by,” Sigler pointed out.

If you love dogs and deer hunting, a shed dog just might be for you. A well-trained dog finds up to 10 times the antlers a person does within the same amount of time. Those odds just might help you finish piecing together your own big-buck puzzle. MP


SPEED KILLS
HELL'S CANYON SPEED
IN STORES
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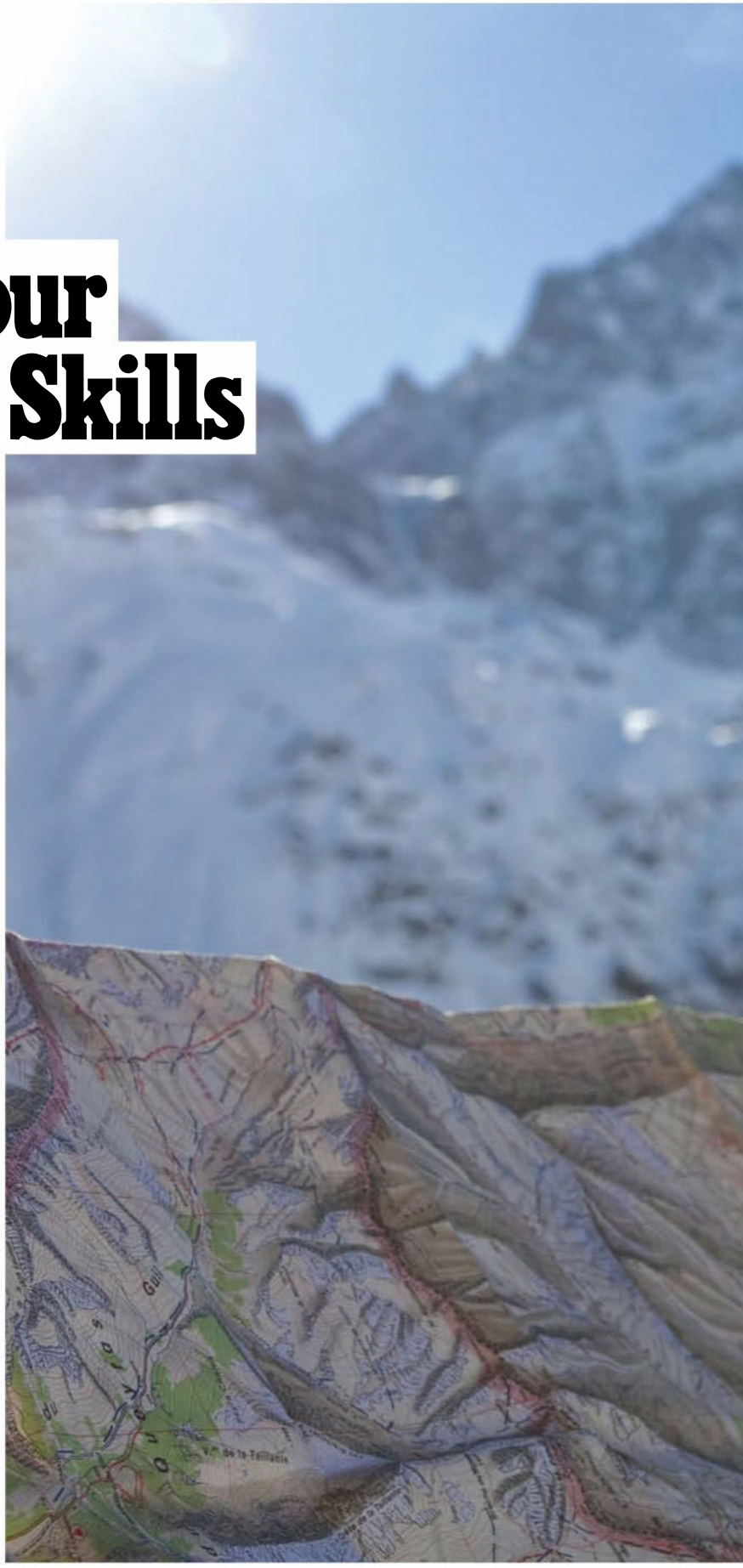
Improve Your Navigation Skills in 5 Easy Steps

FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES AND NEVER BE LOST AGAIN

By Larry Schwartz



LAND NAVIGATION IS A FUNDAMENTAL SKILL EVERY OUTDOORSMAN/WOMAN SHOULD OBTAIN. Learning the basics is fairly easy, but becoming proficient is difficult.

Fortunately, there are several real-world lessons that can improve your skills.

Without further ado, here they are.

Lesson #1

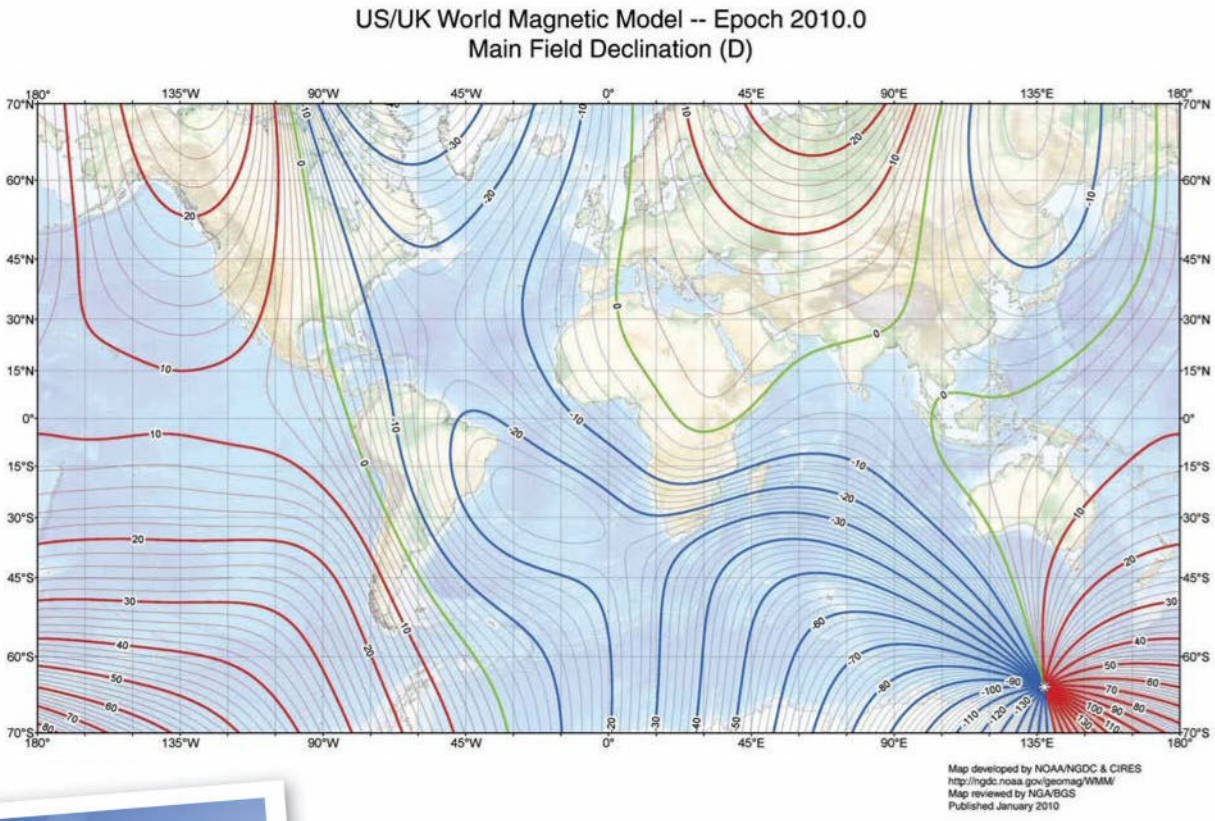
Trust Your Equipment

We all have some sort of internal "compass" that instills a sense of direction. Sometimes, it's spot on. More often, at the worst times, that internal hunch is inaccurate.

Appropriately, there are two navigation essentials that won't let you down: your map and compass. However, "equipment trust" is something many of us struggle—or have struggled—with. Sometimes, we feel so sure "camp is right over the next hill" or that "we must have gone far enough by now to reach the truck."

Manmade features such as roads and buildings may come and go, but terrain features rarely change, so you can trust your map's picture and contour lines. Your compass, when used away from power lines or metal objects, will always align with the northern side of Earth's magnetic field—regardless of the compass's age or your location. The bottom line? Trust your equipment! It's far more dependable than your instincts.

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK



(top) **This diagram shows how the lines of Earth's magnetic field flow across the surface. These lines cause the deviation we call "declination."** *(above)* **When you're navigating in open terrain and have landmarks that don't change as you move (such as this mountaintop), terrain association is your easiest navigation method.**

PHOTOS: WIKIMEDIA.ORG

Understanding Declination's Role in Navigation

If the declination is east of grid north, the angle is positive. If it's west of grid north, it's negative. To calculate which bearing to use, remember this formula:

grid azimuth = magnetic azimuth + declination

For example:
Magnetic azimuth = 90 degrees
Declination = 10 degrees east, or +10 degrees
Grid azimuth = 90 degrees + (+10 degrees) = 100 degrees

Magnetic azimuth = 90 degrees
Declination = 10 degrees west, or -10 degrees
Grid azimuth = 90 degrees + (-10 degrees) = 80 degrees

If this seems complicated, follow the following simple steps:
1. Turn your compass's bezel so the direction of travel is 360 degrees (north).
2. Lay the edge of your compass along your map's north-south line.
3. Rotate the map and compass together until the compass needle matches the MN arrow in the declination diagram.

Your map is now oriented to magnetic north, and any azimuths you take from it will be correct for your compass.

Now, if I haven't confused you enough already, declination changes over time and by location. So, whenever you plan to use your map and compass, you must get your location's current declination. If you get a map from an online source such as MyTopo.com, the current declination information is put on the map for you, but you'll need to update it annually.

To find your location's current declination value, go to the NOAA website and use its declination calculator (ngdc.noaa.gov/geomag-web/#declination). I like this site because it lets you enter a zip code or city and state to get the latitude/longitude values for specific locales.

Lesson #2

Understand and Use Declination

Magnetic north on your compass is different from grid north on your map. Unfortunately, many people don't account for this or do it incorrectly when using a map and compass together.

"Declination" is the difference between grid north (on your map) and magnetic north (on your compass). It's measured as an angle from grid to magnetic (G-M). This information is found in the declination diagram located in your map's legend. The three lines are the three most-used versions of north. True north is marked with a star, grid north with GN and magnetic north with an arrow and MN.

Lesson #3

Take up Orienteering

Orienteering originated in Sweden in the 1880s as a way to train the military in land navigation. In the 1920s, it grew in popularity, became a civilian sport in Europe and then travelled across the ocean to North America in the 1940s. It really became popular in the 1960s.

Orienteering is a great way to practice your land navigation skills while also spending time outdoors and getting in some cardiovascular exercise. It involves compass skills, map reading and interpretation, route selection, running and strategy as you move from point to point, competing against others to complete the course in the shortest time.

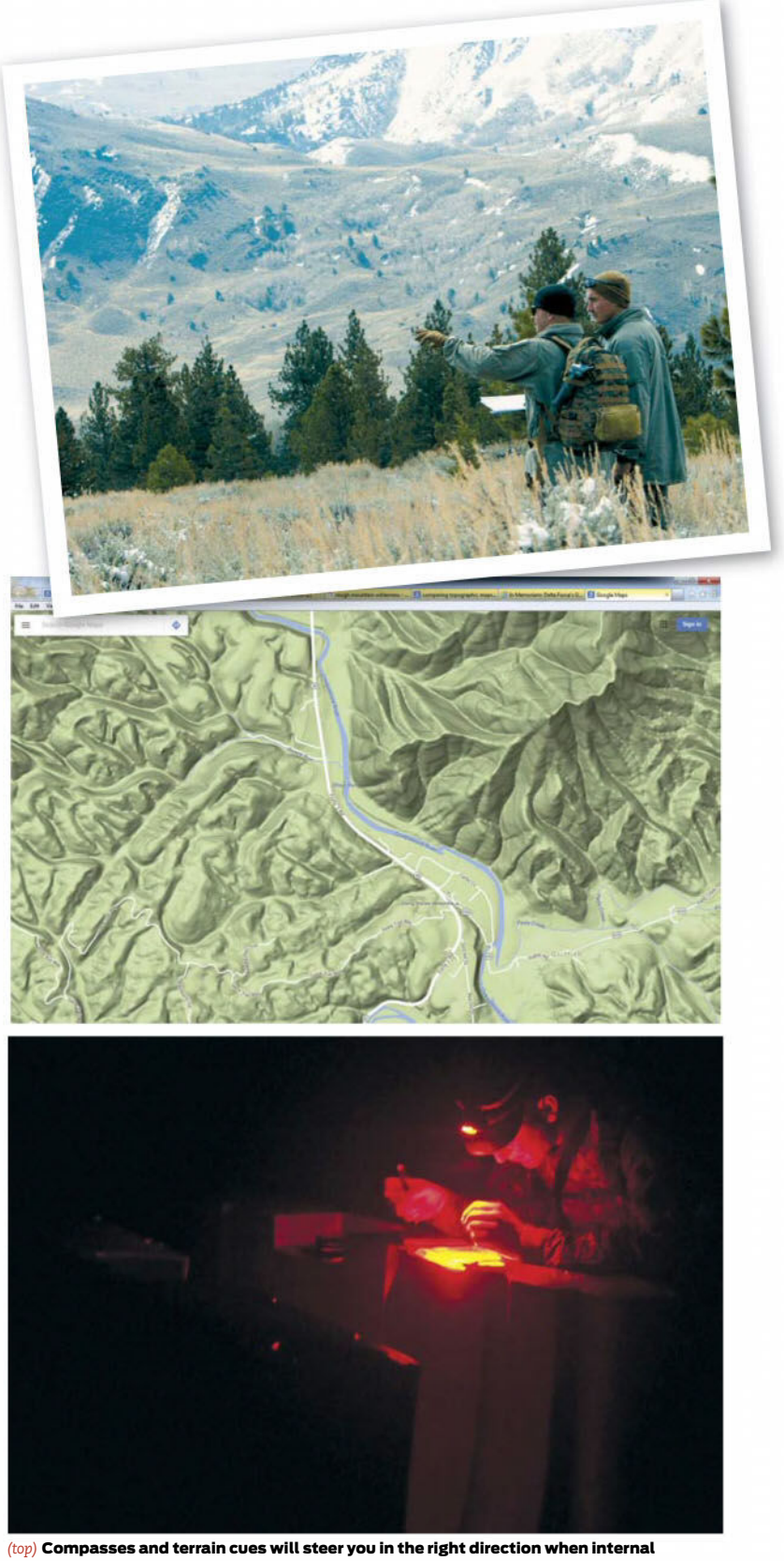
To find a club near you and learn more about orienteering in the United States, check out Orienteering USA on the Web at us.orienteering.org/clubs.

Lesson #4

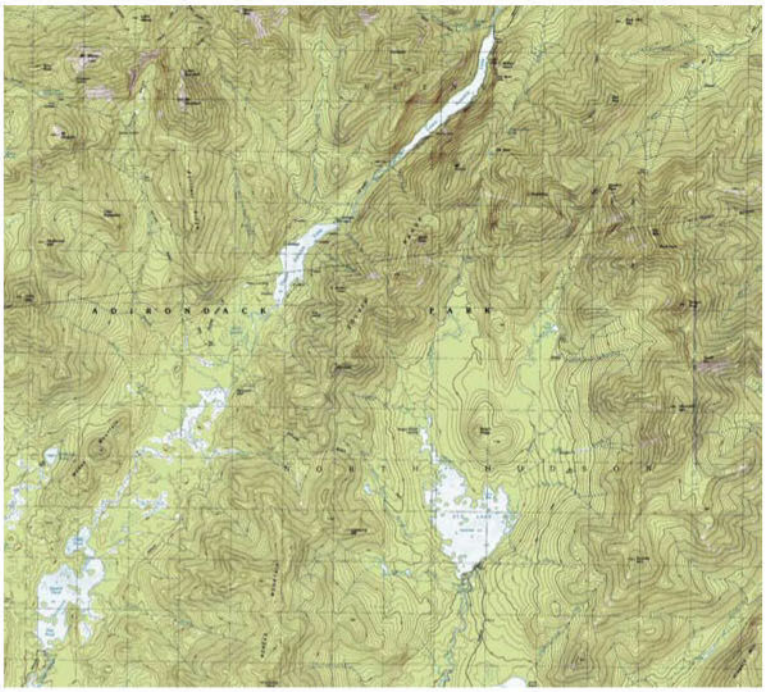
Things Are Different at Night

Terrain features aid daytime navigation, whether or not you actually realize it. At night, you don't have these cues, so your technique must be better. You also have to modify the way you do things.

Although you may need to follow a compass bearing at night—especially if you can't see a distant landmark to head toward—you shouldn't use it for moving long distances. Too many factors can deviate your intended course. Move only short distances to a landmark you can see in the failing light or work with a partner who can walk ahead of you. Guide them left or right to stay on course. Then, walk up to them and repeat the process.



(top) **Compasses and terrain cues will steer you in the right direction when internal hunches are wrong.** *(middle)* **Using aerial photographs (they're often more current than topographic maps) together with topographic maps will help you understand and work the terrain more effectively.** *(bottom)* **Navigating at night involves more than reading a map or compass by the light of a red-filtered flashlight. You need to adapt your methods to what you can see; and use a partner, if possible.** PHOTOS BY WIKIMEDIA.ORG



(above) **Topographic maps provide a wealth of information for those who've gone the distance to learn how to use them. You can pick the best route from where you are to where you want to be, decide which side of a ridge gets the most sunlight during the day and find water sources.**

(opposite) **When you're negotiating thick cover or can't see a landmark to keep you on track, following a compass bearing is your best approach to staying on course.**

PHOTOS BY WIKIMEDIA.ORG

A better strategy for navigating at night is to use terrain association to move toward a terrain feature that's recognizable in the dark. This is called an "attack point" because you can "attack" your final destination from it. Once at your attack point, follow a compass bearing to walk the distance you measured from the map on the azimuth you took from it.

Your pace will also change at night. Since we all want to avoid tripping over a log or plummeting to the bottom of a ravine, we usually take shorter steps. Thus, your pace count increases at night for the same distance you covered during daylight.

Lesson #5

Practice Develops Proficiency

As mentioned earlier, we all need land navigation skills, especially those of us who spend lots of time in the great outdoors. I also mentioned that these skills develop over time and through experience.

So, apply these lessons to your existing skills. Then, put them to the test: Leave the GPS in your pack, and use your map and compass. Go for a hike, but instead of following trails to that beautiful waterfall for an al fresco lunch, head cross-country and move from landmark to landmark or attack point to attack point until you arrive.

Lay out an orienteering course for your family or fellow modern pioneers. Incorporate a gourmet picnic basket at the course's end for the person who arrives first. Get out there and use your skills, learn from your mistakes and move from adequate to adept! MP


“ ... we all need land navigation skills, especially those of us who spend lots of time in the great outdoors.”

