

Did You Nail That Wild Turkey? Here's How To Do It

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When it comes to hunting, many people think of turkeys as being traditional.

Hunting turkeys is not especially difficult, you must still observe some basic rules and take certain precautions.

Whether you are interested in a holiday meal, or another animal to add to your list of game to take for survival needs, learning to hunt turkeys properly will save you from hunger.

Here are some basic things to keep in mind as well as some skills you must master.

How Risky Hunting Wild Turkeys Is?

There are two main sources of danger you will encounter when hunting turkeys. First, these animals can be stronger and more aggressive than expected. If you do not kill them with one shot, or are not certain they are dead, they will attack when you approach and try to pick them up.

A wild turkeys wings are quite strong, as are their claws. Before you attempt to pick a wild turkey up after trying to kill it, prod it several times with a long pole to make sure it is truly dead.

The small size of a turkey's head makes it fairly hard to hit, so you better aim at the body. If you are aiming for the vital organs, hit above the drumstick and towards the back. A shot that connects with the spine will disable the bird and hopefully keep it from flying off. As you approach the bird, shoot it in the head to make sure it is dead.

The second source of danger when hunting turkeys is other hunters. Since turkeys also move very fast, some hunters may fire in the direction of a turkey call, or as soon as they see something moving in the brush. More than a few hunters have gotten shot while hunting turkeys because someone thought a bird was approaching and not a human.

But you can stay safe from other hunters during turkey season if you follow a few tips:

- Wear blaze orange or some other color distinctly different from turkey colors. Avoid red, white, and blue as the red and white can easily be mistaken for turkey colors. Since blue can be perceived as black or brown under certain lighting conditions, also avoid this color.
- If you decide to wear camo colors or a ghillie suit, make sure you have at least a few patches of blaze orange visible so that other hunters can recognize you are a person and not a turkey hiding in the brush.
- Avoid stalking wild turkeys. Even though you may be tempted to go to them or try to find them, remember other hunters may be making turkey calls to an animal you are also looking for. If they see something moving in that general direction, they may think you are the turkey too.
- If you are using decoys, make sure you are never in the line of fire related to the decoy. Remember, another hunter may see the decoy and think it is a real turkey. If you are behind the decoy, you could get shot.
- When hunting with a group, make sure that everyone knows what areas they will be working

in, and try to avoid overlaps or moving into other hunter's territory. Even someone in your own party can make a mistake and shoot too quickly.

- Practice turkey "shoot don't shoot" skills all year long. As silly as it sounds, take the time to drill in the woods with targets that will give you the chance to distinguish between animal targets and humans that you should not shoot. Building muscle memory that includes holding up and not shooting at the last second is every bit as important as aim and accuracy when it comes to turkey hunting. No matter whether you hunt turkeys with a gun or crossbow, these drills can save a life, including your own.

Best Weapons for Hunting Turkeys

When hunting turkeys, shotguns have the advantage of easily cutting through any underbrush, vines, or other material that may stand between you and the turkey.

Here are some characteristics of a shotgun that is good for turkey hunting:

- Should be a 12 or 20 gauge shotgun. Use 12 gauge only if you are sure that the bird will come in fairly close, and you will not have to contend with underbrush or anything else that might reduce the impact of the shot.
- Use a gun that has camo coloring, or a dark colored flat finish. Turkeys can see in full color, and will easily pick up the outline of a shotgun based on its color. Turkeys can also spot blaze orange and other hunter safety colors with ease. If you do not move around, the turkey might dismiss this odd color in their environment. It is better to have a wary turkey take longer to approach than have a hunter shoot at you because you aren't wearing blaze.
- Most turkey hunters prefer a shotgun with a shorter barrel and tight chokes.

Recently, hunters are paying more attention to crossbows because they offer silence and compatible kill power to shotguns. Usually, most crossbows will work for turkey hunting as long as they have camo covering on them that prevent them from being spotted easily.

On the other side of the equation, your choice of ammo is somewhat limited because turkeys have relatively small areas where you can deliver a fatal blow. Most hunters prefer to hit the spine, as it means the turkey will have a lesser chance of escaping. Broadhead arrows will deliver plenty of impact and cut deeply into the spine or any other part of the animal that you hit.

Best Seasons and Times for Hunting Turkeys

As with any other game animal, there are times when you can legally hunt, and times when you cannot. Typically, the seasons that are off limits are those in which game animals are breeding or raising their young.

You'll have no choice but to hunt during these times in a critical survival situation, but still avoid it. Killing turkeys when they are raising young will limit your opportunity to hunt the next generation for food.

Today, you can hunt turkeys during the spring and fall in most areas that allow it. Pay attention to the dates in your local areas, as well as any place else that you might be passing through. When in doubt, make sure that you know the breeding and rearing season for any animal that you may wind up hunting on a subsistence basis.

During the fall season, turkeys move around most of the day. Some hunters prefer to hunt turkeys in the early morning, just as they do any other animal, while others prefer the afternoon, around 2 pm. Most turkey hunters will also hunt spring turkeys in the early to late afternoon.

Even though turkeys are a traditional Thanksgiving meal, most hunters avoid hunting turkeys in the fall. During this season, you are more likely to attract younger birds that are less than a year old, so they will have less meat and size on them.

If you are looking for easier animals to take from a strategy perspective, the younger spring birds are definitely less experienced. If you are new to turkey hunting, starting out in the fall may be a good option for you.

How to Tell Wild Turkeys Apart

Identifying male and female turkeys is critically important when turkey hunting. For new hunters (or just new turkey hunters), it can be pretty confusing. But there are four primary ways to reliably identify a male (gobbler/tom) from a female (hen).

