

Blending In: Don't Stick Out in the Sticks



Any successful hunter will tell you that proper camouflage is essential for taking the game that you are pursuing. You will hear some hunters say that this is complete baloney and will probably hear the statement, "I have killed more deer in my jeans than any of that designer camo you are wearing." While this may be true to that individual, it would be unfair to make a broad generalization on a single person.

Animal eyes are incredibly keen. Whether prey or predator, they depend on their eyesight as one of the keys to survival. Paired with good hearing and smell (depending on the animal), keen eyesight can mean the difference between being a meal and having one.

Interestingly enough, camouflage had its beginnings in World War I. Both sides conscripted artists to study animals as well as natural surroundings to develop a better means of hiding from the enemy. Ships were even painted in various disruptive color arrays in order to break up their outlines on the horizon. It was Scottish gamekeepers who developed the *ghillie* suit for their snipers during this time period. They did this simply enough by taking strips of burlap and cloth and tying them in various lengths to jackets and pants. This followed the same idea of ship camouflage—disrupt the outline and use colors that match the surrounding terrain to make detection difficult.

Without a doubt, camouflage has continued to improve, spilling over into the commercial side of the hunting industry to a point that brands are about as important as your "school colors." Two hunters will quickly size each other up as team members or rivals simply by the camo that they are wearing. Whatever side you find yourself on, it's all in fun, and it can be quite entertaining to hear hunters take friendly jabs at each other.

The main benefit of camo is that it makes hunters more confident, and the more confident you are, the more likely you are to be successful. Many times, hunts end in failure not because of equipment shortcomings but due to mental breakdown of the hunter in the moment of truth. If you enhance your confidence, then you are more likely to



develop the predator attitude needed to take the game that you are pursuing. Now, let's take a look at selecting the right camouflage for your next hunt!

First, think about what animals you are going to be hunting. This will dictate the environment that you will be trying to recreate in your clothing selection. For example, if you are going to be hunting turkeys in the spring, then a pattern created for waterfowl may not be the best choice. Spring turkey hunting usually occurs when foliage is greening up and normally not in a marsh or wetland environment where ducks will tend to be in the fall. So camouflage color depends on the time of year that you will be hunting.

Browns and drab colors will work for the most part in any situation as a base color, but remember you want to maximize concealment, not merely "get by." For example, the last thing you want to do is look like green bush in the middle of winter. Ducks specifically pick up on outlines and colors, especially from their vantage point in the air. They have the distinct advantage of seeing the whole picture from above. In order to gain this perspective, take a look at aerial maps taken at various times of the year. Notice those profiles and landscape features that stick out the most. Evergreen trees, such as pines and cedars, are immediately recognizable in the fall and winter months, while they are not as immediately evident in the spring

and summer. Putting yourself in the perspective of your quarry will help you in your efforts to hide from them.

How much camouflage you need to wear really depends on your preference. You will probably need to have a long-sleeve shirt and pants at a minimum. Facemasks and gloves are really only necessary if you feel that your skin tone contrasts the surroundings too dramatically. Some type of hat with a bill is also a nice addition, as it can shade your eyes from sunlight and also create a shaded area around your eyes and nose.

In recent years, the use of face paint has made a huge resurgence in the hunting community, more than likely due to the success of hunting personalities and media. The use of camo on the face most certainly goes back to the primal urge of our ancestors, who, without modern conveniences, most certainly used charcoal and mud to cover their features. Multiple companies offer a wide array of colors and applicators for the face and hands. If you are going to use this type of product, one of the most important things to know is how to put it on and take it off. Some camo paints are waterproof and must be removed with a dry towel, and others require soap and warm water. Always read the package first, and make sure you're not allergic to the product, as well. Most packages have warnings about potential hazards and skin irritants.

Another method of concealment is permanent or portable blinds. These come in all shapes and sizes and have practically revolutionized hunting. Blinds can be anything from a small piece of camo fabric to a collapsible tent. Blinds can be effective when used properly. Deer tend to balk at blinds more than any other animal; they almost immediately recognize the distinct change in their surroundings. When placing a blind, make sure that you completely "brush" it in. Brushing in a blind means that you take limbs, foliage, and small bushes from the area and cover the blind completely. When you are finished, the blind should be practically invisible. If you think you have enough on it, you probably don't, so go that extra step and cover it completely.

One final thing to remember is that the best camouflage and concealment techniques you have will never replace the ability to be still and know when to move or not. You may be covered head to toe in the latest camo pattern, totally blending in with your surroundings, but, if you make a motion at the wrong time, you are more than likely going to be spotted. Think of it this way: How would you feel if you were in your living room and suddenly the TV decided to change channels? Exactly! You would probably find yourself in the next room scared to death and trying to figure out what just happened. Some animals can pick up on the very slightest of movements—the twitch of an ear or the blink of an eye. There are even some hunters who claim, "That deer could hear my heart beating I was so excited!"

Proper camouflage techniques can open up a new door to the outside world. When you are properly concealed, you become part of the environment and you get to see just a glimpse of wildlife in their world. Preparation for the hunt is one of the most exciting parts of hunting, and concealment is a step that will make your time outside more enjoyable. Whatever you do, remember to keep it fun, and don't get stressed out and think that the kill is the only sign of success. Always keep in mind that, to you, this is just a game, but to the wildlife that you pursue, it is life. Be respectful, be safe, be a part of the woods, and don't "stick out in the sticks."

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