· GENERAL ·

The SHAKERS and DRAFT ANIMALS

THE WIDESPRED COMMUNITY MASTERED LIFESTYLE SIMPLICITY AND COMBINED THE USE OF "HIGH" TECHNOLOGY WITH AGE-OLD COMMON SENSE

By Dana Benner

Despite the advanced use of machinery available for use around the homestead today, more and more people are combining this technology with the "old ways" of doing things. This includes the use of draft animals. From clearing land to plowing and haying, using draft animals—both horses and oxen—is a low-impact, environmentally friendly way of getting work done.

No group of people combined the use of "high" technology with age-old common sense like the Shakers. No matter what they did, it was always on the cutting edge, whether on the farm or in life.

What started out as research into the Shaker use of draft horses, which took me to the Shaker Village in Enfield, New Hampshire, and the Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill in Harrodsville, Kentucky, ended up with me being educated in this simple way of thinking.

Some Shaker Background

The Shakers comprised a 19th-century communal society whose members were spread throughout 18 communities that ranged from Maine to Kentucky. They were a peaceful group and strived for a more simple way of life. They believed in equality of race and sex, and freedom from prejudice, among other tenets.

The first Shaker community was established in New York shortly after the American Revolution; by the 1840s, there were about 3,500 Shakers spread throughout all their communities. The founder of the Shakers (or the United Society of Believers in the Second Coming of Christ), Ann Lee, originally joined the Wardley Society, a Quaker sect, in 1758. As a result of their way of worshipping, which involved shaking their bodies and arms, they became known as the "Shaking Quakers," or "Shakers," for short.

Agricultural Contributions

When many people think about the Shakers, it is often in reference to their well-known craftsmanship—particularly their furniture style, which is still in high demand today. However, the Shakers were also on the cutting edge of agriculture production. In fact, they are credited with many contributions to the improvement of

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEMAW AT TWO FORKS FARM

several livestock breeds, including sheep, chickens, cattle and horses.

Because of their ideals of simplicity and utility, the Shakers made improvements well into the 19th century—not only to livestock, but also on tools used around the farm. The Shakers are also credited for developing many of the crop seeds we use today (examples of which can be seen at the Shaker Village in Enfield, New Hampshire).

Draft Horses

The more I researched, the more complex everything became. I learned that the Shakers who lived near Maine's Sabbathday Lake were still using draft horses as late as the 1950s—well after the other Shaker communities had switched over to petroleum-powered machinery or had ceased to exist. In fact, the village at Sabbathday Lake is the last Shaker community with active Shakers residing there. That community, specifically, is credited with improving the efficiency of the horse-drawn Maine mower (a machine used in haying), as well as on improving the design of the heavy-duty collar for draft horses, which is still used today.

With a thirst for deeper insight, I made my way to Kentucky to visit the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill. While there are no active Shakers living there, the village has been preserved as a way to teach people about the Shaker contributions. The restored Shaker villages in New England don't have any horses, but the village at Pleasant Hill does, and I really wanted to learn more about them.

Upon arriving, I hooked up with David Paris, who is in charge of the livestock at Pleasant Hill. With the idea of how the Shakers used draft horses on my mind, that was the first question I asked him.

"I often find it funny to see that the movies always show horses pulling plows and other farm implements," David said. "In most places,

THIS PAGE:
Devon oxen in yoke (Photo courtesy of Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill)

OPPOSITE TOP:
The short horn is a first-choice oxen for Shakers—even today—because of their versatility, which includes use for meat and milk.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM:
A well-muscled animal known for its intelligence and willingness to work, the Percheron makes a great draft horse.

"[Oxen] were used to pull stumps, haul heavy loads and plow fields—basically everything that needed to be done on the farm."

SHAKER DRAFT ANIMALS

The Percheron. While it is not the largest or strongest of the draft horses, the Percheron was the perfect horse for the needs of the Shakers. It is the only draft horse to carry Arabian blood, which accounts for its intelligence and gentle disposition. The Percheron breed was developed in the La Perche region of France and was bred to be the best all-around riding, driving and farm horse. These horses were first brought to the United States in the early to mid-1800s and quickly found use both as farm animals and for hauling freight in America's larger cities. Today, the Amish still use Percheron horses as a draft animals.

Devon cattle. Devons were first brought to Plymouth Colony in 1623, making them the first British cattle in America. They were highly valued for both their milk and meat, but it was as oxen that this breed of cattle stood out. This multipurpose breed became a mainstay of many small farms from New England to Virginia. In fact, Devon cattle are still in high demand today.

Milking Shorthorn cattle. Milking Shorthorns are far more numerous than the Devon, which it actually replaced on many farms. The breed was originally brought to Virginia from England in the late 1700s. These cattle quickly spread to New York, Kentucky and Ohio. Like the Devon, Milking Shorthorns are multipurpose cattle used for milk, meat and draft purposes. They are very docile, and their ability to adapt to less-desirable grasses made them a top choice among rural farmers.

"From land-clearing to plowing and haying, using draft animals—both horses and oxen—is a low-impact, environmentally friendly way of getting work done."

ABOVE: The Percheron was originally bred as a warhorse in the Huisne River Valley in western France.

oxen were the draft animals of choice, and the Shakers were very quick to pick up on this. They even went as far as selecting the breeds they wanted for their oxen."

David went on to say that while horses were faster, they weren't as versatile as oxen and were often harder to control. When the Shakers used horsepower, they chose the Percheron, which could be used to pull a plow one minute and a wagon or carriage the next. They could even be ridden, thus making them the best all-around horse to have on the farm.

The Shakers were the masters of efficiency in everything they did. Livestock of any kind had to be fed, watered and cared for. This involved a great deal of time and energy. If they could have one type of horse that could do everything they needed, it was a more efficient way of getting things done.

Oxen

Oxen were the draft animal choice for the Kentucky Shakers. Oxen are big and strong and much easier to control than horses; and they are very gentle.

I asked David what makes an ox different from a steer or even a bull. He explained, "Oxen are the males of any breed of cattle that have been neutered, are at least 4 years old and are trained and used for work. Steers are neutered male cattle used for food. Bulls are males used for breeding."

Fully grown, an ox weighs about 1,600 pounds. When yoked together, oxen were all-purpose farm "tools," not only for the Shakers, but also for frontier America, in general. They were used to pull stumps, haul heavy loads and plow fields—basically everything that needed to be done on the farm.

In Kentucky, the Shakers used oxen well into the late 1800s. Ever striving for efficiency, the Shakers preferred "multi-use" cattle, meaning that these animals were used for meat, milk and work. The two preferred breeds of cattle—whether as meat and milk cattle or to make into oxen—were the Devon and the Milking Shorthorn. In some cases, the Shakers even crossbred the two to improve a herd's strength and productivity. According to the people at the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, the Milking Shorthorn was the most popular cattle breed in the 19th century. Their size, strength and intelligence made these a prime breed for oxen. To this day, both the Devon and the Milking Shorthorn are the cattle of choice for oxen.

ABOVE: Hooking up young Milking Shorthorn

My time investigating this subject opened my eyes to a group of people whose way of life was a perfect balance of technology and simplicity. The Shakers were open to new ways of doing things and readily adopted items from the "outside" world that would benefit their way of life while, at the same time, not compromising their ideals. MP

DIY European Skull Mount

JUST A FEW TOOLS, MATERIALS AND A LITTLE TIME ARE ALL YOU NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL RESULTS

By Michael Pendley

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS YOU MIGHT WANT A DEER MADE INTO A TROPHY. MAYBE IT IS YOUR FIRST BUCK, YOUR FIRST ONE KILLED WITH A BOW OR AS A MEMENTO OF AN OUT-OF-STATE HUNT THAT RESULTED IN A PUNCHED TAG. WHATEVER THE REASON, A MOUNT HANGING ON YOUR WALL WILL BRING BACK GOOD MEMORIES FROM PAST HUNTS.

Everyone likes a nice shoulder or pedestal mount from a taxidermist, of course, but they are expensive, and cost is an essential factor for most of us. Most professional taxidermists use colonies of small, meat-eating dermestid beetles to clean skulls; even that process can be on the expensive side.

However, you have another option: Show off your trophy animal with a European-style skull mount. With just a few tools, materials and a little time, you can make your own mounts at home and end up with a professional-looking final product.

“ ... a mount hanging on your wall will bring back good memories from past hunts.”

A finished European skull mount makes a beautiful standalone memory of a successful hunt.

Gather the Materials

Compile all these items before you begin the trophy mount process. Chances are, you have a lot of these around the house, but you will probably need to purchase a few inexpensive items, as well. Gathering everything beforehand will save time and ensure that everything you need is within easy reach.

- Sharp knife for skinning
- Dull knife for scraping
- Needle nose pliers
- Stiff wire brush
- Metal pot large enough to submerge skull
- Outdoor heat source (gas burner, camp stove, fireplace, turkey fryer)
- Bottle of 50% volume cream developer from a beauty supply store (40% will work if 50% is not available)
- 1 tub Clairol BW2 powder lightener (also from beauty supply store)
- 1 box 20 Mule Team Borax powder
- 1 pound sal soda (sodium carbonate); available from taxidermy supply companies (optional)
- Rubber bands or string
- Super Glue
- Dawn dishwashing liquid
- Plastic wrap
- Electrical tape
- Pressure washer or drill
- Metal wire
- Small paintbrush
- Small glass measuring cup or bowl
- Rubber gloves
- Cardboard (large piece)

STEP 1: **Skin and remove as much soft tissue as possible from the skull. The more work you put in now, the easier the process will be later.**

Step #1

The hardest part of the entire process is skinning the skull. Separate the skull from the last vertebra of the spine. Using a sharp knife, remove the skin and soft tissue from the nose and lip area. Also remove the tongue and eye tissue. Scrape any loose tissue off the outer surface of the skull.

Next, remove the brain tissue from skull. This can be challenging. The best way to do this is to use a pressure washer and spray the brain matter out from the rear of the skull. If you don't have a pressure washer, simply chuck a bent piece of wire into a cordless drill and insert the bent end through the back of the skull. Use the drill to spin the wire at full speed until the brain tissue is liquefied and pours from the rear of the skull.

STEP 2: Wrap the first several inches of antler in plastic wrap and secure it in place with electrical tape to prevent the antlers from becoming discolored during the mounting process.

STEP 3: Submerge the skull in a pot of clean water. Use wire to suspend the top of the skull just under the surface of the water.

STEP 4: Scrape and cut away any tissue left from the boiling process. A dull knife and a pair of pliers help loosen any stuck-on bits. Make sure all the soft tissue is removed.

"The hardest part of the entire process is skinning the skull."

Step #2 Starting at the skull, wrap the first several inches of the antler in plastic wrap and secure the wrap in place with electrical tape. This will protect the rack from discoloration during the later steps in the process.

Step #3 Fill a large pot with enough water to submerge the skull entirely but not cover any part of the antler bases. Place the pot over a heat source.

Be warned: This process produces a strong odor and is best done outside. In addition, the pot you use can never be used for cooking again. (Take that into consideration when going through your kitchen cabinets and eyeballing your wife's favorite stockpot.)

Using some wire, suspend the skull in the water and adjust the level until the top of the skull plate is barely submerged. Hold the skull in place by wiring the rack to the pot handles. Try not to let the water cover any part of the rack, because the boiling water might discolor the submerged area.

Add a few drops of Dawn dishwashing liquid to act as a degreaser. Turn the heat up and bring the pot to a simmer. Maintain a slight simmer and avoid bringing the pot to a full boil during the process.

The length of time the skull will stay in the pot can range from two to four hours; it depends on how much tissue you removed in step 1.

Toby Roub, owner of Nature Werks Taxidermy, recommends the addition of sal soda (mckenziesp.com/WSS1-P20409.aspx) to speed up the process. Add this ingredient

to the pot at a ratio of 1 cup per gallon of water. The sal soda will help dissolve meat, fat and grease. If you use sal soda, reduce the boil time to 30 minutes.

Remove the skull from the pot and scrape away any remaining soft tissue. If the skull isn't completely clean, place it back into the pot and boil it for another 15 minutes.

Make sure to change the water three or four times during the boiling process. At each water change, use a dull knife and pliers to remove as much tissue as possible. If any teeth are dislodged during the boil, collect them from the pot and reserve them for later repair.

Step #4

When you are done boiling the skull, use a combination of a dull scraping knife, pliers and small wire brush to remove any remaining soft tissue from on or inside the skull. Once this is finished, there should be very little soft tissue left on the skull.

At this point, the lower jaw will probably have separated from the skull. You can continue the process with both pieces or discard the lower jaw and simply mount the upper skull section.

Step #5

Wash the skull under hot running water using dishwashing liquid to remove any remaining grease from the bone area. Set the skull aside to dry completely.

Step #6

Pack the skull in 20 Mule Team Borax, filling any voids inside. Set the skull aside and allow the borax to work for 24 to 48 hours. The borax dries and preserves the skull and ensures that your mount will be odor free once finished. (The borax can be reused several times if you are doing more than one mount.)

Step #7

Remove the skull from the borax and remove any loose material. Rinse the skull well in cool water, paying careful attention to the brain and nasal cavities to make sure any remaining borax is rinsed away. Once the skull is clean, set it aside to air dry.

STEP 5: After scraping, wash the skull under hot water using Dawn dishwashing liquid to remove any remaining grease. A stiff bristle brush is helpful in getting the skull completely clean.

STEP 6: Pack the skull in 20 Mule Team Borax, making sure to fill the brain cavity and nasal openings. Leave the skull in the borax for 24 to 48 hours in order to dry and preserve the skull.

STEP 7: Shake off any excess borax and rinse the skull well under hot water. While the skull dries, mix the paste whitener.

STEP 8: Paint the whitening mixture over all exposed surfaces of the skull. Do this in a well-ventilated area and wear rubber gloves and old clothes. Use a sheet of cardboard as a work surface to prevent the whitener from bleaching the work area.

STEP 9

STEP 10

STEP 9: After four hours, rinse the dried paste from the skull and allow the skull to air dry. The skull will continue to whiten over the next few days.

STEP 10: Repair any split seams or loose teeth with Super Glue. Use string or rubber bands to hold the seams together while the glue dries.

Step #8 Make a paste of equal amounts of lightener and 40 or 50 percent cream developer in a small glass measuring cup or bowl. While the 50 percent product whitens better, it is a controlled product in most states and is only available to licensed cosmetology professionals.

You will need about a half-cup of paste per skull. Using a small paintbrush, paint the paste over the entire skull. Take care not to get the paste on your skin, clothing or the deer's antlers. Be advised that this paste will bleach everything it touches.

A large sheet of cardboard makes a handy surface for working; it can be folded up and thrown away when the job is finished. Also wear rubber gloves while completing the process and work in a well-ventilated area, because the fumes from the paste will be strong.

Step #9 Let the paste remain on the skull for three to four hours while it sits in a warm area. Rinse the skull under warm water and clean it completely. Then, dry the skull for one or two days; it will continue to whiten throughout that time. If you want a whiter skull, repeat steps eight and nine.

Step #10 Use Super Glue to replace any teeth that might have fallen out during the boiling process. Additionally, if any seams opened up along the way, glue them back together and use rubber bands or string to hold them in place while the glue dries.

Step #11 Mount the skull on a plaque, tabletop mount or wall by wiring or screwing the skull from the bottom. Get creative with your plaque: Use wood from the farm at which the deer was taken or cut the plaque into creative shapes. MP

MOUNTING OPTIONS

Incorporate a simple design that allows the skull to be mounted—freestanding on a table or shelf—or have the mounting surface reversed to hang on a wall.

A doe skull makes an interesting mount and is a great way to show off a first kill, even one without antlers.

European mounts are a great way to show off any sized rack. In fact, many hunters prefer the natural look of a skull mount to a full shoulder mount.

"In my opinion, rifles that group consistently right out of the box with factory-loaded ammunition are great hunting weapons."

SAVAGE ARMS AXIS II XP

PERFORMANCE AND AFFORDABILITY INTERSECT IN THIS OUTSTANDING RIFLE/SCOPE PACKAGE

By Thomas C. Tabor

SAVAGE ARMS HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER ITS 120-PLUS-YEAR HISTORY. FIREARMS WIELDING THE SAVAGE BRAND WERE ONCE VIEWED AS LOW-END PRODUCTS EARMARKED PRIMARILY FOR YOUNGSTERS AND NOVICES. NOT ANYMORE.

Today, Savage towers in the firearm and shooting industries, producing rifles virtually anyone would be proud to own. That relatively new reputation marks the result of Savage's philosophy to produce high-quality, affordable firearms that outperform expectations.

Savage's XP-series rifles best demonstrate those attributes. "XP" essentially stands for "scoped-rifle package." Consequently, it includes the rifle, a quality scope and scope mounts, thereby saving customers an average of $100 in lieu of purchasing everything separately. Savage even factory bore-sights the rifle to speed range time for new owners. Savings and convenience make XP-series rifles incredibly popular. In fact, Savage officials recently told me the XP series now accounts for over 60 percent of Savage's total sales!

Savage's Unique Design

Savage rifles utilize a unique action design. While most rifle manufacturers machine their bolts from a long, solid piece of steel, the bolts Savage builds consist of a floating, integrated bolt-head design that ensures minimal float and 100 percent bolt-lug engagement.

The design requires less machining, which equates to lower manufacturing costs. In turn, Savage offers ultra-reasonable consumer pricing. Even better, the floating, integrated bolt-head design contributes to out-of-the-box accuracy.

The Axis II XP Package

The new Axis II XP package exemplifies Savage's low-cost/high-performance XP

"Today, Savage towers in the firearm and shooting industries, producing rifles virtually anyone would be proud to own."

philosophy. Axis series rifles have been around for several years but recently joined the XP series. The rifle now features the tried-and-true Accu-Trigger and a high-quality Weaver KASPA 3-9x40mm scope.

I'm always impressed by the paperwork Savage includes with its rifles. Inspection and certification checklists instill great peace of mind: I know each rifle is safe and functional. Additionally, Savage includes a target to demonstrate the rifle's performance in the company's tunnel range. These papers might mean little to laymen but nonetheless demonstrate Savage's quality commitment.

Notable Attributes

The Axis features a push-feed system with plunger-type ejectors located within the bolt face, as well as a spring-type extractor. The oval-shaped, cast-metal bolt handle is smooth and uncheckered. The Savage-designed bolt is equipped with a recessed bolt face and twin locking lugs located up front. Further, the action can be opened while the safety is on. This means safer handling.

Axis II XP rifles come equipped with Savage's Accu-Trigger, a synthetic stock, detachable, box-type magazine, sling swivel studs and a ventilated recoil pad.

Accu-Triggers are consumer adjustable. To adjust one, you must first remove the stock. Then, you simply insert an included tool into the trigger assembly's rearmost area and turn it to either increase or decrease the pull weight. In this case, though, I found the five-pull average of 2 pounds, 10.8 ounces to my liking and didn't change it. The consistency across all five pulls was exceptional—something you wouldn't expect from a factory trigger.

The Axis II XP caliber choices cover a broad spectrum of eight popular centerfire cartridges: .223, .22-250, .243, .25-06, .270, .30-06, .308 and 7mm-08. For this review, I chose the .223 Remington—a caliber well suited for game ranging from prairie dogs to coyotes to wild hogs. Some hunters insist it's adequate for deer, but I recommend .243 or larger for deer hunting. Of course, the cost and diversity of .223 factory-loaded ammunition also suits this caliber for repetitious shooting.

