

Insider Info

THE HIDDEN HUNTER

What you wear and where you sit are keys to a successful hunt. Here's how to stay out of sight. **BY LISA DENSMORE BALLARD**

CAMOUFLAGE COLORS.

Finding the best blend for the habitat you hunt.

Most hunters know intuitively that they need to blend into their surroundings. Yet sorting out which camo pattern works best for a particular species or habitat can make your vision turn as blotchy as the infinite number of camouflage choices.

One reason for the explosion of camo colors and patterns is its growing use beyond military gear and hunting products. “Nowadays, you can go from diaper to casket in camo,” says Dodd Clifton, marketing coordinator for Realtree®, which has been in camo business since the mid-1980s. Realtree’s patterns are available on anything from dinnerware to drapes, steering wheel covers to wedding dresses. “The trick is to make an effective hunting pattern that also looks good on a ceiling fan,” Clifton explains. “We have 2,500 licensees who make 20,000 products. The number of patterns is at a high because many brands and retailers are doing their own — on top of what traditional camo companies supply to the market.” Although lifestyle marketing has become a big component of the camo business, Realtree starts the pattern design process focused on hunters in the field.

Like other camo producers, Realtree separates its patterns into key habitat-related designs without limiting a pattern to a small geographic area. Its four general patterns match four types of hunting situations:

- **General hunting:** Wooded areas and marsh/crop zones
- **Waterfowl hunting:** More reeds; lighter dead-crop colors (tans and browns)

- **Western hunting:** Rock and sage; open, light coloration

- **Turkey hunting:** Greenish hues to better mimic pine, spruce, or cedar

Variations in pattern and color can make a big difference in helping hunters stay hidden.

Patterns: “Effective camo patterns are not just sticks, leaves, and limbs,” says Clifton. “The goal is to disrupt the human form using elements of nature plus [other] forms that are nondescript. What looks like vertical bark to some resembles rock to others. We also make some details crisp and others out of focus on purpose.”

It’s the ability to layer color and shapes that make modern camo more effective. In the past 10 years, camo companies have been able to create even more realistic patterns with a 3-D look — an illusion created with the use of shadow, light, and open space.

Color: Will my girly pink, green, and white camo jacket hide me as well as my high-tech green, brown, and black one? Probably not. Clifton says an effective camo pattern is not just about breaking up the appearance of a hunter against a background but also matching color. Certainly in the case of turkeys and geese, which have color vision, matching the hues in your apparel to your surroundings is critical. But even big game animals such as deer and elk, which don’t have the rods and cones in their eyes to detect color, see variations and shading.

“The science is muddy,” says Clifton. “We know deer don’t see color, but they see tones. If a leaf on a camo pattern looks close to nature, then it will look close in black and white, too.”

When hunting in the snow, don’t fret if you’re not wearing camo with white



WORD WISE

Camouflage was coined in the late 1800s from the French verb *comoufler*, which literally translates to “disguise” or “muffle the head” when referring to thieves. During World War I, the French military also used the word *camouflet*, which means “blow smoke in the face of the enemy.”

in it. “We offer camo in a snow pattern because people request it,” Clifton says. However, “you’re usually hunting against trees or corn stubble even if it’s snowing, so other camo patterns still work.”

If you’ve always hunted deer, ducks, and turkeys wearing drab wool pants and a checked jacket, it may be time for an upgrade. Having the right camo pattern hides you better visually, and this new gear will keep you drier and more comfortable too.



IT'S A FACT

During the Gallic Wars (58-50 BC), Julius Caesar coated his reconnaissance boats with blue-green wax and then had the sails, ropes, and crew painted the same color to blend in with the sea.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Universal Camouflage Pattern (UCP) was the first computer-generated camo pattern with a pixelated look used by the U.S. Army. Introduced in 2003, the UCP failed because it was only one color pattern, which often revealed the silhouette of soldiers. The army has since issued a variety of camo uniforms to better match deserts, jungles, and other locations.

BETTER BLINDS. Choose a blind for the way you hunt.

I've hunted from blinds that resemble trenches, under layout-blinds flat on my back among corn stubble, behind driftwood blinds near the ocean, and in blinds made from pine boughs in the woods. I've used army surplus mesh draped over tent poles and store-bought, free-standing blinds in myriad camo patterns. Lightweight, quick set-up portable blinds — which come in numerous shapes, sizes, and fabric patterns — are also becoming increasingly popular.

There are more types of blinds than there are creatures in the woods. But to be effective, blinds need to do just one thing: hide hunters.

Heath Woods, a member of Hunters Specialties' Pro Staff since 2008, is an archery and rifle hunter. He offers these tips when it comes to using a blind for hunting:

1. **Include elbow room.** Make sure you can draw your bow or mount your gun without interference from the sides of your blind.
2. **Lower occupancy.** In general, if one person is using the blind, buy or build a two-person blind. Two people should get a three-person

blind (and so on) to make sure you have room to shoot and can comfortably hide people and gear.

3. **Rake away leaves.** Rake out the blind and just behind it so you can get in and out of the blind — and move around inside — without making noise that might spook your target.
4. **Put up walls.** Use a blind with walls when hunting with a rifle. These blinds may take longer to set up, but they hide a gun rest and a chair better than a blind without walls.
5. **Know the travel routes.** Set up close to game trails or flyways. It helps to scout ahead of the hunting season to figure out an animal's or bird's daily habits.
6. **Set it up early.** Whether it's a portable blind or a permanent one, if you are planning to leave the blind in one spot for the season, put it up at least one week ahead of opening day to allow wildlife to get used to the blind being in their environment.
7. **Eliminate human scent.** Spray your blind with a scent eliminator after setting it up. Woods sprays his blind twice, once at his truck and then after setting it up.
8. **Consider the background.** Always place a blind by timber. If there are no trees, then place it by a hillside to prevent animals from silhouetting the blind or you in it.
9. **Use elements of the environment.** Portable and permanent blinds blend in better if you position branches or grass around it.
10. **Put safety first.** Place a blaze orange hat or small flag on the back of your blind to let other hunters know you're there, especially on public land.

Blinds add another layer of concealment in addition to what you wear and what's around you. "An animal might be on top of you without you knowing it," says Woods. "A blind doubles your chances. If you're hunting with kids or someone with a disability, it hides movement and things you may need to bring along. And it gets you closer to game."

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