MALES

FEMALES

HEAD COLOR



VS



Males have bright blue and red heads with bumpy "wattles" all over (especially in spring). Females have bluish gray heads, usually with fine feathers attached.

BEARDS ON BREASTS



VS



Males have feathery "beards" attached to their lower breast, which get longer with age. Females rarely have these beards, but some do. Don't use just this indicator alone.

SPURS ON LEGS



VS



Males have bony spurs on the back of their legs, which get longer with age. Females don't usually have spurs.

BODY SIZE AND FANS



VS



Males usually have bigger bodies and fluff their feathers/tail fans to "strut" for females. Females are usually smaller in size and don't display their tail fans.

These are general rules. Don't use any one by itself; combine them all to be reliable. Identifying turkey males from females takes time and practice in the outdoors. Print out this guide and bring it with you for a field identification refresher!



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Calling Turkeys and Other Methods

If you are used to other kinds of hunting, you may be very surprised to find that hunting turkeys rarely involves stalking them. Aside from safety issues, the fact is turkeys pick up on motion in their environment with uncanny ease. Therefore, if you are stalking a turkey, there is every chance they will run away from you. On the other hand, if you are still and make sounds like those of another turkey, they will come right to you.

During the process of hunting turkeys, you can still stalk groups of them to a point. In this case, you will always be interested in places where they gather for water and food. All you need to do is sneak up on a flock, scare them into flight, and then shoot them. Surprisingly enough, if you make sounds like a turkey after startling the flock, some will come back to investigate.

Important Turkey Calls and Decoys

As you learn more about turkey psychology and traits, you may be amazed at what they will fall for when compared to deer or other animals. In this case, there are several sounds that will lure a turkey right to you, or direct it to an area where you can shoot it with ease. Here are some to consider:

- Insofar as sounds a turkey makes, nothing will draw a gobbler (male turkey) faster than the sound of a hen calling. Since turkeys are not monogamous, they will always be on the lookout for females that they can breed with. Gobblers will also follow females around, which means if a hen comes into view, a male is not far behind.
- In order to call in a hen turkey, all you need to do is gobble like a male during the spring season. The hens will be drawn to the sound of the male, who will be listening for the females to respond.
- During the spring season, gobblers are more highly attuned than usual for the sound of a female. Therefore, you also use just about any loud banging sound or whistle to make them curious enough to approach. Some hunters prefer to use owl sounds, or even coyote as a means to lure turkeys.
- One of the most important turkey calls you can master is the turkey yelp. It is used by both males and females to let other turkeys know where they are. In particular, during the spring season, hens will yelp to let gobblers know they are about to fly down from their roost. Since male turkeys are very interested in mating with any available female, they will rush towards that sound as quickly as possible.
- Since many turkeys will change from a yelp to a cackle when they leave the roost, it is important to follow up the yelp with a cackle. If a gobbler is waiting to move towards a female, it may not do so until it hears this second sound.
- Clucking is also a very important turkey call. It is used by both males and females to signal when they are about to go eat, or are moving off from one area to another. While the cluck can have many different meanings, it is still something that will draw curious birds to where you are waiting for them.
- The putt sound is used to signal the presence of danger. Turkeys will run away from this sound. If you have a blind set up and a fire zone, it is possible to send turkeys away from where you are hiding, and right into your optimal zone of fire. That being said, it may take some work and patience to make this call work for you.
- During the fall season, young turkeys will make a specific call when they don't know where their mother is. You can use the "kee kee" and "kee kee run", and then listen to see if an adult answers. If you use this call, adult turkeys may also come towards you.

- If all else fails, you can try using the cutting sound. A female turkey will use this call when a male does not answer and she is feeling impatient. Most hunters use this one with caution because a gobbler may be approaching, and this sound may cause him to move away instead.

What to Do After You Kill a Turkey

If you have ever gone hunting or fishing, then you know that finding, targeting, and killing the animal is only the beginning of a long process that finally leads to getting something to eat. When it comes to turkeys, you will more than likely want to do some field dressing in order to preserve the meat and other usable parts.

Once you take the turkey back home, you will need to finish the process so that you can make the meat last as long as possible.

Here are the basic steps for field dressing a turkey:

- During hunting season, you will need to put your tag on the bird and bring it to the game warden for counting. Usually, you won't be allowed to remove the comb, feathers, or feet until the animal has been counted and noted as part of your quota.
- Next, you will to pluck the feathers, cut the wings, and remove the tail.
- Remove the feet and head. Try to cut the head from the neck as close to the jaws as possible since there is plenty of good meat on the neck.
- Once the bird is down to skin and beheaded, you can go ahead and start cleaning out the insides. Make one cut on the abdominal side of the tail end of the bird. You should be able to pull out everything but the crop in one clump. Be sure to separate out the heart, gizzard, and liver. Each of these organs are edible and will provide vital nutrients in time of need.
- Next, cut another slit near the neck to pull out the crop. This is not edible and should be buried along with the head. While some people keep turkey claws, that is up to you. The tail feathers can also be of use if you wish to save them.
- Finally, rinse out the carcass and wrap it up so that it does not draw flies or other insects.
- Once you get home, finish butchering and put the meat in the freezer. You can also cut turkey meat into thin strips and make jerky or smoke it if you do not have refrigeration or freezers available.

Many hunters look upon turkey hunting as a secondary interest when compared to deer, bear, or other animals. Turkey hunting can still be very important for preppers that want as many options for their meat supply as possible.

When approached with caution and the right tools during the right seasons, you will find turkey hunting fairly easy and achievable. At the very least, if you are limited in range of motion, or don't want to stalk animals, there is nothing quite like a turkey coming to you when you make the right calls.



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