

9 STEPS TO GET YOUR WEAPON READY FOR HUNTING SEASON

By Donald Gasaway*

Range Time Is Just One Step To Fall Hunting Success

Whether one deer-hunts with a rifle or with shotgun, as is the case in my home state of Illinois, it is important to prepare for the season. Here are some steps for hunt preparation related to your firearms.

1. Check it over physically. The screws on the stock and sight should be snug. If they are snug then do not tighten them further. They might not need to be changed. If they do need it, you can work on that later.

2. Next purchase two boxes of ammo for each gun to be used. One box for hunting and one for sighting. By getting two boxes, you have ammo that is the same weight, same make and same stock number. All of the shells will be as close to equal as is possible.

3. Go to a range with safe backstops and measured distances. Run a cleaning patch through the bore of the weapon. It helps to clean out dust and any corrosion that might have accumulated since last hunting trip. Place a zeroing target up at 25 yards. Place sandbags, a rest or whatever is available on the shooting table. Make room to have your elbows and fore end hand on a firm surface. The idea is not to see how well you shoot but rather to find the rifle's zero point.

4. It might be a good idea to take a shot to clean out the lubricant left in the bore from the last cleaning. After the barrel has cooled, take a test shot, holding the sight on or under the bull's-eye. Hold your breath and squeeze the trigger slowly. Pay particular attention to form and procedure. Take two more shots using exactly the same aiming point, form and patience. If you accidentally pull a shot or otherwise make a mistake, disregard that shot.

5. Examine the results of your actions after the third shot. The goal is to have all the holes tight. If the holes are scattered, you have a problem with the weapon or with your shooting.

If the tight 3 shot pattern is an inch high, that means that the group will be two inches high at 50 yards. If it is an inch off to the right or left at 25 yards, it will be two inches off at 50 yards. A ready gun will be able to put shots into a three inch group at 50 yards and beyond.

6. If the weapon is not ready for hunting, adjust for either the height or horizontal correction necessary. Your weapon and/or sight came with instructions on how to adjust the elevation and/or wind. Adjust them one at a time. Take three more shots using the same care used earlier. Once either the wind (horizontal movement) or elevation (vertical movement) is taken care of, it is time to try to correct the other if required. It is better to move the adjustment too little rather than too much. Adjusting sight screws can make you crazy if you move them too much. Not to mention all the ammo you will waste.

7. Once a good group is established at 25 yards it is time to move the target to 50 yards. Repeat the process until you have a good group at that distance. Then move to 100 yards and repeat. If you did a good job at 25 yards, the 50 and 100 yard shots will be pretty accurate.

8. Once the sighting in is completed, it is time to practice without a rest as you would in a hunting situation. If your shots are off target, you know that the problem is you and not the gun. Correcting that problem may be more difficult than making the weapon ready for the hunting season.

9. This is more of a caution. You have taken all the time and expense to make sure the weapon is shooting where it is supposed to be hitting. Do not waste it with careless handling. After cleaning the bore again, carefully place your weapon in a good gun case. Take care to avoid moving anything on the sight or bumping it in any way.

If you follow these steps this year and still can't hit what you shoot at, then perhaps you need to get some coaching for your shooting performance. A well meaning friend may offer to help, but it is better to find a pro. You will probably save more money in the long run. Chances are you will be a better hunter this year if you take the time to make your gun ready for the season.

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