The Axis II's magazine has a four-cartridge capacity. The magazine is secured by way of an integral plastic latch system consisting of the same molded-plastic material used for the

The Axis II XP demonstrates excellent accuracy.

The Axis II XP rifle package came with a factory-installed Weaver KASPA 3-9x40mm scope.

Savage molds a comfortable finger groove into the forearm.

AXIS II XP AT A GLANCE

Barrel material	Carbon steel
Barrel finish	Matte
Stock material	Synthetic
Stock finish	Matte
Trigger	AccuTrigger (adjustable)
Magazine	Detachable box
Scope	Weaver KASPA 3-9x40mm (mounted and bore sighted)
Calibers	.22-250 Rem, .223 Rem, .243 Win, .25-06 Rem, .270 Win, .30-06 Spfld, .308 Win, 7MM-08 Rem

The removable magazine is designed to hold four cartridges.

A small tool is included with each Axis rifle for adjusting the trigger pull.

For many shooters, the Axis name has become synonymous with good quality and reasonable pricing.

The Axis II's stock contains a metal lug that fits into a slot machined into the bottom of the rifle receiver.

The trigger guard perfectly matches the rifle's exterior.

floor plate. This could potentially pose wear problems after long-term use, but replacement magazines are readily available for purchase if that ever becomes an issue.

The rifle comes with a matte-black synthetic stock, which matches the action's black-oxide finish and the 22-inch carbon-steel 9:1 twist-rate barrel. The rifle weighs 6.5 pounds (gun only) and has a 43.9-inch overall length.

In addition to adult versions, Axis II rifles are available in submodels designed specifically for young shooters. These come with downsized stocks to fit shorter arms and are available in Realtree Xtra and Muddy Girl models. The Muddy Girl sub-model features an attractive pink camo stock perfect for women.

Range Testing

I recently evaluated the Axis II XP chambered in .223 Remington at my private range. Fine-tuning the scope reticles proved nearly effortless, so I got down to some serious powder burning.

For my range test, I only used Federal Premium ammunition loaded with 43-grain Speer TNT Green bullets. Federal indicates that this round produces an impressive 3,600 fps velocity. When zeroed at 100 yards, bullets drop 2.7 inches at 200 yards and 11.9 inches at 300 yards.

The rifle/ammo combination yields superb accuracy. My 100-yard, three-shot groups averaged 1.45 inches, with the smallest group measuring only 0.69 inch. I'm certain those groups will shrink once the rifle is fully broken in and fired with specifically tailored hand loads.

According to the author, the overly large rear portion of the Axis II bolt assembly isn't all that attractive, but it requires less machining—which brings the rifle to consumers at an affordable price.

The author found the ventilated recoil pad on the Axis II XP unique and comfortable. It also deflected some of the recoil.

The author ran the Axis II XP .223 through its paces on his private rifle range and was impressed by its accuracy when shooting factory-loaded Federal Premium ammunition.

The Way I See It

For consumers looking to avoid the hassles of matching a scope, bases and rings to a rifle, the Axis II XP is the answer. Not only is it affordable, it's also bore sighted and range ready. Getting it ready for hunting is as simple as grabbing a box of shells and heading to the range to fine-tune the scope reticles.

Although I prefer nicely figured black or English walnut stocks over composites or synthetics, the latter choices are better for inclement weather and rugged conditions.

Weaver's KASPA scope essentially resides at the lower end of Weaver's lineup, but crystal-clear optics and crisp reticle adjustments outperform expectations.

The Axis II XP rifle/scope package isn't intended to compete with fine collectable firearms, and perhaps it's not as beautiful as higher-priced rifles. But with a $489 MSRP—including scope and mounts—I don't see how potential buyers could go wrong. Overall, the package is simply a great bargain.

Rifles that group consistently right out of the box with factory-loaded ammunition are great hunting weapons in my opinion. No question: The bargain-priced Axis II XP is an outstanding addition to Savage's lineup, and it's a rifle you'd be proud to own and shoot.

MP

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on the Axis II XP or to locate the nearest Savage dealer, visit Savagearms.com or call (800) 370-0708.

For use in the outback, the Ruger Blackhawk Convertible and Buck Frontiersman are useful and effective tools.

BLADE-AND-BULLET SURVIVAL COMBO

TAME DANGER AND COMPLETE EVERYDAY TASKS WITH THESE PROVEN WILDERNESS COMPANIONS

By James E. House

"For more than 140 years, a single-action revolver has provided reassurance and security in remote places."

MOST URBANITES HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED THE UNCERTAINTIES OF REMOTE AREAS REACHED BY HORSE AND WHERE EVERYDAY UTILITIES ARE NONEXISTENT. Herders and wranglers of the mountain West, though, experience them daily while tending sheep flocks and cattle herds. My wife and I have encountered these wilderness veterans many times during visits to the mountains and national forests. They literally live in the wild most of the year and, for them, self-sufficiency is a must. Their lives depend on it.

Two Survival Essentials

Two items cow camp and sheep wagon occupants almost always tote are a knife and firearm—standard equipment for backcountry nomads. When uncertainty lingers, they're prepared to protect themselves.

Regardless of *your* wilderness mission—hiking, camping, exploring or working sheep or cattle—a knife and firearm are essential tools.

Word From the Wise

One of the most famous early-1900s adventure writers was James Oliver Curwood. In *The Wolf Hunters* (Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1908, p. 210), he writes, "Only those who have gone far into the silence and desolation of the unblazed wilderness know just how human a

Some useful .45 Colt loads are (left to right) the Remington 255-grain lead and 225-grain Semi-Wadcutter, Winchester 225-grain Silvertip, and Hornady 225-grain Critical Defense and FTX.

(above) **The Buck Frontiersman knife handles most remote-area tasks.**

(below) **For many years, the Remington Golden Saber has been a highly regarded defense load.**

"A good blade certainly complements a versatile firearm in the survival and self-sufficiency realms."

good rifle becomes to its owner. It is a friend every hour of the night and day, faithful to its master's desires, keeping starvation at bay and holding death for his enemies; a guaranty of safety at his bedside at night, a sharp-fanged watch-dog by day, never treacherous and never found wanting by the one who bestows upon it the care of a comrade and friend."

Curwood's statement could be amended to include a handgun, but the central concept is clear: A dependable firearm is required equipment in remote areas and performs the functions Curwood describes.

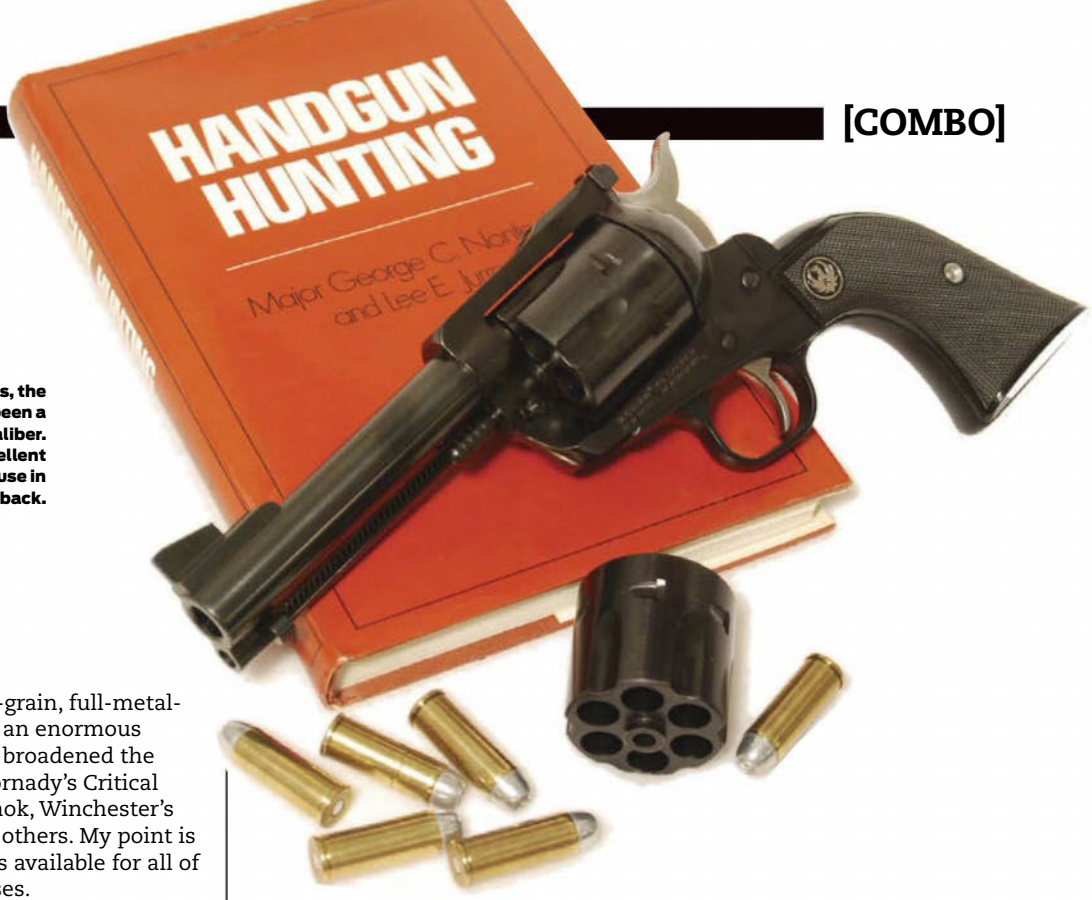
Ruger Blackhawk Convertible

For more than 140 years, a single-action revolver has provided reassurance and security in remote places. The Colt Single Action Army in .45 Colt caliber is the most famous handgun of its type, but it's scarce and expensive. Today, Ruger produces excellent single-action revolvers. Perhaps its most versatile is the Blackhawk Convertible, which includes two cylinders—one to fire .45 Colt ammunition, the other, .45 Auto. By simply pulling the cylinder pin forward, one cylinder can be removed and replaced by the other, which gives shooters the option to fire either of the two popular and powerful calibers. Although its MSRP is $699, some dealers offer it at $125 to $150 cheaper.

.45 Colt Versus .45 Auto

Firing a 255-grain, large-diameter bullet, the .45 Colt was the most powerful handgun until the .357 Magnum's introduction in 1935. Even today, it ranks high on the list of calibers that deliver a severe blow. Ammunition is currently available in styles ranging from the 255-grain lead cowboy loads to shot loads. In between are high-performance loads, such as Hornady's Critical Defense, Winchester's Silvertip and PDX1, and Speer's Gold Dot.

The ammunition range in .45 Auto is extremely broad. Federal, alone, lists a dozen loads. Almost all ammunition manufacturers



(right) **For many years, the .45 Colt has been a reliable hunting caliber. It's also an excellent choice for general use in the outback.**

produce the traditional 230-grain, full-metal-jacket load. In recent years, an enormous interest in self-defense has broadened the defense loads to include Hornady's Critical Defense, Federal's Hydra-Shok, Winchester's PDX1, Speer's Gold Dot and others. My point is that there are .45 Auto loads available for all of this caliber's conceivable uses.

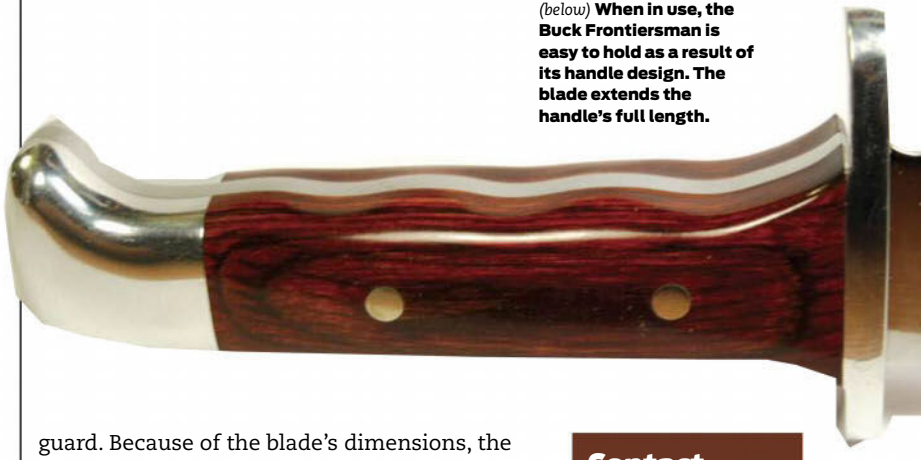
Buck Knives Model 124 Frontiersman

Of course, other tasks require a different tool—one with a sharp edge. A good blade certainly complements a versatile firearm in the survival and self-sufficiency realms. The market is full of options, and personal tastes certainly differ.

A large, general-purpose knife that handles most tasks is Buck Knives' Model 124 Frontiersman. It's 1 foot long and has a 420HC stainless-steel blade that's approximately 6.5 inches long with a 3/16-inch thickness. The blade is hollow ground and almost 1.4 inches wide, which makes it sharpen easily. Given Buck's proprietary heat treatment, the blade has a hardness of 58 on the Rc scale. Perhaps a bit large for some uses, the Frontiersman is ideal for heavy knife work and makes a great all-around option for frontier roamers.

An ergonomic handle complements the beautifully shaped blade. My Frontiersman features rosewood scales, but more recent versions utilize micarta. The blade extends the handle's full length. The handle's bottom surface has shallow finger grooves, promoting a secure grip. A generously proportioned hand guard makes it impossible for the gripping hand to move forward, and the gripping area ends with a large aluminum cap with a swelled portion on the bottom edge. Although the knife weighs 13.3 ounces, its large, comfortable grip and excellent weight distribution make it feel lighter.

The Buck Frontiersman is furnished with a sturdy sheath made of heavy black leather. It utilizes a wraparound retainer that encircles the handle just behind the hand guard. Because of the blade's dimensions, the sheath utilizes a flat design with a spacer between the front and back panels. Belts easily accommodate the sheath, and it perfectly matches the Frontiersman.



(below) **When in use, the Buck Frontiersman is easy to hold as a result of its handle design. The blade extends the handle's full length.**

The Frontiersman's MSRP is $200, but it can be found significantly cheaper if you do some comparison shopping.

Be Prepared!

Choosing a knife or firearm is a personal matter, but experience provides some guidelines. Our forefathers trusted single-action revolvers and large knives for both work and protection. The Ruger Blackhawk is made of modern materials with design improvements that make it more reliable and durable than most single-action revolvers. The Buck Frontiersman is a robust blade that's more than equal to a 19th-century model. With these implements, one can feel well equipped while living in remote places. MP

Contact Information

For more information on the featured gun and knife, contact these fine manufacturers or visit their websites.

Sturm, Ruger & Company
(603) 865-2442
Ruger.com

Buck Knives
(800) 326-2825
Buckknives.com

Persimmons
A FALL DELICACY

" ... a peck of persimmons can be processed in about an hour ... "

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THINKSTOCK

THREE EASY RECIPES FOR ONE OF NATURE'S TASTIEST TREATS

By Jason Houser

IN MOST PLACES, PERSIMMONS BEGIN DROPPING IN OCTOBER. JUST ABOUT EVERY LIVING CREATURE—BIRDS, SKUNKS, 'POSSUMS, 'COONS, DEER (AND HUMANS)—WILL BE "OFF TO THE RACES" TO SEE WHO/WHAT CAN GATHER AND EAT THE MOST PERSIMMONS BEFORE THEY ARE ALL GONE FOR ANOTHER YEAR.

If you are lucky enough to beat all the other critters to these tiny, orange fruits that are a pure heavenly delight to bite into, you are on your way to enjoying fine desserts and treats all winter long and even throughout the year if you gather enough.

Persimmon Fudge, Bread and Pudding

First, strain about a peck of persimmons. Simply drop soft, ripe persimmons into a press and squeeze. Then, scrape the resulting sweet, orange-colored pulp from the sides and transfer it to a container. Remove the waste seeds and skins so you can move on to the next batch.

The result: a peck of persimmons that can be processed in about an hour and produce approximately 2 quarts of pulp, which can then be frozen and stored in the freezer or refrigerator. It may darken when it is thawed, but there is little loss of the delicate flavor.

Now, enjoy the following three delicious persimmon recipes.

Persimmon Fudge

You can create delicious persimmon "fudge" with just a few ingredients.

4 cups sugar
1 stick margarine
½ pint marshmallow cream
1 cup chopped nuts
⅔ cup persimmon pulp
1 cup evaporated milk
1 teaspoon vanilla

Combine sugar, milk, butter and persimmon pulp in a heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the fudge reaches the "soft ball" stage (236 degrees F). In general, candy has reached the soft ball stage when a bit is dropped into a glass of cold water and forms a ball.

Remove the mixture from the heat and add the marshmallow cream, nuts and vanilla. Pour it into a buttered pan. Let it cool and then cut it into pieces.

(above) **North America is home to two types of persimmon trees: kaki (otherwise known as Japanese persimmon) and American persimmon (also known as sugar-plum).**

(above) **Bread is one of the many foods persimmons are perfect for enhancing. Other greats include cakes, puddings, salads and curries.**

Persimmon Bread

This spiced bread is wonderful anytime of the year, but it is particularly fitting for the fall and winter seasons.

1½ cups sugar
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup persimmon pulp
1¾ cups flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon nutmeg
½ teaspoon clove
½ teaspoon allspice
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup chopped walnuts
½ cup chopped dates (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees (F). In a large bowl, blend the sugar and oil. Add the eggs and persimmon pulp. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda and spices. Add the nuts and dates and mix well. Stir the flour mixture into the persimmon mixture. Turn the bread dough into two greased and floured loaf pans. Bake for one hour or until done, testing the center of the loaf with a pick. Turn it out on a wire rack to cool. Persimmon bread freezes well.

“ ... these tiny, orange fruits ... are a pure heavenly delight to bite into ... ”

Persimmon Pudding

This easy-to-make pudding is a delicious year-round dessert.

1 cup persimmon pulp
¾ cup sugar
3 eggs, beaten
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup milk
¼ pound butter
½ teaspoon cinnamon

Combine the persimmon pulp with the sugar. Beat in the eggs. Mix in the milk and then the butter. Sift or stir the flour with the baking powder, cinnamon and nutmeg and then mix this with the persimmon mixture. Pour the batter into a well-greased, 9-inch-square cake pan. Bake in a 315- to 325-degree (F) oven for approximately 60 minutes or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean. MP

(above) **Persimmon pudding has the consistency of pumpkin pie but resembles a brownie. It is almost always topped with whipped cream.**

(right) **Believe it or not, from a technical/ botanical standpoint, persimmons are actually berries.**

[Persimmons]

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK

The Art of Curing Meat

LEARN CURING FUNDAMENTALS TO TURN OUT DELICIOUS MEAT PRODUCTS AT HOME

By Michael Pendley

LONG-TERM MEAT STORAGE was a dilemma before refrigeration's advent. Somewhere along the line, though, humans learned packing meat in salt extends its edible life and improves its long-term flavor. Eventually, folks noticed salt from particular mines preserved meat more effectively than others. They also noticed that it helped meat retain its pinkness rather than turning it gray or brown.

The reason? Those salts contained natural nitrites in the form of saltpeter, and the art of curing meat was born.

Today, home curing—and "charcuterie," in general—is resurging in popularity. Perhaps the chief reason is quality. Products turned out by home curers are often superior to commercially produced cured meats.

