

SCENT CONTROL

Whether eliminating odor to stalk big game or teaching your dog to find a bird, here's how to make sense of scent while hunting. **BY LISA DENSMORE BALLARD**

ELIMINATING ODOR. **Remove scent for greater hunting success.**

It happens to all big game hunters. The wind shifts, and the trophy buck you just spent an hour stalking catches a whiff of you and bolts. In the old days, big game hunters tried to mask their scent with pine and other natural, woody aromas. Today, scent control is less about covering it up and more about eliminating it.

"There are two forms of odors: the bacteria our bodies produce and environmental odors such as gas for your car, cigarette smoke, or what you pick up in a convenience store," explains Steve Lambeth, a long-time hunter and product manager for Code Blue, who has spearheaded 98 percent of the brand's scent-elimination products over the past 21 years.

According to Lambeth, game animals don't associate human-related odors with humans per se. They merely recognize those odors as uncommon and thus a reason to be alert. "It's impossible to make yourself completely scent-free," he says. "The key is to eliminate enough odor so that a deer doesn't smell you."

To get rid of body scent, Lambeth recommends a four-step process using scent-elimination products:

1. **Wash your skin and hair**
2. **Launder your hunting clothing — all of it!**
3. **Apply underarm deodorant**
4. **Spray yourself and your gear in the field**

To prevent your clothing from picking up odors at home, in a store, or in hunting camp, Lambeth suggests storing your hunting clothes in sealed containers, then

putting them on in the woods. "Most people won't go to that extreme. But if you take the perspective that to a big game animal, everything you touch smells like it has something spilled on it, you'll have more chances for success," says Lambeth. "Beating a deer's nose is critical. It's amazing how much odor you pick up and emit."

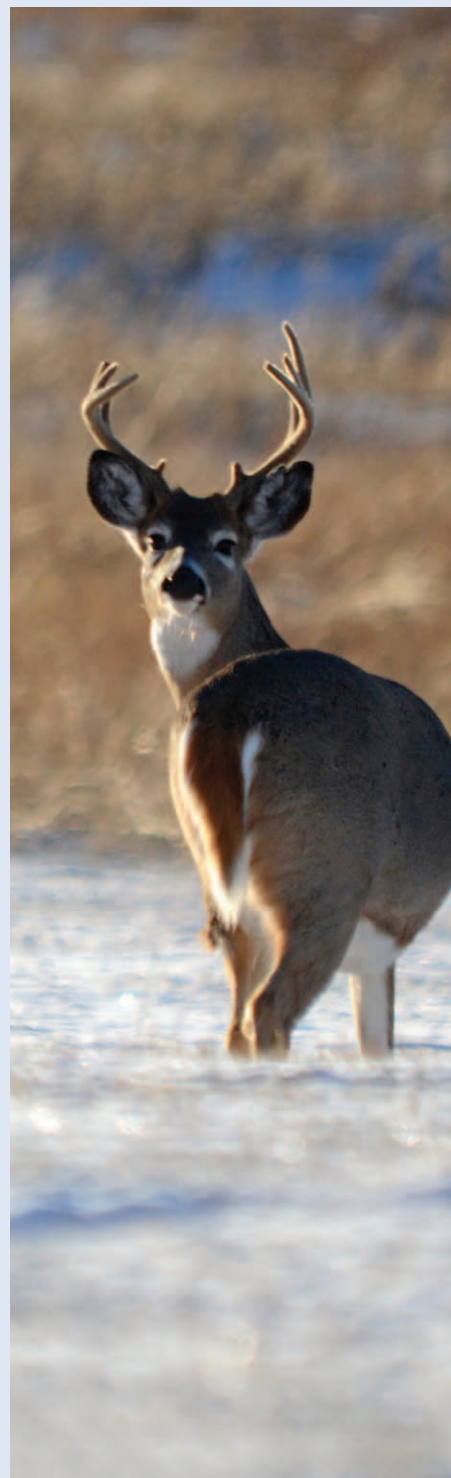
What about a campfire? Some long-time outdoorsmen don't worry about campfire odor, rationalizing that animals are exposed to wildfires now and again. Lambeth considers this a mistake. "While it's true that campfire smoke can overpower body odor, you're still giving off odor," says Lambeth. "A deer might ignore you, or it might bust out. Many hunters have experienced both situations. The more you can eliminate odor — any odor — the better."