Want to produce your own hams, bacon, salami, coppa and the like? The process is relatively simple. Let's review the steps, along with some basic food safety rules.

(top left) **Whole-muscle coppa cured for 14 days, finished with a chiltepin pepper coating and then dried for almost eight weeks in curing chamber**

(top right) **Spanish-style dried chorizo cured using ancho and chiltepin peppers. These were fermented 72 hours and dried for almost a month in the curing chamber.**

(bottom right) **Chris Varner's curing chamber is made from a refrigerator. The small heating pad and humidifier work with a temperature control unit to maintain the perfect curing conditions.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS VARNER

The Basics

Fundamentally, curing meat is cooking it with salt. Because saltpeter is rarely used anymore, Instacure #1 and Instacure #2 replace it in modern meat curing. Both provide the nitrites necessary to preserve meat, retard bacterial growth, prevent botulism and improve flavor during the curing process, but the two have differences.

Instacure #1, also known as "pink salt" or Prague Powder #1, is a blend of 93.75 percent table salt and 6.25 percent sodium nitrite, along with a pink dye to distinguish it from table salt. Because the nitrites are in a readily usable form, Instacure #1 is most often used in foods that are to be cooked and consumed or frozen for long-term storage. Meats commonly cured with #1 include wet-cured hams, bacon and sausages that require cooking.

Instacure #2, or Prague Powder #2, contains 6.25 percent sodium nitrite, about 1 percent sodium nitrate and about 92.75 percent salt. The additional 1 percent of sodium nitrate breaks down into nitrite over a long period of time. Consequently, Instacure #2 is used in products requiring unrefrigerated long-term aging or in products meant to be eaten without cooking. Dry-aged hams, pepperoni, salami and coppa normally use Instacure #2.

A third curing agent often used in ham- or bacon-making is Morton's Tender Quick from the Morton Salt Company. The product is simply a blend of high-quality salts, sugar, and both Instacure #1 and #2. It's designed for quick cures of fish, city hams, bacon and game meat in cool environments, similar to Instacure #1.

"Today, home curing—and 'charcuterie,' in general—is resurging in popularity."

NITRATES AND NITRITES

ARE THEY HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH?

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS VARNER

(above) **Curing expert Chris Varner's curing chamber full of product. Note that everything is carefully labeled with names, dates and weights as they enter the chamber. Careful records help home curers know when particular pieces of meat are finished curing.**

HEALTH CONCERNS OVER NITRITES/NITRATES BEGAN RISING IN THE 1970S, BUT FURTHER TESTING REVEALS THEY'RE SAFE.

In fact, up to 93 percent of our daily nitrite intake comes from leafy green vegetables, so the amounts present in cured meats are negligible in overall consumption. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) allows a maximum of 156 parts per million (ppm) of nitrites in cured meats. The level in most properly cured meats is even lower. In contrast, spinach, lettuce and many other vegetables can contain up to 1,800 ppm or more.

While nitrites/nitrates are safe, use them in proper amounts. Don't fall into the "more-must-be-better" trap. Always follow recipe instructions for your meat of choice, and weigh ingredients carefully.

(left top) **A plastic tub large enough to completely submerge meat is the best receptacle for brining meat. Here, a rear ham from a wild hog is brining for a period of seven days.** *(left middle)* **Brine curing time can be greatly reduced by injecting some of the brine directly into the muscle. While commercial producers use large pumps with multi-needle injectors, a simple syringe-style marinade injector is sufficient for smaller production.** *(left bottom)* **A wild pig ham after brine curing for one week. From here, the ham can either be smoked or roasted to an internal temperature of 165 degrees (F).**

Wet Cures

Once you've settled on a product and curing agent, choose the correct curing process. Different products require different cure times and conditions. Meats such as bacon and city-style hams can be cured using a "wet method" for faster finishing times. Wet cures consist of a mixed brine of salt, sugar and Instacure #1 dissolved in enough water to submerge the meat.

On large cuts such as ham, the brine is typically injected directly into the meat to speed the process. Injection tools range from high-pressure, multi-needle injection pumps to simple single-needle, syringe-style marinade injectors.

Wet cures don't always start out wet. Because they draw moisture from the meat, their ingredients are often applied as a dry coating over it. The cuts are then placed into a plastic tub or another nonreactive container, such as a large zip-style bag. As moisture exits the meat, it blends with the remaining cure on the meat's outer surface to form a natural brine.

Dry Cures

Dry cures are often used for long-term curing. Meats such as dry-cured hams, whole-meat coppas and capicolas, as well as salamis and other dry sausage-style products, hang for long periods in open air. Curing times for these products range from months to several years.

The cure for these products is blended together and rubbed liberally onto the meat's surface. Over time, the nitrates in the Instacure #2 reduce to nitrites, preventing bacterial contamination over the length of the curing process.

Curing Conditions

Bacon and city-style quick hams are best cured between 38 and 42 degrees (F), so a standard refrigerator is your best bet for curing. Keep the meat on a lower shelf so drips and leaks don't contaminate other foods. For best results, turn the meat daily so all parts are equally cured. If curing in a zip-style bag, place it in a large pan or tray to catch any leaks.

"Meat-curing is a rewarding hobby practically anyone with an interest can undertake."

(top left) **A cured ham after roasting for three hours and being basted every half-hour with a peach-bourbon glaze. Because the ham was wet-cured using Instacure #1, it must be refrigerated for long-term storage.**

(top right) **Coppa cured for 17 days with an ancho-orange glaze and then dried for nine weeks in the curing chamber**
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS VARNER

(bottom right) **Italian Nduja-style spreadable sausage cured using Calabrian peppers, cold-smoked six days and aged two months**
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS VARNER

A more-controlled environment is needed for dry-cured meats. Perfect long-term curing conditions call for steady temperatures between 50 and 60 degrees (F), with relatively high humidity and decent air flow. Early meat curers found that caves provided the ideal environment. In fact, many places in Italy and Spain still utilize caves as curing chambers. Root cellars and unfinished basements also work well.

Today, most curing aficionados build their own curing chambers from refrigerators. Since modern refrigerators only reach 40 degrees, a temperature-control unit is necessary to hold them at the correct curing temperature. Fortunately, such units are readily available online for under $50. They simply plug into an electrical outlet, and then the refrigerator plugs into them. A temperature probe is placed into the chamber, and the unit turns the refrigerator on and off to maintain the pre-set temperature.

Most refrigerators are designed for low humidity, so a small humidifier can be added in the lower section beneath the hanging meat. While some chambers and humidity units can maintain the proper 75 percent relative humidity necessary, others require a humidity controller that functions like the temperature controller. You can even find units that handle both tasks.

Generally speaking, most curing chambers get enough airflow from opening the door to check the process once a day. If you find the chamber's conditions a bit stale, or if you're patient enough to let the meat cure without opening the door for several days, several small holes can be safely drilled through the sides of most refrigerators. Three to four holes should create adequate airflow. Cover them with a fine mesh screen to keep insects from entering.

Meat-curing is a rewarding hobby practically anyone with an interest can undertake. Therefore, now that we've reviewed the fundamentals, consider making bacon your first curing attempt (try the recipe on page 81). I'm sure this inaugural project will lead to many more.

(inset) **Several slabs of bacon fresh out of the smoker. The sticky pellicle that forms on the surface of the meat helps both the smoke flavor and color penetrate.** *(right)* **While chilled and cured bacon can be sliced with a knife, an electric meat slicer makes the project faster and more uniform, particularly if the bacon is sliced with the outer skin attached. Once the bacon is sliced, vacuum sealing and freezing offers the longest storage.**

HOME-CURED BACON

FIRST-TIME MEAT CURERS TYPICALLY LAUNCH THEIR HOBBY WITH BACON. It's quick, forgiving and takes just a few days. Plus, the flavor blows away commercial, mass-produced bacon. About the only specialty equipment necessary for homemade bacon is a smoker. If you don't have a smoker, a charcoal or gas grill and a few handfuls of wood chips will work in a pinch.

Ingredients

½ a pork belly (approximately 5 pounds)
Note: Pork bellies can be cured with or without the skin. Traditionally, country-style bacon was cured with the skin on. The skin was either sliced through and fried with the bacon strips or sliced off in one or two large sheets and used to flavor beans or greens.
½ cup kosher salt
½ cup brown sugar (substitute honey or sorghum for flavor variations)
3 tablespoons black pepper
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 teaspoon Instacure #1
1 2-gallon zip-style bag

Directions

Mix all the dry ingredients together. If you're substituting honey or sorghum for the brown sugar, reserve it and pour into the zip-style bag once dry cure ingredients have been applied. Place the pork belly on a cutting board or in a large pan. Rub cure ingredients onto the meat's surface. Place the rubbed belly into the zip-style bag—if you're using honey or sorghum, pour it in now—and seal tightly. Place the bag into a large pan to contain leaks, and refrigerate.

Cure the bacon five days, flipping once per day. After the five-day curing process, remove the bacon from the bag and rinse well under cold water. Discard any remaining cure and juices.

The bacon is now cured but still needs to be smoked. Before smoking, a dry, but sticky, pellicle must form over the meat's outer surface. Accomplish this by placing the bacon on a wire cooling rack or hang it from a hook. A small fan speeds the drying process.

Once the meat's surface is dry but sticky to the touch, it's ready for smoking. Set the smoker's temperature as low as possible while still producing smoke—preferably 150 degrees (F). Smoke the bacon over hickory or apple wood for two to three hours and then adjust temperature to 175 degrees (F). Continue smoking, carefully monitoring the meat's internal temperature until it reaches 150 degrees (F). (A remote barbecuing thermometer works well.)

Now, the bacon is cured and smoked. For easier slicing, refrigerate the bacon overnight. Because home-cured bacon has a slightly higher sugar content than its mass-produced cousins, take care not to burn it. Rather than frying it in a stovetop skillet, try baking it on a cookie sheet at 300 degrees (F) for 25 minutes. MP

“The wing-bone turkey call worked back then, and it still fools wild turkeys today.”

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK

PROBABLY THE OLDEST MAN-MADE TURKEY CALL IS CRAFTED USING WING BONES FROM THE VERY BIRD IT MIMICS. Native Americans are believed to have originated the call long before European contact. Early American settlers soon learned its value for collecting their own Thanksgiving dinners. The wing-bone turkey call worked back then, and it still fools wild turkeys today.

Differences in size and construction make each wing-bone call one of a kind. Gobbler wing bones often produce a lower tone. In contrast, jake (immature male) wing bones typically produce a higher pitch. Regardless, wing-bone calls deliver realistic sounds rivaled only by real wild turkeys. When wise, old gobblers resist other calls (boxes, slates and diaphragms), the handmade wing-bone call's unique tone and sound just might fool them.

Collect the Ingredients

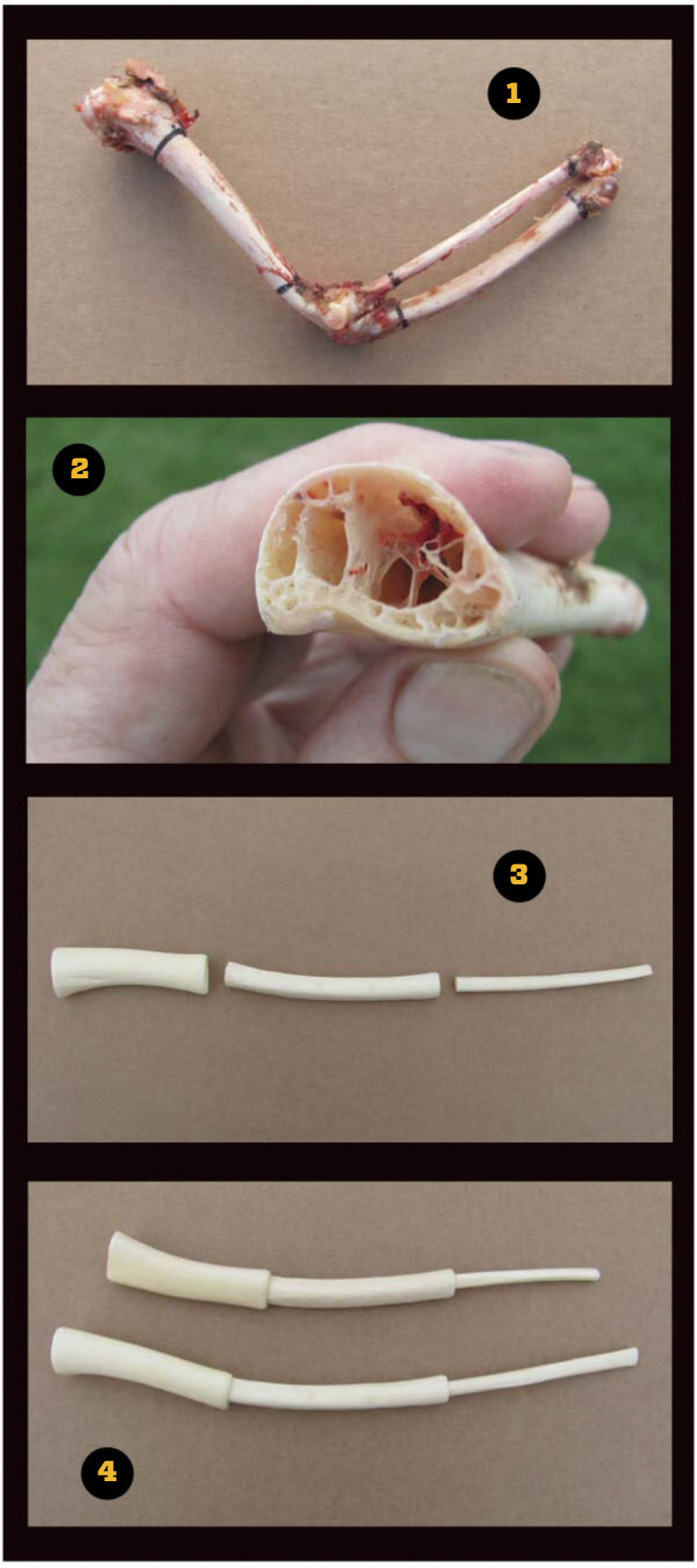
Of course, the first step in making a wing-bone call is harvesting a wild turkey. You also might consider asking a successful turkey hunter for a wing. Either wing—left or right—will do.

Traditionally, three bones are used to make the call: the large humorous bone and the ulna and radius bones. These are the

WHEN MODERN CALLS AREN'T DRAWING WISE GOBBLERS IN CLOSE, THIS ANCIENT, MAKE-AT-HOME CREATION LIKELY WILL

By Darryl Quidort

MAKE YOUR OWN Wing-Bone Turkey Call



(1) These are the three wing bones needed for crafting your own wing-bone turkey call. Note: They've been marked for cutting off the bulbous ends. (2) The internal webbing of the large humorous bone must be removed. (3) Once the three wing bones are boiled and cleaned, the author arranges them, trumpet style, before assembling the call. (4) Although similar in appearance, these finished calls produce individual tones.

same bones found in the "buffalo wings" you ate while watching a recent football game.

Remove the first two joints of wing bones next to the turkey's body and then cut away as much meat/flesh from them as possible.

Prep the Bones

Next, use a hacksaw or bandsaw to cut off the bulbous ends, keeping the bones as long as possible. Discard the ends.

The two smaller bones have soft bone marrow inside them. Push the marrow out of the hollow bones using a wire or pipe cleaner. The largest bone doesn't contain bone marrow; it's a hollow bone strengthened with internal honeycomb-like webs. Use a screwdriver blade to break away as much of this webbing as possible.

Next, cook the bones at a low boil for 20 to 30 minutes. Once the bones are cool, use a knife blade to scrape them clean. You now have the three completely clean bones needed to make your turkey call.

If you want your call stained a darker color, reboil the bones with coffee grounds or walnut hulls added to the water. Alternatively, if you want it pearly white, soak them in 3 percent hydrogen peroxide for several hours.

Once the call is dry, use a screwdriver, knife blade or Dremel tool to smooth out the inside of the largest bone. A clean tube delivers better tone.

Assemble the Call

Arrange the bones, trumpet style, from smallest to largest. The small bone's flat end will be the mouthpiece. The more-triangular end fits inside the next bone. You may have to sand or file the ends of the bones so they fit together, but it doesn't have to be a perfect fit.

When you get the bones fitted together, adhere them in place using epoxy. To achieve an airtight seal at the joints, pack a small amount of glue-soaked cotton around the bones. Historically, pine pitch was used as a sealant, and I'm sure it still works today (if you have access to it).

The final step is to seal your call with clear-gloss polyurethane spray or rub on a coat of Johnson Paste Wax.

“It’s been said that wing-bone turkey calls are easy to make but difficult to use. However, once mastered, they can help you replicate many wild turkey sounds.”

Talk Like a Turkey

Now that you’ve finished your wing-bone turkey call, you’re probably wondering how to use it. Place the small end of the call between your lips and make a kissing sound as you suck air through the call. Long kisses make yelps, while short kisses produce clucks and putts.

You can vary the tone by cupping your hands over the end of the call, opening and closing them while calling. Some hunters place the call at the corner of their mouths, while others find it easier to “kiss” with the center of their lips.

Using the wing-bone call takes practice. It’s been said that wing-bone turkey calls are easy to make but difficult to use. However, once mastered, they can help you replicate many wild turkey sounds.

Personalize the Finished Product

A plain wing-bone call works just as well as a fancy one. Nevertheless, you can turn your wing-bone call into a work of art by adding some India ink scrimshaw and a leather lanyard, complete with a turkey feather decoration.

Join the likes of early settlers by making and using your own wing-bone turkey call. It’s a rewarding project that just might help you bag your next tom. MP

(above) **You can personalize your wing-bone call however you like. This one, decked out in a leather lanyard, scrimshaw and turkey feather decoration, is one of the author’s favorites.**

There are many false morels that should be avoided, because they can cause extreme gastronomical distress. The elephant ear, shown here, is one of the edible false morels. Consult identification books or the Internet if you're unsure.

"Morels are some of the most sought-after and widely distributed wild mushrooms in the United States ..."

HUNTING FOR MOREL MUSHROOMS

REAPING THE SPRING BOUNTY OF A RELISHED DELICACY

By Patrick Meitin

When you live in the panhandle region of northern Idaho, winter seems like a never-ending curse. Then, icy, snowy winter transitions into a wet and slushy spring, so it's really difficult to see a difference between the supposed seasons.

It's easy to develop the "shack nasties," also known as "cabin fever" in some locations. But ever so slowly, snowpack begins to recede to make it possible to take the winter-fattened Labradors for long hikes again; the plow finally comes off the tractor so I can contemplate spring food plots to feed rib-sprung, white-tailed deer; and evenings begin to warm to "just right." I examine my diminished woodpile with a sigh of relief that it lasted through the worst of it. My mind begins to turn to … fungi.

Morels of various species—all fungi from the genus *Morchella*—begin to appear as sunshine peeks from the woolen clouds and warms the first ridge tops and southern slopes, making those long hikes something more than mere exercise. Morels are some of the most sought-after and widely distributed wild mushrooms in the United States, because their smoky taste lends them a distinct flavor that mushroon lovers consider to be the most delicious. They can be eaten fresh by frying them into your morning eggs, added as part of hearty vegetable soups to impart their rich, earthy flavor or dried for future use in fancy sauces.

While the mushroom portion of the morel is the most obvious part, the majority of the fungus remains hidden; its filamentous "hyphae" cells form an intricate network beneath the soil. Morels appear most commonly beneath trees in deciduous, coniferous and mixed forests and only occasionally in open fields, yards or on undisturbed ground.

In Texas, for instance, they appear in limestone-based soils near junipers. In northern Idaho, you can find them beneath white firs where red cedars are absent. And in the Northeast, they grow most predominantly around elms and ash. In most parts of the country, they make their first appearances for a

(top) **Morels often grow in "colonies" or clumps. So, where you find one morel you are likely to find more. Once a single morel is located, slow down and look for others, because they can hide beneath leaves and other debris.**

few weeks in the spring following the first drenching rains or after the snowpack has receded to higher elevations (although in Southern states and parts of California, they often appear well into the fall).

There are four true morels, with appearances dependant on region and elevation. Unlike most mushroom species, morels enjoy a longer longevity after popping up, often remaining edible for weeks after their initial appearances. Other mushrooms, by contrast, tend to last only days before rotting or shriveling up.

Morel Identification and Home Range

Yellow morels, *Morchella esculenta*, are so called because they tend to take on a yellow, golden, tan or brown hue. While the caps of all morel mushrooms are sinuous and brain-like in appearance, yellow morels wear a spongy-looking cap, often occasioning the name "sponge mushroom."

Yellow morels can appear just about anywhere if conditions are right—moist soil that is rich in compost—but are most often located beneath hardwood trees as spring weather begins to warm the land following a cold winter. This morel is often one of the first to appear, generally found from late winter to early summer. It is most common in Eastern and Midwest regions of the nation and is rare in the West.

Black morels, *Morchella elata*, have a darker cap than the yellow or white morel species. They tend to range from yellowish brown to dusky black. Black morels are most common in the northern and western portions of the country and appear in the late spring and early summer. The black morel seems to thrive best in areas that have been recently burned, so look in areas around logging slash-pile burns or last year's forest fires. As with all true morels, the stem of the black morel is hollow.

The white morel, *Morchella deliciosa*, is a small- to medium-sized morel showing pale to light ridges and darker hues in the areas between the cap ridges. Patches of white morels tend to be large but are also much more widely spaced than other morels. Whites normally appear later in the spring and usually in the eastern portion of the country. The white morel is most apt to "play by its own rules," appearing at unexpected times in unexpected places.

(above) **The black morel is generally most common in Western states and grows especially well in areas that have been burned. Its name comes from its obviously darker hue than the other morel species.**

The "half-free" morel, *Morchella semilibera*, is a little different from the others. The biggest difference is the bottom part of the cap, which appears to be unattached to the stem. The other three species of morel include caps and stems integral to one another (most easily seen by cutting them lengthwise). So, although the cap of the half-free remains brain like in appearance, it also appears reminiscent of other forms of mushrooms. The half-free is typically more brittle than the other species and tends to be the least tasty of the four species. However, it redeems itself by generally being the first to appear each spring, often immediately following snowmelt. For instance, I've discovered half-frees as early as late March in northern Idaho, while other morels don't appear until May.

Mushroom Caveats

As with hunting for any type of mushroom, a quick word of caution is in order: Morels often appear in strange places, such as garbage dumps, abandoned coal mines, mine tailing piles, cellars and basements, or along railroad tracks. It's probably a good idea to avoid eating morels from such places, because they can be contaminated with chemicals or heavy metals.

Also, false morels, such as the beefsteak and early morels, contain gyromintrin, which can make you violently ill. These mushrooms look like morels at first glance; on closer inspection, however, they will show an independent stem and cap, even if that cap appears brain like. Morels include a stem and cap formed as one.

Other false morels, such as the elephant ear, are perfectly safe to eat and are quite tasty. The best start is to always study identification books or Internet sites if you're untrained in the nuances.

Finally, some people are sensitive to morels. As a general precaution, morels should not be eaten raw, so cook them before eating or dry them for later use (unless you know you're one of those without sensitivities).

The Hunt Is On

Morels have been discovered in all 50 states, appearing just about anywhere in limited quantities, but they are most prevalent in the Midwest. The West can also offer large hauls of morels, especially the black morel, which does especially well following forest fires (a trait Eastern species don't share) that are more common to the region.

(top) **The yellow morel is most common in hardwood forests of the East and Midwest regions. They are typically the first morels to appear each spring and are yellowish to tan in appearance.**

(below) **The white morel is most common in Eastern states and is also typically the smallest of the four species. They tend to grow in widely spaced clumps and are the lightest hued of the four species.**

On a micro level, you can search for morels in one of two ways: Simply wander around and scan the ground for them or—even better—learn what kinds of microhabitats your regional morels prefer and concentrate on those isolated spots.

With the first warming days of spring, south-facing slopes and ridge crests are your best bets for the first appearances of morels. Soil temperatures must normally reach 50 degrees (F) to coax the first morels out of hiding. As the season progresses and nighttime temperatures rise to dry out south-facing slopes, the search shifts to shadier, north-facing slopes and wetter nooks.

Serious morel hunters learn which trees to look beneath to find the most morels in their area. In the big picture, it's not necessarily the tree species specifically that cause morels to fruit, but the kind of moisture and sunlight conditions certain trees tend to prefer.

For instance, oaks tend to require more sunlight than, say, beech trees. Thus, oaks will generally be most common on south-facing slopes (good places to look early in the season) and beech trees on shady north slopes (better later in the spring and early summer). Elm and sycamore trees prefer well-watered areas, so they tend to grow near creeks, rivers and springs and relinquish more morels later in the spring and early summer (although morels don't seem to appear after major floods). Ash and tulip poplars—other water-loving trees—are also good morel hot spots later in the spring or early summer.

Overall, in the Midwest, in particular, elm and ash trees are the most productive spots to pore over while morel hunting. Of course, morels grow in other places, but looking only where the probability of finding mushrooms is greatest means you're spending your time most efficiently. So, in the East and Midwest, those trees seem to be elm, ash, sycamore, tulip poplar and cottonwood (many of these species also grow in the West). Oak and hickory forests tend to yield fewer morels.

In my Western stomping grounds of northern Idaho, I find most of my morels beneath white firs mixed with "viney" maple and alder thickets. I have found morels in stands of red fir (especially early half-frees) but never red cedar, which seem to poison the soil. (A quick visit to TreeBarkID.com can be helpful in this respect.) In general, where appropriate tree species grow, mossy areas or those beneath dying trees are always good bets.

A quick review of scientific papers reveals these insights: Elm trees were cited five times as producing the most morels, ash three times, and sycamore and cottonwood twice

The author loves combining spring morel mushroom hunting with shed-antler hunting. Early to late spring is the prime time to do both, giving winter-weary outdoorsmen an excuse to stretch their legs.

“With time and experience, you definitely develop an eye for morels, especially the types of microhabitats they prefer.”

each—with frequent references made to apple trees, old apple orchards, tulip trees and black cherry. Western studies found that recently burned or insect-infested true fir forest produced best, while a Canadian study pointed to apple, cherry laurel and ocean spray as the best places to discover morels.

Learning to Look

With time and experience, you definitely develop an eye for morels, especially the types of microhabitats they prefer. I often find myself approaching a piece of ground after miles of hiking and saying to myself, “There will be some mushrooms right there,” despite the place looking like a hundred other spots I’ve passed without finding a single mushroom. It’s amazing how often those instincts prove correct. But even the eagle-eyed morel hunter would do well to slow down. Approach an area carefully, stop and squat down to get a better perspective.

Freshly sprouted morels are often hidden beneath leaves and other forest-floor litter, and simply walking around slowly increases the possibility of stepping on and ruining these delicious mushrooms. Some days, it simply takes awhile for your eyes and brain to key in to the morel shape and hue. They can be downright camouflaged in the right clutter and light. This is why there is such an emphasis on zeroing in on certain species of trees; this allows you to slow down and take in the ground beneath high-odds spots instead of walking around randomly.

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK

Family Fun

Spring and early-summer morel hunting creates the perfect family outing. Kids are normally chomping at the bit to get outside and enjoy some fresh air, and the adults in the group could probably use some exercise. Look to nearby national forests, state-administered lands or even visit farmland well out of town and politely knock on farmhouse doors.

Most landowners—especially when kids are involved—are more than happy to let you tromp through their property. Offering the landowner a portion of your bounty can cement a relationship that lasts for years, perhaps even opening doors to other outdoor activities such as camping, fishing or hunting.

Conventional wisdom says to drop your accumulated morels in net-like bags while hunting. This can be anything from a recycled onion sack to a burlap tote sack or fishnet laundry bag. Most serious morel hunters believe this allows spores to drop from your collected mushrooms and spread morel “seeds” for future crops. This sounds reasonable and at least keeps them fresher longer.

Never store morels in plastic bags (even in the refrigerator), because it causes them to spoil more quickly. And when storing them in the refrigerator, paper bags are best.

Morel hunting is a great activity to combine with other outdoor pursuits. Fishing is just coming on in many parts of the country when morels begin to appear. Morel hunting can help justify the first family camping trips of the season. In my area, the first archery 3-D tournaments of the season begin during prime morel-hunting season, allowing my wife and me to shoot bows by morning and hunt mushrooms later on in the day.

My favorite springtime activity is combining morel hunting with shed-antler hunting. Both activities can be conducted simultaneously, require a sharp eye and allow me to scout out new hunting territories. A bounty of fresh mushrooms for the skillet *and* a few trophy antlers to add to the fireplace mantel—what could be better?

Mushroom hunting is highly popular in many parts of the country, but many people are intimidated, afraid they will pick the wrong species and poison themselves and their families. However, the prized morel is not only considered the tastiest of the wild mushrooms, it is also the easiest to identify, making beginning mushroom hunters confident in their take.

It’s always fun to gather food from the wild, but in the spring, mushroom hunting provides a great excuse to get outside, stretch your legs and slim down those lazy dogs after a long winter. MP

The cast-off antlers of deer, elk or moose often come as bonuses to morel mushroom hunting. These cervids shed their antlers in late winter or early spring to grow another set—thus providing wonderful "trophies."

The author's favorite setup: an MB450 trap with double-stake system and MB chain-stake system, made in the USA.

CASH IN MORE BY DOUBLING UP THIS TRIED-AND-TRUE TRAP SETUP

By Mike Yancey

The World-Famous Dirt-Hole Set Times Two

Articles written over the years about the dirt-hole set wouldn't fit into a semi-trailer. This common, everyday set has accounted for more fur on American trap lines than any other. Most trappers use it on their lines in one form or another. It's easy to set up, and it's effective once you understand its basic principles.

Many trap predators to protect livestock and game animals on their properties. Others trap for hobby and profit. But with fur prices currently down, trappers must cut costs and increase their catches where possible. Good news: Fashioned properly, the dirt-hole set accomplishes both, and it's effective on predators, large and small.

In this article, you'll learn how to use this simple set with a few modifications that will, in many cases, double your fur catch.

"Fashioned properly, the dirt-hole setup ... is effective on predators, large and small."

(above) **This is one of the author's recent bobcat catches.**

(right) **Shown here, an effective trap location in relation to the dirt hole. The trap must be bedded solidly, with dry dirt sifted over it for concealment.**

Effective by Design

The dirt-hole set is designed to look as if another animal dug a hole and buried food for later. Two underlying factors make it effective: First, it's visually attractive. Predators are curious by nature. Done properly, I believe this set could catch critters without a lure or bait simply by placing it where they frequently travel.

The smell of your lure, urine or bait is the second reason it's so effective. Still, don't rely entirely on this to draw in predators from great distances. If they're not already in the area, they simply won't smell your lure or bait.

Location is far more important. Learn animal habits and travel routes in your area to help increase catches. Hay fields, old farm roads, fence lines and corners along grown-up pastureland work best for me.

Double Your Odds

Now, I'll present the big secret to increasing—or even doubling—your catch. Hot locations often produce nightly catches, and if you have only one set in each, you're out of business the second the first critter gets caught. One set per location simply isn't the answer.

Instead, make two or more sets at good locations. Don't set them too closely together, because the first animal caught could set off the other trap(s). Nevertheless, place them relatively closely. I place mine roughly 3 or 4 yards apart and face them toward one another.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(above) **The author’s gray fox double shown here exemplifies the effectiveness of a double dirt-hole trap set.**

FEATURED ATTRACTANT

I’ve successfully used Leggett’s Exciter attractant for many years. Several variations formulated for specific predators are available, and a small amount applied in the trap hole is all it takes to catch predators of all kinds. It’s the perfect complement to a good location.

To learn more about Exciter or other Leggett’s trapping supplies, visit Trapleggetts.com.

Additional Considerations

Consider wind directions while placing such sets so that passing animals will smell either one set or the other—the very essence of why single sets aren’t as effective as double sets.

Bedding your trap solidly in the ground also increases your odds. Be sure it doesn’t move at all, in case an animal steps on the trap’s jaw and misses the pan. If animals feel any movement, they’ll usually dig up the trap to see what it is. It’s not that they know what traps are, but once they determine it’s not the food they expected, the jig’s usually up.

By staking the trap securely in an open area such as a field, animals feel less threatened and will work it more confidently. I prefer anchor-type stakes attached to the trap chain and driven into the ground. If you choose rebar-type stakes, use two to avoid pullouts by coyotes.

(left) **Predators have ultra-keen senses, which is why trapping them can be very difficult. Fortunately, the author's strategy improves your odds.**

A Few Last Tips

Trapping sounds easier than it actually is. Consider: You're trying to make animals place their feet on a pan as small as a role of electrical tape amid thousands of acres. Add to that a predator's keen senses, and you're up to a steep challenge.

I increase my odds by forming a trench, either with dirt or loose grass, to create a funnel. Animals often avoid stepping on these higher materials and will naturally funnel right into the trap. Always set traps lower than the surrounding ground; never higher.

Follow these suggestions, and you'll likely reap larger harvests. I've had just as many mixed-species catches as same-species catches. There's nothing more rewarding than walking up on multiple catches. In addition, landowners and nonpredatory animals will benefit from your efforts. It's a win-win for everybody. MP

An Alcholic Taste of the Outdoors

NO NEED FOR SPECIAL EQUIPEMENT, TOOLS OR SUPPLIES. JUST PROVIDE YOUR FAVORITE FRUIT.

By Thomas C. Tabor

MANY DOCTORS NOW SAY THAT AN OCCASIONAL ALCOHOLIC DRINK IS NOT A BAD THING FOR MOST PEOPLE'S DIETS. IN FACT, A LITTLE ALCOHOL ENJOYED IN MODERATION IS NOW BELIEVED TO ACTUALLY WORK IN FAVOR OF SOME PEOPLE'S HEALTH.

While that belief may not be the sole deciding factor behind the reason many of us enjoy a glass of wine at dinnertime or maybe some sort of a mixed drink, it does work in favor of that opinion. I'll be the first to admit that I seldom pass up an offer for a fine glass of cabernet with my evening steak or a glass of well-aged scotch-on-the-rocks at the completion of a good meal.

However, I think I have found another great drink every bit as pleasant and rewarding to the palate. And, possibly best of all, that drink can be made at home by you—without specialized tools, distilling equipment or supplies—and comes with the added benefit of being made with whatever fresh fruit or berries you prefer.

Obviously, there is no shortage of liqueurs you can purchase over the counter at your local liquor store. There is Kahlúa, various Irish creams and even a wide variety of different-flavored schnapps, but I think those commercially produced products frequently pale in comparison to the fruity liqueurs I make right at home.

No Equipment Needed

There is no need for specialized equipment, tools or supplies; usually everything that is

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK

“The types of homemade liqueur you make are limited only by your imagination.”

THE WAY I SEE IT

Making your own fruit liqueur is one more way to be a little more self-sufficient, and knowing that you produced it yourself with your own fresh fruit only adds to the pleasure of the experience.

A word from the wise: Don't overindulge, and remember to share the results of your labor with the closest of friends—otherwise, you might find that the liqueur won't last as long as you would like!

(above) **One of the author's favorite homemade liqueurs is made from the wild chokecherry berries that grow on the hills around his home.**

(opposite, left) **The items needed to produce your own homemade liqueurs can generally be found right in your own kitchen.**

" ... commercially produced products frequently pale in comparison to the fruity liqueurs I make right at home."

necessary to make your own homemade liqueur can be found right in your own kitchen. You will, however, need to provide your favorite fruit.

While I always consider freshly grown and picked to be the best, in a pinch (when the seasons aren't cooperating), you can sometimes use frozen fruit or fruit that has likely been imported from some obscure, exotic locale and purchased at your local market.

The process used to produce your homemade liqueur is not a distilling process, so you don't have to hide a homemade still in the woods behind your house. You won't be paying an exorbitant alcohol tax to the government, nor will a special government-issued permit be necessary.

As long as you are of the proper legal drinking age, the process is perfectly legal and safe to undertake. It is simply a way of turning your own terrific-tasting fresh fruit into a very pleasant and enjoyable dessert-style drink that includes using a prior distilled alcohol in the process.

Home Scavenger Hunt

First, you will need to round up a few necessary items; most of these can be found around the house:

- A supply of fruit of your choosing
- A bottle of prior distilled vodka or grain alcohol*
- A glass bowl, preferably with a tight-fitting lid, that will hold all the fruit**
- A bag of granulated white sugar
- Several glass jars with lids
- A bottle or two to store your final product in
- A piece of porous cloth large enough to drain the contents of your bowl
- A funnel for filling the bottles

*(*Double-distilled vodka works great, but some people prefer Everclear or some other form of high-alcohol-content grain alcohol.)*

*(**If you don't have a bowl with a lid, you can substitute a piece of tight-fitting kitchen food wrap as an alternative.)*

Choose the Fruit

One of the best things about making your own liqueur is that you can use virtually any kind of fruit or even a combination of several different types. You're limited only by your imagination. Part of the fun in making liqueurs is trying different types of fruits and berries, along with the ability to vary the mixture to suit your own taste.

We have a surplus of wild serviceberry trees in our area of the country. It's always a challenge to beat the birds to the succulent fruit that grows on those trees, but when I do, those berries make some of the best-tasting liqueurs I have ever produced. I have also used cherries, apricots, peaches, various types of wild and domestic berries, and even watermelon.

The intensity and flavor of the natural juices contained in the different fruit species will vary quite dramatically, as will the volume of juice produced. Because of these variations, processing time can be affected.

Fruits such as serviceberries and chokecherries generally contain considerably less juice than, for example, peaches and some other types of berries. In addition, some fruit (such as strawberries, blackberries, peaches and apricots) will generally have a more-robust flavor than some other fruits; this, too, can have a bearing on your end product.

In particular, cherries are possibly one of the most flavorful fruits. On the other hand, watermelon is typically very light tasting. Because of these differences, you might find that blending a strong-flavored fruit with a lighter-tasting one sometimes makes good sense.

An Easy Process

The liqueur-making process will generally be the same, no matter what type of fruit or berries you use; what will vary is the overall processing time.

Use Those Leftovers

After reaching your own personal level of taste perfection, you may have some of the later batches left over. I can never bring myself to discard those and have, on occasion, found some great ways to put them to good use.

You can use the remaining pulp or the unused batches as nice additions to ice cream, cake or pie. It certainly adds a bit of zip or zing to virtually any type of dessert.