That said, not all scent strategies are meant to purge aromas. Some are effective attractants, particularly those that mimic the urine of a doe in heat. "The timing is critical when you use attractants," advises Lambeth. "Doe urine contains pheromones when she's nearing the peak of her estrus cycle, usually late in the fall. If the timing isn't right, a buck won't be interested."

Lambeth urges hunters to follow the cardinal rule: stay downwind to be stealthy around animals with sensitive sniffers. But when the wind changes unexpectedly, paying attention to scent can have a big impact on your chances for success.

WORD WISE

The word "olfactory" first appeared in the English language in the 1650s. It is derived from the Latin word "olfactorius," which means "used to sniff at."





IT'S A FACT

Dogs possess 300 million olfactory receptors in their noses compared with 6 million receptors in human noses. What's more, the area of dog's brain dedicated to sense of smell is proportionately 40 times greater than ours.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to biologists at the University of California-Los Angeles, dogs (wolves really) were domesticated about 18,000 years ago by European hunter-gatherers to assist man at certain tasks such as hunting, guarding, and pulling cargo. They were not considered pets until about 2,000 years ago.

TRAINING YOUR DOG. Turn your pup into a hunting partner.

You're in the market for a pointing dog with plans to make it not only your new best friend but also a stellar bird hunter. Dogs are born with a nose for pheasants and grouse. The trick is teaching a dog to ignore the rest of what it smells. Here are a few tips to help you pick the perfect puppy and then teach it to work well afield.

"It's more important to pick the right breeder than the pup," says Patti Carter, co-owner of Merrymeeting Kennels in Brunswick, Maine, who has bred and trained German short-hairs since 1986. "The boldest or the cutest dog is not necessarily the best match for you. A professional breeder knows his dogs and can help you pick your pup based on your ability to train it."

According to Carter, training your new dog should start as soon as you bring it home. "Introduce it to everything it will see the rest of its life, both socially and afield. Expose your puppy to old people, kids, car rides, water, noises, smells, birds, bird covers, and gun fire, and get his mouth on a bird," advises Carter. "Crate training is really important too. Their crate should be their den — a place that's familiar and safe to them."

She also says you should forget the myth of waiting a year to start field training. It puts your pooch a year behind. Your dog should first learn basic commands, such as "whoa," "come," and "stay," then graduate to sitting, heeling, and other fundamental canine skills. "Pick command words that work for you and reward with food," says Carter. "Avoid words that rhyme. For example, I use "whoa," which means stop moving, so I don't use "no." Instead, I use "bad" when a dog is doing something I don't want it to."

Quartering. To teach quartering (crisscrossing a field ahead of a hunter), Carter uses a 25-foot check cord made out of quality climbing rope or lariat rope. She showers the dog with encouragement when it performs well. If the dog stops paying attention, Carter purposely changes her direction, forcing the dog to reach the end of the cord and change direction too.

Retrieving. Carter teaches retrieving in stages, beginning with "hold" (keeping an object in the dog's mouth). Then she rewards the dog separately for "stay," "come," and "sit" with the object in its mouth. "If a dog only carries a wounded bird halfway back then drops it, you might lose the bird," she says. "Your dog should learn that something in its mouth is good, out is bad, and there's no getting rid of it until you ask for it."

Focus on Game Birds. Every young bird dog chases birds — all birds. To train your pup to skip the meadowlarks and concentrate on pheasants, Carter teaches "leave it" with a plate of hot dogs and a squirt gun. She places the wieners on the ground. If the dog won't "leave it," she squirts the dog with water as a deterrent.

No-Point Shooting. Many dog owners won't shoot unless their dog points the bird first, believing it takes the desire to point out of a pointing dog if you down a flushed bird. If your pointing dog intentionally busts out a bird instead of pinning it, Carter says don't shoot. But if it's a wild flush, she says go for it, as long as it's a safe shot. (Some dogs might go after the bird before you shoot, potentially leaping into the line of fire.)

Prepping a Trained Dog. If your dog is already well-trained, Carter recommends periodic refresher sessions during the summer but emphasizes physical conditioning, running, and swimming. If your dog is panting heavily and working too hard while hunting, it's more injury prone and won't smell the birds as well.

An award-winning writer and photographer, Lisa Densmore Ballard hunts upland birds with her English setter and stalks big game in the mountains around Red Lodge, Montana. (www.LisaDensmore.com)