Try using it as a topping on pancakes or waffles. In fact, it might even be used to supplement the water or milk within the batter. Or, you might keep the pulp or later batches to supplement your next liqueur-making session.

The author's current selection of homemade liqueurs (left to right): cherry, peach and watermelon

After washing, it is best to halve or quarter the larger varieties of fruit (peaches, apricots and such). In the case of apples, which typically aren't as juicy, you might find it works best to cut them into smaller pieces so the alcohol can more easily penetrate the fruit and draw the juices out.

In most cases, there is no need to remove the skins of the fruit, but you can do so if you prefer. Generally, berries and smaller fruits are processed in their whole form. Cherries can be left whole or halved, and the skin can be left on, pits in place.

Start by placing your washed fruit or berries in a glass bowl large enough to hold the entire batch, as well as the alcohol that will be added. The liquor you choose should contain a fairly high level of alcohol. Double-distilled vodka works great, but some people prefer to use one of the higher-alcohol-content grain alcohols such as Everclear. I have found that even vodka with a normal alcohol content of 40 to 80 proof works well, but part of the fun in the liqueur-making process is experimenting with different combinations of alcohols and fruits.

Batch #1

With the fruit in the bowl, add enough of your chosen liquor to completely cover it. Cover the bowl to prevent evaporation. (If the bowl you use doesn't have a lid, you can stretch a piece of plastic food wrap over the top.) Then, place the bowl on a shelf or on the counter. Store it at room temperature but out of the direct sunlight. Over time, the fruit will soak up the alcohol and begin to release some of its juices.

Depending upon the type of fruit and the amount of juice it contains, the fluid level may appear to decrease through this stage of the process. Monitor the batch occasionally over the next couple of days, and when the fruit appears to have soaked up as much alcohol as it can hold, gently pour off the liquid into a glass jar. Care should be taken not to bruise or damage the fruit.

"One of the best things about making your own liqueur is that you can use virtually any kind of fruit or even a combination of several different types."

Once you've drained the bowl's contents, put the lid on again. Label this jar "#1" or "Batch #1." This first batch will contain the highest alcohol content of any of the batches that follow.

Batch #2

The next step is to cover the fruit in the bowl with a layer of granulated white sugar. Enough sugar should be used to completely cover the surface of the fruit, but you shouldn't overdo it either. Just make sure that a layer of sugar is covering all the surfaces.

After adding the sugar, cover the bowl again and set it aside in a location where you can easily monitor its progress. After a couple of days, the sugar will have drawn a significant portion of the alcohol and juices out of the fruit. Depending on the juice content of the fruit, the juices might rise to nearly the top of the fruit level. At this stage, you should again gently pour the liquid off into a second jar and label it.

Subsequent Batches

The number of times the sugaring/pour-off process is repeated depends on the type of fruit you are using, but this step should be repeated until the fruit appears withered and dehydrated with little in the way of liquid remaining inside it.

These subsequent batches are labeled in sequence order. Once you are satisfied that most of the fruit juice has been extracted, place the fruit in a cloth and squeeze any remaining liquid into the last of your sequential jars. Discard the remaining pulp.

The Pleasures of Mixing and Tasting

For many of us, the last step—mixing, tasting and blending the liqueur to suit our personal taste preference—is, by far, the very best part of the whole process.

To start, I generally pour the entire contents of batches #1 and #2 together, followed by a taste test. These two batches contain the highest alcohol content and are typically less sweet than the following batches.

Continue to slowly add subsequent batches to the mix until you are satisfied with the sweetness, flavor and alcohol content. MP

How to Stay Warm During a Cold-Weather Power Outage

WHEN HAZARD STRIKES, DEPLOY THE SKILLS YOUR GRANDPARENTS USED EVERY DAY

By Larry Schwartz

MODERN TECHNOLOGY PROVIDES THE ULTIMATE COMFORTS. Still, it's not invincible, and individuals imbued with self-sufficient spirits know better than to forsake our pioneer forefathers' lessons learned through peril and misfortune. They survived through unimaginable circumstances, and their time-tested survival methods deliver results when modern technology fails in the form of a power outage.

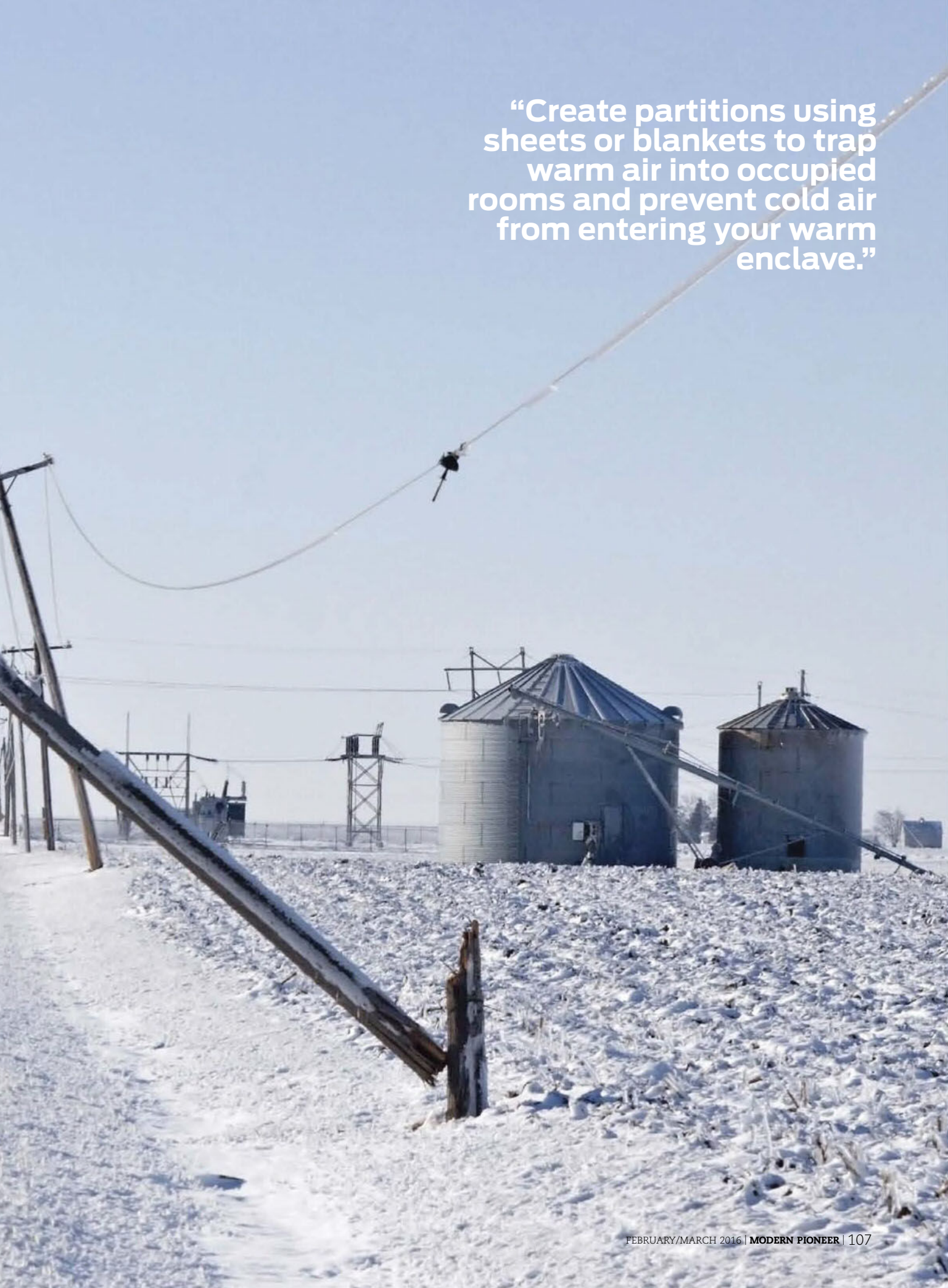
Hopefully, you've already considered what to do during such an event. Perhaps you've even implemented several precautionary measures. If not, there's still time to prepare.

Let's review some simple steps that will keep you cozy when your furnace is rendered useless.

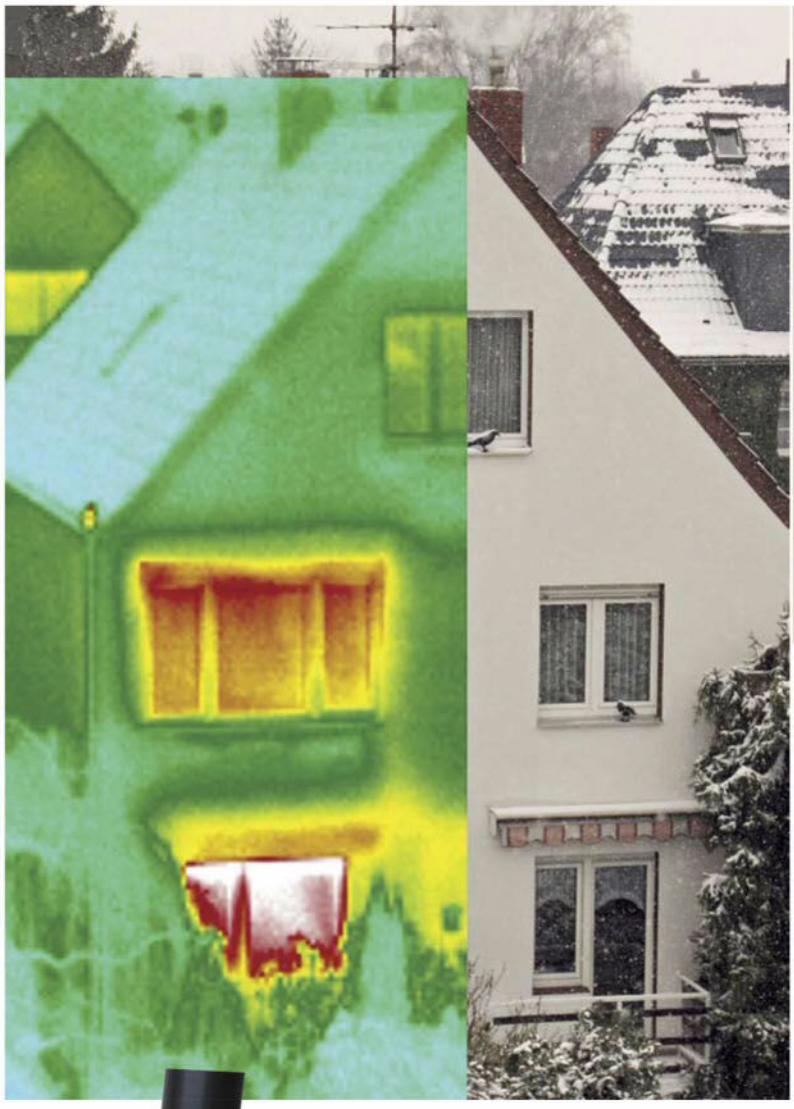
Perform an Efficiency Check

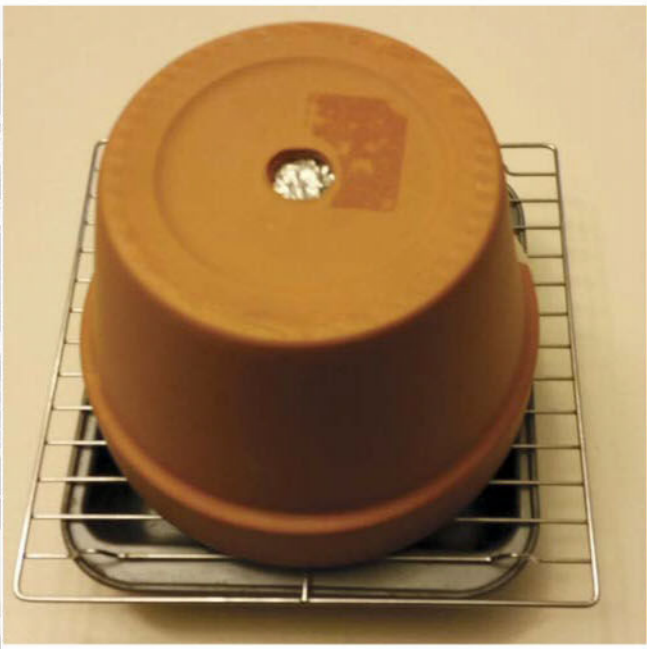
First, make your home as energy efficient as possible. Have an energy expert perform a thermal examination of your home to determine where you're losing heat. Then, add insulation in the walls, and seal around exterior doors and windows where needed. I did this while re-siding my home several years ago. I also upgraded to more-efficient windows. Those efforts cut my energy bill in half. Properly insulated, your home will maintain its interior temperature without power for long periods.

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK



“Create partitions using sheets or blankets to trap warm air into occupied rooms and prevent cold air from entering your warm enclave.”





(top) **An effective space heater can be made from two clay flowerpots, some tea candles and a cookie-cooling rack. Stack the pots together and rest them on the cooling rack, which sits above the tea candles. Light the candles, and the entire assembly will radiate heat throughout the room.** *(left top)* **A thermal survey from an energy expert is a good place to start when looking to optimize your home's insulation.** *(left bottom)* **Pellet stoves like this top-loading model burn pellets of compressed sawdust that provide steady heat, burn efficiently and produce very little smoke.**

ODDS AND ENDS

Oil lamps are great items to have on hand, providing both heat and light. Matches and manual can openers are other necessities you should have. These and other simple items, such as hand warmers, are often overlooked, but they're inexpensive and make life easier when the power goes out.

Buy a Generator

Also consider getting a generator. You can get one large enough to handle lights, appliances and other key electrical services, or you can pick up a smaller one that runs your stove, lights and refrigerator.

Running inductive devices such as electric heat throughout your home from a generator is possible, but it is poor use of fuel and money. Heating one room with an electric space heater is a better option. Heated blankets also deliver extra warmth without drawing tons of power.

Get a Grill

If you don't have one, consider purchasing a propane or charcoal grill. It will cook food and soups and also heat water for hot drinks. Properly stacking six cinder blocks creates a rocket stove—an alternative to a commercial grill.

The nice thing about propane grills is that the market has many catalytic heaters that attach to your grill's 20-pound propane tank. Then, it can be used indoors as a space heater—with proper ventilation, of course.

Install Solar Panels

Another pre-outage step is installing solar panels that provide power directly through an

Warm drinks and a hot fire are commodities that can be enjoyed without electricity.

inverter or charge and maintain a bank of deep-cycle, 12-volt batteries, which can provide your home with electricity.

Conserve Your Existing Heat

We all remember our parents' instructions: "Close the door! You're heating the entire neighborhood!"

The same concept applies during a power outage; only heat the room(s) in which you'll be spending time. Choose a room on the home's south-facing side to benefit from solar radiation.

Create partitions using sheets or blankets to trap warm air into occupied rooms and prevent cold air from entering your warm enclave. Insulate the floor with area rugs, blankets, cardboard or newspapers. If you own

GO UNDERGROUND

This may surprise you: Basements or below-ground family rooms are the best rooms to occupy if lighting isn't an issue. Because they're at least 6 feet beneath ground level, the earth surrounding the walls actually insulates the room. Basement temperatures often reside between 50 and 60 degrees (F), day and night. Consequently, they're easily heated.

Taping clear or opaque plastic sheeting across the basement's doorway transfers light from the home's main level to the basement. If you don't have a way to light the basement during daytime, consider spending those hours on another level and sleep underground at night. My family has done this in the past, and we're always amazed how much warmer the basement is than the aboveground rooms. This technique also works in the summer if your air conditioner quits working.

camping equipment, your sleeping pads will help insulate the floor near your sleeping area.

Block doorway drafts with towels, blankets, clothing or duct tape. Tape shower curtains or plastic sheeting over window frames. Cut foam to the size of your windows—especially if you don't have thermal pane windows—and place it in the window to inhibit cold air from entering.

Use Supplemental Heat Sources

You now know several ways to retain existing home heat during power outages. However, sometimes, what's left is insufficient, especially when the power is out over multiple days. Fortunately, there are solutions.

A wood-burning stove—especially one designed similarly to the old Ben Franklin stoves (with pot-belly-shaped, cast-iron bodies)—creates electricity-free heat. Plus, it's designed for cooking and heating.

Pellet stoves are another great option. They burn pellets made of compressed sawdust and a binder, and they feed into the stove from a hopper, which saves the hassle of continuous manual loading. Both designs release heat in all directions, so adding a reflector behind them is highly beneficial. Wood and pellet stoves both require a stovepipe with an outdoor vent.

Fireplaces throw heat, but most of it is lost in the chimney. To capture it, install a fireplace insert designed to recirculate hot air back into the room. Another option is building several channels that capture and recirculate the heat through the walls and around the chimney flue.

My wife and I use two Mr. Heater propane heaters that run on 1-pound propane canisters. We put one in the living room during the day and one in our upstairs bedroom at night. Each canister burns approximately six hours on the low setting, which keeps the room comfortable. Ours also accommodate a second canister in case they need to be run on a higher setting.

While propane and kerosene heaters are effective and easy to use, you must be sure they're approved for indoor use. You might need to open a window for ventilation, so check before you buy.

With basic materials such as bricks, cast-iron pots and terracotta flowerpots, you can create your own space heaters and place them virtually anywhere. Bricks can be heated on or next to your stove or heater and can then be placed in a cast-iron pot or Dutch oven. Cast iron absorbs heat, which helps the bricks emit heat longer.

Terracotta flower pots, combined with tea

"Fireplaces throw heat, but most of it is lost in the chimney. To capture it, install a fireplace insert designed to recirculate hot air back into the room."

(top) **Air-activated hand warmers are small, lightweight and give off a surprising amount of heat for a long time.** *(right)* **A propane heater, such as this Mr. Heater Big Buddy Heater, is an effective and inexpensive way to heat small- to medium-sized rooms.** *(opposite)* **Emergency food supplies such as MREs are a good way to get your calories when you don't have a way to cook.**

candles, radiate heat. Stack a small pot inside a larger one, then set the tea candles underneath the smaller pot. When lit, the candles will heat the smaller pot. The smaller pot then heats the air inside the larger pot, in turn heating the room.

Eat to Stay Warm

As I said earlier, your body is the biggest space heater in the room. Fuel it by consuming high-calorie foods during cold weather. Fats and carbohydrates give your body the calories it needs to stay warm. Eat something like chocolate before bedtime for nighttime fuel and a stoked metabolism. Warm drinks and soups are an excellent two-for-one punch of heat and calories.

Finally, use the bathroom before bedtime so your body doesn't have to keep a pint of urine at 98.6 degrees all night. That heat can be used more effectively in other ways.

Dress for Success

As for clothing, a good set of base layers beats the chill. Aptly named, "base layers" should be worn against your skin, followed by a shirt and pants and then an insulating layer such as a sweater. An outer rain jacket or wind shirt, for example, retains heat within the layers. Gloves and wool socks complete the ensemble. During extremely frigid conditions, wear a knit watch cap or beanie to prevent heat loss from your head and face, especially while sleeping.

Be Prepared, Stay Warm

Power outages are unforeseeable. For that reason, spend a weekend without electricity so you can practice the skills and tools you plan to use, determine what does and doesn't work, and recognize things you overlooked while planning. Do this, and you'll be prepared when modern technology fails. MP

CAMP IN YOUR HOUSE

If you own camping gear—tents, sleeping pads and sleeping bags—you're way ahead of the game. Although it seems counterproductive, sleeping bags actually warm up faster and hold more heat if you wear little or no clothing. Your body is the best heat generator you have, and it, alone, will warm the sleeping bag.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. A tent placed in your room of choice helps contain heat. If you don't have one, make a fort from furniture or cushions with a blanket draped over the top.

Reflective materials such as space blankets or rolls of Reflectix on the walls and ceiling help retain room heat, too. Also place it underneath your sleeping bag or mattress to warm your sleeping area. A sheet of reflective material placed behind your heat source also reflects heat back into your living area.

"Fur buyers will grade your furs and measure them before they buy them."

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK

Grading Fur

SIZE YOUR ANIMAL PELTS LIKE A PRO

By Jason Houser

FUR BUYERS WILL GRADE YOUR FURS AND MEASURE THEM BEFORE THEY BUY THEM. SO, WHEN MANY OF US LOOK AT MARKET REPORTS TO SEE WHAT FUR IS BRINGING, IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT EVERYTHING MEANS.

For example, a raccoon could be graded as a Grade I, sized at an XXL and bring $22 from the fur buyer.

This sounds—and often is—confusing. Nobody knows what fur prices will bring, but hopes are always high that they will be good. Clearly, though, having the best and biggest well-handled furs will bring you the most money.

In this article, I will first define fur-grading terms and then help you learn how to size your animal pelts just as the pros do.

Fur Terminology 101

"Green" fur: Green fur is properly skinned, rolled flesh in/fur out and kept frozen until it is time to sell. If you are selling green fur, it is best not to take it out of the freezer until 24 hours before selling. The fur needs to be thawed enough to be properly graded but still fresh enough that it does not spoil and can be quickly put up by the buyer. If you take it out of the freezer too early before selling, there is a good chance the fur will taint. The result? You won't be able to sell it.

"Finished" fur: Hides that have been properly scraped (not too much, not too little), stretched on the proper-sized board and completely dried are considered finished fur. If you plan to finish your own fur before selling it, make sure you know how to do it correctly.

While properly handled fur will bring you more money, poorly handled fur is almost worthless. YouTube is a good way to learn the proper techniques, as well as the many available books and DVDs that focus on this subject. In addition, there are people willing to put your fur up for you for a small fee. This is well worth the price if you do not have the time or knowledge to do it yourself.

"In the round": An animal that has not been skinned is considered "in the round." Make sure you have a buyer before you plan on selling your fur this way.

"Well-handled fur": Well-handled fur indicates that you skinned the animal fewer than 24 hours after catching it and then cleaned all the mud, dirt or burs off the fur. It also means that if you decide to finish the hide completely, you do not over- or

(top) **When put on a stretcher, raccoons are measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base.**

(bottom) **Size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base once a possum is put on a stretcher.**

underscrape it and that you also stretch it to the proper width and shape.

Pelt Grading Systems

Raccoon

Grade I: This is a prime pelt and allows one imperfection or small hole. Its width must be no fewer than 5¼ inches across the shoulder area and 7 inches across the base. The leather will have a creamy color—not blue or slate. The fur will have a black/silver appearance (not yellow or solid black).

Grade II: This raccoon pelt is just like Grade I except with a solid-yellow or black color to its fur. Pelts with a good silver/black color will get a Grade II evaluation if they have two or three small imperfections or holes. Also, pelts that have good fur or whose leather has a slate-colored appearance may also fall into this grade.

Grade III: This grade includes pelts that are generally prime but have several imperfections (three or more), such as tick bites or small holes.

Grade IV: These include pelts that are unprimed or badly damaged. Raccoons caught very early or very late in the season often fall into this grade. The leather is blue in color. These pelts have little commercial value.

"If you plan to finish your own fur before selling it, make sure you know how to do it correctly."

Muskrat

Grade I: These pelts feature thick fur; the leather is creamy to reddish with a pliable texture. The guard hair is good and ample under the fur. Pelts cannot have damage or imperfections.

Grade II: These pelts are just like the "I" grade but with one very slight blemish.

Grade III: The fur has a flat appearance and might have one or two slight holes.

Grade IV: The guard hair is sparse with very little under the fur. Three or more damaged areas or small holes might be present.

Mink

Grade I/II: This category includes prime fur with white or creamy leather. These pelts have long, dense guard hair. A red "saddle" should be visible.

Grade III: These pelts feature good-quality fur but have some tick bites or scars. The guard hair is shorter and less dense.

Grade IV: Both fur and leather have weak or broken appearances. These pelts lack density and coverage, and the leather is slate or dark blue in color.

Coyote

Grade I: Grade-I pelts exhibit no damage and have prime fur and good guard hair and underfur.

Grade II: These are pelts with little damage. They still have guard hair and underfur with no rub marks.

Grade III: The pelts feature decent fur but

with one small rub mark or two small holes.

Grade IV: Pelts with large holes, cuts or fur slippage are placed in this category.

Fox

Grade I: Grade I fox pelts are free of imperfections or holes and feature good underfur and nice guard hair.

Grade II: These pelts are almost as good as grade I pelts but have slight variations in quality (but not enough to notice).

Grade III: Average pelts that show weakness in the flank and neck areas are considered grade III.

Grade IV: Poor-quality pelts with little guard hair fall into this grade. They are badly damaged or badly rubbed. They have little or no commercial value.

Beaver

Beaver pelts should be fully prime and feature underfur 0.8 to 1.2 inches long in the kidney region. In comparison, the guard hairs are stiff, thick and long, gradually widening at the distal end and tapering to the tip. The guard hairs are 2.0 to 2.4 inches long when fully grown and range in color from black to reddish.

Grade I and II: Beaver pelts of good to average quality fall into this category. Their leather may be prime or of a slight blue color and may have minor blemishes.

Grade III: These pelts have a flat quality. The fur is weak or exhibit a loose density. The leather color may range from clear to blue, and the pelts may have more blemishes or imperfections than grade I. Grade III pelts may have up to three small imperfections.

Grade IV: Pelts whose fur has a very weak/loose density fall into this grade. They may have more blemishes or imperfections than grade III pelts and are usually late-spring or early skins. The can have four to six small imperfections or up to three larger imperfections.

Opossum

Grade I: These are prime pelts with good guard hair and underfur and with no damaged areas.

Grade II: Prime pelts in this category may have one small hole or bite.

Grade III: Pelts in this grade may have no more than two small damaged areas. Opossum pelts with black fur go into this category.

Grade IV: Grade IV pelts feature three or more damaged spots and are of little value.

Something as simple as the slight color phase difference between these raccoons will make one less desirable than the other.

"Nobody can predict the grade and size of the animal they catch ..."

(top) **Get the most out of fur—as the author hopes to do with this nice coyote he caught.**

(bottom) **A raccoon with a missing or a short tail will be graded as "poor."**

Standard Pelt Sizes

RACCOON: Pelt size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base.

Size	Length (in inches)
5XL	more than 38
4XL	35–38
3XL	32–35
2XL	29–32
XL	27–29
LGE	24–27
LM	22–24
MED	20–22
SML	fewer than 20

MUSKRAT: Pelt size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base.

Size	Length (in inches)
3XL	more than 17
2XL	15½–17
XL	14–15½
LGE	12½–14
MED	11–12 ½
SML	9½–11
XSM	fewer than 9½

MINK (MALE): Pelt size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base. (Smaller-sized males are usually sized with females.)

Size	Length (in inches)
XL–L	more than 21
LM	19–21

Seller Beware

Nobody can predict the grade and size of the animal they catch, but I hope this advice will help you know what you have to sell before you take it to your buyer. Also, this will help protect you if your buyer tries to short-change you by telling you that you have a lesser fur than you actually do. MP

MINK (FEMALE)

Size	Length (in inches)
MED	more than 17
SML	fewer than 17

COYOTE: Pelt size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base.

Size	Length (in inches)
2XL	more than 42
XL–L	36–42
M–SM	fewer than 36

OX: Pelt size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base.

Size	Length (in inches)
XL–L	more than 28
M–SM	fewer than 28

BEAVER: Pelt size is measured by adding the length and the width. For the length measurement, go from the ears to the base. For the width measurement, go from the widest point.

Size	Length (in inches)
2XL–3XL	more than 65
XL	60–65
L	55–60
LM	51–55
MED	47–51
SM	42–47
XSM	fewer than 42

OPOSSUM: Pelt size is measured from the tip of the nose to the highest point at the base.

Size	Length (in inches)
4XL	more than 26
3XL	24–26
2XL	22–24
XL/LGE	18–22
M-SM	fewer than 18

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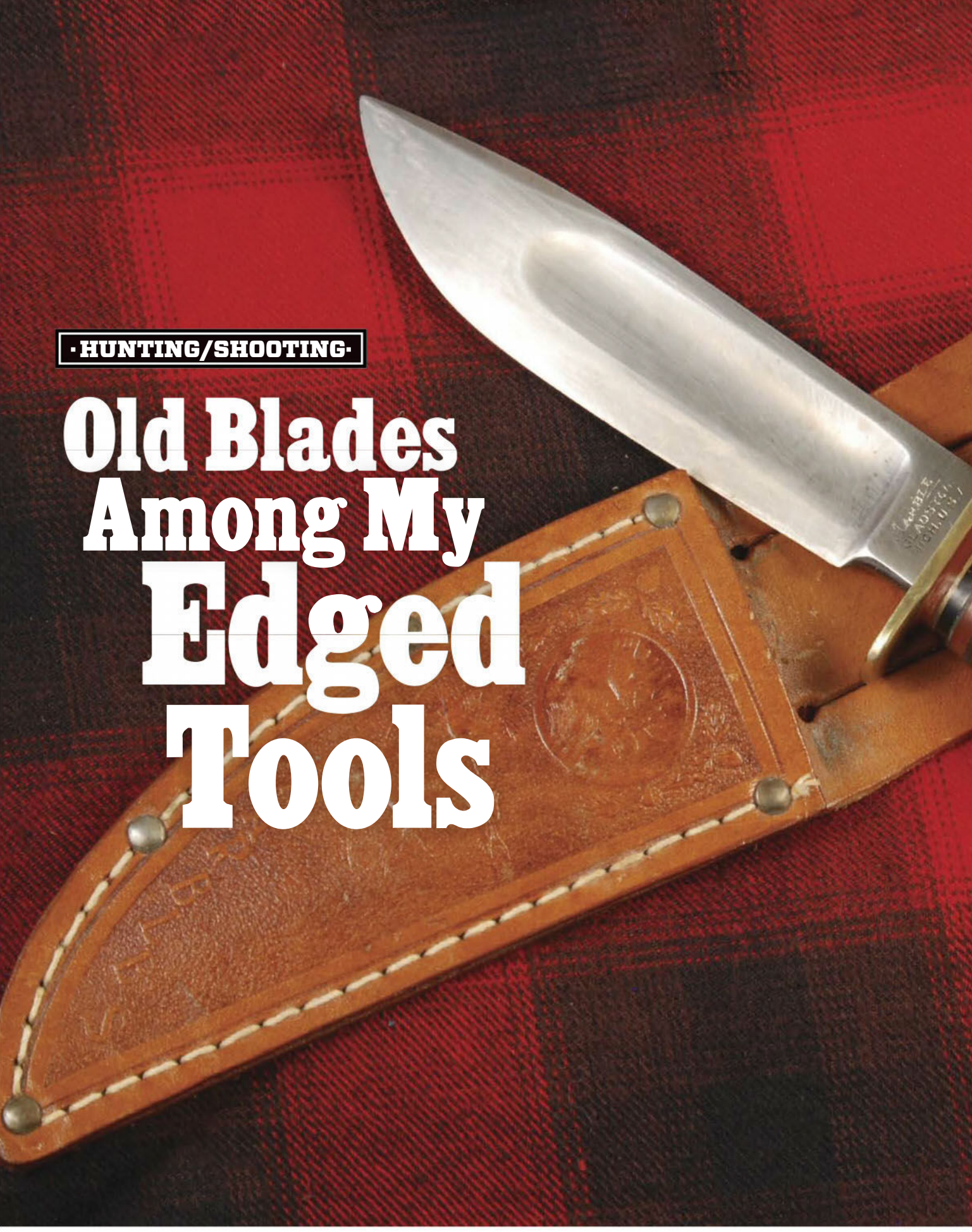


·HUNTING/SHOOTING·

Old Blades Among My Edged Tools

MAN HAS BEEN FINDING SHARP EDGES USEFUL SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. If you regularly read outdoor or survival magazines, you'll note that knives are frequent topics—and rightly so. After all, where would we be without them?

In the early days, shaped stone eventually gave way to copper and its alloys with tin in the Copper and Bronze ages, respectively. These were eventually trumped by iron in the Iron Age. Most recently, steel has become the dominant metal used to produce sharp edges.

I'm amazed by the number and letter designations used to denote various grades of steel. There are many, but quality differences are generally insignificant for a knife's ordinary uses.

Old Knives Still Do the Job

In technological progress, the goal is to produce superlative products. Take firearms, for example. The .30-06 Springfield was developed over a century ago. Recently, we've seen several .300 magnums brought to market. Do they outperform the .30-06? I believe so, but the .30-06 is a proven standby that handles most big-game hunting situations fabulously.

A similar analogy exists with handgun cartridges. The .45 Colt is nearly a century and a half old, performing very well amid the introduction of the newer magnums.

Are there superior steels used today to create edged tools and weapons, compared to what was used during earlier generations? Absolutely. However, some alloys produced in the past still function admirably in most situations. They don't feature Space Age "class," but they do the job and preserve old-time heritage.

History and Character

I've owned many knives over the years, most of which I still have today. One I no longer own was a yellow-handled, three-blade stockman, probably a Keen Kutter, if memory serves me well. It was a constant companion during my high school years. I have no idea what happened to it, but I'm still fond of similar knives, and I have a few.

Old knives remind me of aged writing instruments. When I get an old pen, I wonder what documents and letters were written with it. What thoughts were recorded, and by whom? My imagination wheels begin turning.

(above) **Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. To the author, this Western H48A is an attractive knife.**

Similarly, when I get an old knife, I wonder who carried it. Where has it been, and what was it used for? Old knives and pens are usually full of character and perhaps a little history.

Even though I own many modern knives, I often pick an old one for my too-infrequent woods ventures. Maybe that's because I couldn't afford them when they were new many years ago. Still, they attract me more than most of my modern blades do.

Where am I going with all this? Old blades still accomplish tasks the way they did when they were new. Plus, owning and handling them are gratifying experiences.

Let's review several of my time-tested favorites.

Western L66

The first is a Western L66 featuring a 4.5-inch clip-point blade measuring 0.11 inch thick. The same blade was produced for sale by some chain stores. Mine is marked "Wards Western Field" on the ricasso. It's become a favorite because it's conveniently sized and sharpens easily.

A stacked leather grip adds style to the L66. The knife was actually missing its sheath when I found it. As shown in the photo, I crafted a sheath and placed the keeper very close to the hand guard, which secures the knife in the sheath. This old Western has accompanied me on many excursions, and it's an all-around performer.

Western Model H48A

A second knife in my list of old specials is the Western Model H48A. It's a trim, little knife with a sturdy, 4.5-inch blade that measures 0.11 inch thick. Its well-designed sheath holds the knife securely. The knife is sturdy and lightweight, and the stag scales make it

"Old blades still accomplish tasks the way they did when they were new. Plus, owning and handling them are gratifying experiences."

attractive. Its model number appears on front of the guard rather than on the ricasso. It performs just as well as most new knives made of some "super" steel.

Marble's

Another very special knife is my old Marble's from Gladstone, Michigan. With a blade measuring 4.25 inches long and 0.15 inch thick, it's adequate for most outdoor activities, as it was a half-century ago. I haven't carried it as often as others, simply because I don't like the sheath. Still, the knife is excellent. It sharpens well and holds an edge—the same characteristics ascribed to blades made of newer alloys.

KA-BAR Model 1205

More than 40 years ago, I bought a KA-BAR Model 1205 for less than $10. It's still new and in the original box. I bought it as an addition to the collection of two or three fixed-blade knives I had at the time. However, I also have one

(above) **Shown are a divided tang, a handle made of leather with the edges of the divided tang bars exposed and a handle with leather disks encircling the tang.**

LEATHER HANDLE CONSTRUCTION

Leather is durable and versatile. It's long been used in the construction of knife sheaths and the belts on which they're carried. However, it's also one of the classic materials used to construct knife handles.

One of the time-honored procedures is to use a stack of leather disks that encircle the tang. Another type of handle utilizes a divided tang to give two rails and leather pieces in the form of the letter "H," which centers the bar between the rails. The top and bottom rails of the tang are exposed, but the handle's sides are leather. The stacked leather disks are secured by a pommel, pinned to the tang.

Leather handles last longer if surface moisture is removed and a leather preservative is periodically applied. Leather handles are durable, comfortable and complement tried-and-true blades.

(above) **KA-BAR knives have long been popular, and this Model 1205 is still a functional blade.**

(above) **The Buck Special is an example of a knife that handles chores requiring a large blade—and has been doing so for a long time.**

that's a well-used specimen. It has a sturdy, 5.75-inch blade with a 0.10-inch thickness. The knife sharpens easily, and its stacked-leather segment handle complements it.

Buck Knives Woodsmate Model 402

In addition to the four knives already described, I have two other favorites in my working collection. I've had them many years but wouldn't classify them as "vintage" as this term applies to knives. One is the little Buck Woodsmate Model 402 with a handle made of a durable polymer called "Kraton." With a 3.88-inch blade of 0.12-inch thickness, it's perfectly sized for most small jobs. In addition, it can be made shaving sharp in short order. With its Cordura sheath, the knife weighs very little but performs exceptionally. It has accompanied me from Florida to Idaho and, in some cases, it's been the only sheath knife on those trips.

Buck Knives Special Model 119

Although the KA-BAR 1205 mentioned earlier has a rather large blade, there are times when I desire a larger knife—not a machete or short sword, but a substantial tool. I have several such knives to choose from, but I generally pick my Buck Special Model 119. If I need something larger, I choose an axe or hatchet. This knife may not be considered a vintage knife, but it's been produced for about 50 years.

The Special is a durable knife with a phenolic-resin grip and front and rear aluminum bolsters. The heavy clip-point blade is hollow ground, measures 0.18 inch thick along the spine and is 6 inches long. As on other Buck knives, the model

"Even though I own many modern knives, I often pick an old one for my too-infrequent woods ventures."

(above) **A small knife such as this Buck Woodsmate is adequate for many uses around camp.**

number appears on the ricasso.

I wouldn't hesitate to make the Model 119 my primary blade for an extended stay in the outback.

Relive the Past

Knives play an important role in a lot of facets of outdoor sports. I have many knives among my souvenirs. Some are unusual, some are expensive, and others are ornate works of art. However, I often pick one of my old knives for general use and reflect on how it became mine.

I love using old or vintage knives, because they still perform well and remind me of the way knives used to be. Plus, I can relive the old-time heritage these time-tested tools retain. (For the same reasons, I still use a .45 Colt single-action handgun and Parker fountain pen!) MP

MODERN PIONEER

8-Step Homemade Fruit Preserves

WHY BUY JAMS AND JELLIES FROM THE MARKET WHEN YOU CAN MAKE THEM IN YOUR OWN KITCHEN?

By Charles Witosky

WE LIVE IN A COMMODITY-FILLED COUNTRY WHERE FOOD IS ABUNDANT. STILL, YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN EXTRA RATIONS WILL COME IN HANDY. NORTHERNERS, FOR INSTANCE, COULD GET SNOWED IN, AND COLOSSAL DRIFTS CAN MAKE ROADS IMPASSABLE.

Of course, food availability and modern technology leave very few Americans worrying where their next meal will come from (after all, we're not living in the *Little House on the Prairie* era).

Nonetheless, preserved jams are a great shelf food to have on hand. Whether you're preparing for an emergency or just stocking your pantry, homemade fruit preserves are a healthy alternative to store-bought shelf foods jacked with artificial preservatives.

Homemade canned foods, which can safely last up to one year without refrigeration, rely on nothing but tried-and-true methods developed by early pioneers.

Follow the steps below to create your own preserve stock.

PHOTO: CHARLES WITOSKY

Step 1: Understand Preserved Foods

Understanding the science behind canning and how it preserves food sets the basis for doing it right. These are the two most important things to know: 1) Cooking fruit at 212 degrees (F) or higher removes existing bacteria. 2) Creating an airtight seal prevents new bacteria from entering a canning jar once it's been sealed. Besides that, large amounts of sugar give preserved fruits long life.

Step 2: Get Canning Supplies

Properly canning your jam or jelly begins with having the right supplies. These are the supplies I use:

- **12-ounce canning jars, jar lids and bands**
- **Boiling-water bath canner**
- **Small saucepan for heating the lids and bands**
- **Jar lifter**
- **Magnetic tool to lift lids and bands**
- **Canning rack**
- **Drying rack**
- **Small plate on which to set hot jars**
- **Funnel specially made to fit the jar openings**
- **Towel for wiping the jar rims**

If you already have these tools, perfect. If not, don't despair. The absolute essentials you need are:

- **Jars, lids and bands**
- **Boiling-water bath canner**
- **Small saucepan for heating lids and bands**
- **Pair of tongs**
- **Towel**

It's important to use canning jars for preserving jam, because you'll be boiling them and pouring in hot jam. Plus, the lids are designed specifically for canning jars.

Step 3: Sanitize

Lay your jars on their sides in the designated boiling pot. Fill the pot with water until the jars are submerged 1 or 2 inches. If you're using a funnel, lay it on top of the jars, along with the tool you're using to transfer jam from your cooking pot to the jars. A glass measuring cup works best, although any handled, heat-resistant cup will work. Bring the water to a steady boil to sanitize the jars and tools.

Place your lids and bands into a saucepan, fill it with water and cover it. Heat, but don't boil, this pan at the same time you're boiling the jars. Do that (i.e., boil the pan) closer to when you'll be the filling jars with jam.

A


D

BOILING CHART

For each 1,000 feet above sea level, you must add 1 extra minute of boiling (sanitizing). Once the water begins boiling, start your timer. When the timer beeps, turn off the heat and remove the lid from your pot. Wait 5 minutes and then remove the jars and place them in a cooling rack.

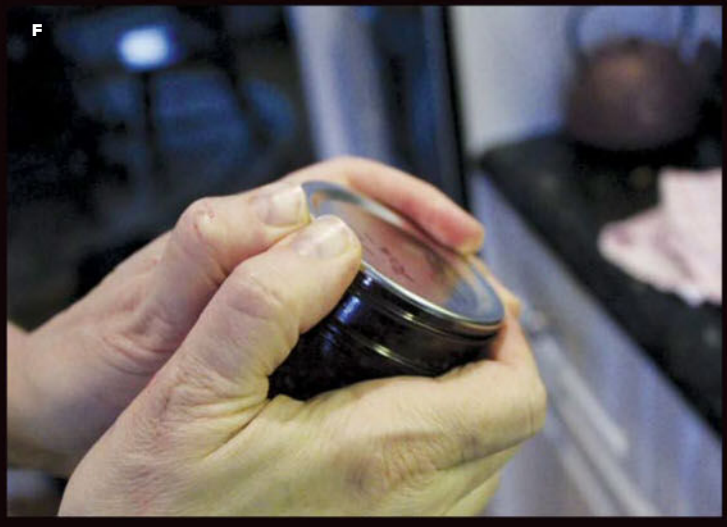
Here's a by-altitude chart to guide you:

ALTITUDE	BOILING TIME
Up to 1,000 feet above sea level	10 minutes
Up to 2,000 feet above sea level	11 minutes
Up to 3,000 feet above sea level	12 minutes
Up to 4,000 feet above sea level	13 minutes


B


C


E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Step 4: Choose a Recipe

Most berries make tasty jam, but we chose blackberries for this article, because we find they're especially tasty when in season.

Here's the recipe:

Ingredients

5 cups crushed blackberries
7 cups sugar
1 package dry pectin (1¾ ounces)

Tools

1 large stock pot
Potato masher
Measuring cups

Step 5: Prepare the Berries

Mash up, but don't purée, the blackberries. You want to keep them somewhat solid, because cooking breaks them down more. Try to keep large parts of the berries intact.

If you wish, do some straining to remove seeds. This is a matter of preference. We removed the seeds from half our berries to retain some texture.

To remove seeds, place a strainer above a bowl and pour your mashed berries into it. Press the berries in the strainer using a spatula, pushing the pulp through and leaving the seeds behind.

You'll notice the recipe reads 5 cups of *crushed* blackberries—not just blackberries. Don't measure them before crushing. Once they're mashed and measured, pour them into

A. Sanitization is a key step to proper canning. Boil the jars, funnel and glass measuring cup.
B. Here's an example of crushed berries. Always remember to crush them before measuring.
C. The author's completely cooked blackberry jam, fresh off the stove
D. A funnel helps transfer the hot jam from ladle to jar with minimal mess.
E. Finger-tighten the bands.
F. Test to see if the lid can easily be pushed off.

A

B

D

E

A. These are the supplies needed to make raspberry freezer jam. (See the sidebar on the next page for this recipe.)
B. 5 cups of sugar
C. Crushed raspberries with the sugar mixed in
D. Cooking the pectin in water
E. The pectin and water have been mixed.
F. Completed raspberry freezer jam

your pot for cooking. Next, pour the pectin into the berries, stirring until combined.

Before cooking, measure all your sugar into a bowl and set it aside.

Step 6: Cook

Cooking jam is a high-speed, high-intensity activity. You'll deal with sugary, scalding-hot fruit. I highly recommend wearing a long-sleeved shirt for protection against burns. Gloves also help, as long as they don't interfere with your dexterity.

Set the berry/pectin mixture on the stovetop at high heat. Stir constantly while cooking the mixture. The berries can easily stick at the bottom of the pot and burn. Keep stirring until the pot comes to a rolling boil.

At this point, pour in the sugar all at once; stir until it has completely dissolved. Let it boil over high heat until a full, rolling boil is reached and then remove the pot from the heat.

Step 7: Can

Using either a jar lifter or tongs, lift the sanitized jars out of the water, one at a time. Ladle the jam into each jar. Fill them to within ¼ inch from the top. Don't worry about spilling; concentrate on not being scalded.

Wipe the rim with a damp, clean cloth. Using either the magnetic tool or your tongs, apply the lid and the band in succession. Make sure the lid's rubber rim contacts the jar rim. Finger-tighten the band onto the jar.

Repeat this entire process, starting with the boiling of the empty jars, until all your jam is canned. Your jam will stay hot (devoid of bacteria) for a long time, so don't worry about getting it all canned quickly. Instead, make sure it's canned properly.

Once each jar is sealed, water-bath all your jars at once. To do this, you can either use a canner (as we did) or lower them into the water, using tongs or a jar lifter. Stand the jars upright in the water, cover them and boil.

Once you remove your jars from the water, the buttons in the middle of the lids will most likely be popped in. That lets you know the jars are completely airtight. There's a chance some lids may not be popped in, but they should pop in as they cool down.

To ensure each jar is airtight, remove their bands after 24 hours. Press on the lid to see if the buttons have popped in. If so, use your thumbs and lightly push up on the lid. It will stay put if it is properly sealed. If any of your jars don't appear sealed, they must be refrigerated, and the jam must be consumed within three weeks.

Step 8: Enjoy!

You now have properly preserved jam. While the jam stays in an unopened jar, it should remain safe to eat for up to one year. Once open, it will keep for three weeks—refrigerated. Make a new batch every summer, and you'll be enjoying tasty jams all year long. MP

RASPBERRY FREEZER JAM

While canning is a great way to preserve jam for room-temperature storage, there are other methods of storing homemade food that don't include boiling hot, sugary liquid. If you're looking for a safer, faster way to make jam for the whole year, try the following freezer jam recipe.

INGREDIENTS

6 cups crushed raspberries
5¼ cups sugar
1 packag e dry pectin (1¾ ounces)
¾ cup water

DIRECTIONS

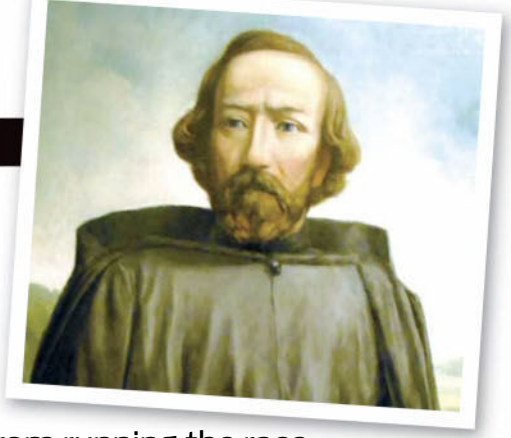
Crush the raspberries in a bowl. Once you've measured your crushed berries, pour the sugar into them all at once. It's essential to measure the sugar precisely. If you don't, your jam won't set correctly. Stir the sugar into the raspberries until completely dissolved. Let the mixture sit for 10 minutes.

Pour the water, followed by the pectin, into a saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil. Boil for 60 seconds, stirring constantly.

Pour the mixture into the raspberries and stir.

Pour the jam into a container of your choice and cover it. Let it sit at room temperature for 24 hours.

After the 24-hour resting period, place the container in the freezer, where it will stay good for a year. Once removed and thawed, it should be eaten within three weeks.



Father Jacques Marquettte (1637–1675)

Adversities didn't prevent this 17th-century missionary from running the race

> By ***Darryl Quidort***

Father Jacques Marquette was perhaps the best-known Jesuit missionary to serve North America during the 1600s. His lasting influence is evident by the cities, rivers, streets, schools and counties that bear his name today, nearly 350 years after his death.

A "black robe" missionary, Father Marquette brought his religion to the Native Americans. In doing so, he traveled and mapped many of North America's unexplored areas.

Big Dreams

Born in France on June 1, 1637, Marquette grew into a brilliant young man. He became a Jesuit priest after schooling at the Jesuit University in Reims, France. His greatest desire was to travel to New France (Canada) and bring religion to the natives there. Ordained at Toul in 1666, 29-year-old Marquette then sailed for the New France mission field.

He spent two years in Montreal, where he mastered six Algonquin dialects. His aptitude for learning foreign languages would serve him well to communicate with Native-American tribes during his ventures.

The Journey Begins

In spring 1668, Marquette, in the company of voyageurs, canoed upstream to begin a new mission "at the place where Saint Mary's River tumbles down its rapids from Lake Superior to Lake Huron." This was a difficult canoe trip across Canada via the voyageurs' fur trade route.

Marquette was a strong, healthy, young man when he built a simple chapel at the foot of the falls. This place eventually became Sault Saint Marie—the first city within present-day Michigan.

One tribe of visiting Native Americans who called themselves "Illinois" taught Marquette about a great river called "Messippi." It was said to flow from the north and run south, far beyond the Illinois' longest journeys. Marquette dreamed of traveling this river to minister to unknown tribes, but that trip had to wait.

Staring Down Death

In 1669, Marquette went to the Jesuit mission at Lake Superior's far western end (near Wisconsin's Chequamegon Bay). Paddling a fragile birch-bark canoe the length of the vast lake proved challenging. Leaving Sault Saint Marie in mid-August, Marquette and his Native-American friends faced a more than 500-mile voyage.

They were drenched throughout the voyage by icy spray and chilled to the bone by fierce winds. On many nights, it was impossible to even light a fire, and their only shelters from the elements were snow-covered rocks (on which they also slept).

On completing the grueling journey, Marquette wrote, "After a month amid snow and ice, which blocked our passage, and amid almost constant danger of death ... I arrived here on the 13th of September."

Marquette served there only two years before leading the Christian Native Americans eastward to escape certain annihilation at the hands of the warring Sioux. They settled at the Straits of Mackinac in present-day Michigan, where they built a new mission named St. Ignace. Marquette spent the next two years there.

Finding the Mississippi River

In spring 1673, plans finally aligned for an exploratory trip to the unknown Illinois country to find the Mississippi. Marquette ministered to the Native Americans, and his partner, Louis Jolliet, started trade among them. Jolliet and Marquette also claimed all the unexplored area of the continent for France. They left St. Ignace on May 17 with five other paddlers in two canoes loaded with trade goods. Marquette never saw his beloved St. Ignace again.

They made good time down Lake Michigan to the Jesuit mission of St. Francis Xavier in present-day Green Bay, Wisconsin. From there, Native-American guides escorted them up the Fox River as far as they could go. With a compass to aid him, Marquette completed a map of the area.

Their guides warned them not to proceed farther, because they were sure Sioux warriors would kill them. As a result, the guides turned back, while the explorers bravely pressed on.

After a long portage, they followed the Wisconsin River to the west. Four days later, they stood before the Mississippi. It was a mile wide at that point. Each clear night as they traveled downstream, Jolliet aimed the astrolabe at the North Star to establish their location.

Approximately 190 miles below the Wisconsin River, the explorers were greeted by members of the Illinois tribe. Once again, they were advised not to continue their journey. Still, they pushed forward.

Passing the mouth of the Illinois River, they eventually came to the Missouri. They then progressed downstream to the mouth of the Ohio River. There, they found a man who understood the Illinois tongue. He guided the explorers down the Mississippi to the mouth of the Arkansas River.

The explorers were met by a multitude of the Quapaw tribe and were warned that below that point, Native Amerians with guns were killing everyone who passed by to prevent them from making contact with the whites to trade for firearms. As a result, the explorers decided to start for home in the morning.

An Exhausting Retreat

They departed on July 17. Negotiating the current required twice the time and effort as when they'd traveled downstream. The men grew weak as their muscles strained to exhaustion each day. By the end of September, the seven exhausted explorers were back at the mission at Green Bay after having traveled 4,000 miles through unmapped wilderness.

Marquette Comes to Rest

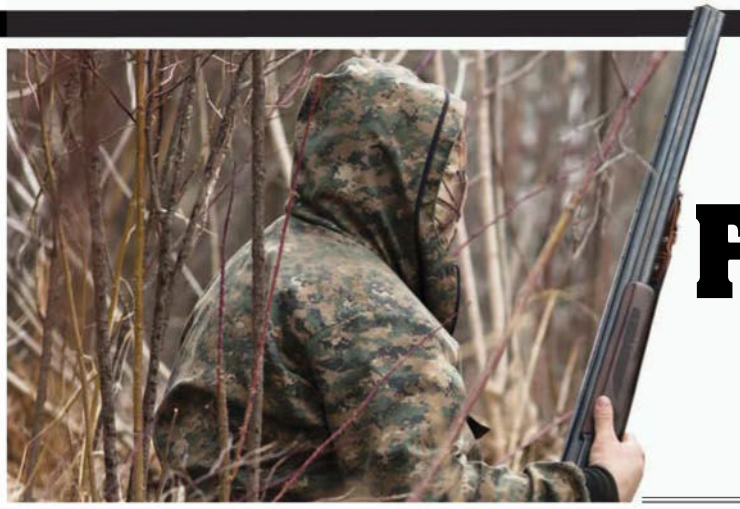
Marquette stayed at the Xavier Mission that winter. On May 18, 1675, he died, only 14 days shy of his 38th birthday. His body was buried at the mouth of a river known today as the Pere Marquette River in Michigan. For two years, only a wooden cross marked his wilderness grave.

In spring 1677, Indians brought the bones of their beloved missionary to the mission at St. Ignace. There, the bones were buried under the church's stone floor. Wilderness eventually overtook the site, and it was lost for 200 years. However, in 1877, a gardener happened upon the old mission's foundation, and Marquette's final resting place was rediscovered. MP

"The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and God."

—ANNE FRANK

PHOTO BY THINKSTOCK



Bad News For Survival Food

Something just happened that explains why tons and tons of survival food are literally flying off warehouse shelves. We've never seen anything like it before. Right now, our truckers can barely keep up with the rapidly rising demand. We have even been getting reports that this food is actually sold out in many parts of the country – and unfortunately, may be for a while.

What the heck is going on?

We were determined to figure out why so much survival food has been disappearing… and where it was going. So we did some digging around on our own and it paid off.

Wait until you see what we found out. It caught us totally by surprise because it involves a well-known agency that is responsible for aiding Americans in times of crisis. The possibility that they could have something to do with a potential survival food shortage made no sense to us … unless they knew something we didn't. We were determined to discover the truth for ourselves – and for you.

Now, it was impossible to say precisely what these people were up to, but we knew they must be planning for something really big – something really out of the ordinary.

We don't know about you, but any time outsiders starts prying into the affairs of private businesses like ours, we can't help but get concerned – and frankly, we are. After all, here's an agency we never heard from before suddenly asking questions about foods intended solely for emergency use in a disaster. Certainly makes you think, doesn't it?

Know what we heard? Nothing.

It's like talking to a wall. But we're going to keep the pressure on until we get some believable information. The truth is, revealing a plot like this could land us in some serious hot water. There's a reason they're not going public with any details. But we are absolutely convinced they are up to something. And we think you and every other American deserves an explanation.

Listen, we all know most people will be woefully unprepared when disaster strikes. The smart among us prefer to take steps to ensure that in a crisis, we won't be relying on someone else to take care of our families. That's our job.

Anyone not taking action will find themselves in the same boat as millions of other brainwashed souls who go through life thinking everything is fine. Until one day it is definitely not fine and they are OUT OF LUCK!

Go to GETFOOD110.COM right now.

We just posted a free video presentation that exposes the truth. You can view it at GETFOOD110.COM. We have to warn you that you'll probably think what it shows is really disturbing. Because it sure seems like the American people are being kept in the dark about something that could threaten not only our way of life, but even our very lives.

Go to GETFOOD110.COM now and you'll also learn what is the #1 item to hoard in a crisis and whysupplies of this critical item are so low in some places or even completely gone – unavailable at any price.

See this video while you still can.

Watch the controversial video that thousands of smart patriots have already seen in recent days. Go to GETFOOD110.COM and discover the #1 item most critical in a crisis.

Go watch this important video now before they force us to shut it down. What you'll learn could literally save your family's lives.

IT GETS EVEN BETTER – WE HAVE THE PROOF IN WRITING!

Just as we were beginning our investigation, our warehouse manager was shocked to receive a request from an official of that very same agency.

- How much survival food did we have on hand?
- Where is inventory kept?
- How quickly can we produce more?
- Just how fast could they get their hands on it?

LOG ON NOW TO GETFOOD110.COM