

Flint's First Deer - Continued...

I still remember my first hunting license Dad bought for me at Auldridge Building Center in Goldthwaite in 1977. It was a rite of passage for me. Flint and I made a trip to Mills County General Store for Flint's first hunting license. I am proud to share that rite of passage with Flint. He has earned it.

We have a progressive deer harvest system at the ranch for hunters young or old. All hunters start out hunting does, before moving up to spikes and then eventually trophy bucks.

This accomplishes two things. First, the hunter gets practice making ethical harvest shots on live deer with a deer rifle. This reduces the chance of wounding a trophy buck later on. And second, we need to harvest lots of does and spikes off the property for herd management each year. Getting does and spikes

out of the way first keeps hunters from bagging a trophy, then deciding that others can chase does and spikes for management.

Amber has taken a doe and a spike in the past, making her eligible to hunt for a trophy now. She has gone on several hunts this fall, but hasn't gotten a shot at a big one. So, Debra made it clear when I took Flint out on his first hunt for a doe that Flint was not eligible to take a trophy buck until Amber got hers. I replied, "No problem. I am clear on the rules... does only!"

(The reader should feel some foreboding right now, because this was going to get complicated later on...)

Flint and I sat in a stand next to a food plot for his first real deer hunt. Everything went as planned. The deer cooperated, with 14 deer coming into the field in front of our stand.

Flint and I took our time picking a nice doe out of the group and then lined up his shot. When the doe turned broadside at around 80 yards, Flint let her have it. The doe stumbled a few steps and then keeled right over. Flint made a perfect shot right behind the shoulder. It was 'high fives' with me at the ranch and later hugs from Mom and sister at home.

Insert plot thickening music here.

Later that same weekend, family friend Brady Westlund, along with me and Flint, went to check my trap line at the ranch. Brady has gone through our progression of deer harvests over the last three years at the ranch and the result was a beautiful ten point buck we rattled up and Brady harvested a few weeks ago. (See The Goldthwaite Novem-

ber 14, Page 9 to read the account of the hunt.)

Brady and Flint were loading up into my truck to go to the ranch to check traps when Debra grabbed my arm and whispered like only a wife can into my ear, "Remember that Flint can't shoot a buck until Amber gets hers!"

I laughed and said in a low voice, "No problem. We are clear on the rules. Look, I only have my little .22 Hornet rifle. It is all good."

Insert louder plot thickening music here.

Brady is now old enough to want the challenge of fair chase hunting adventures. Flint, not so much. So Brady and I always let Flint dispatch all the live animals while trapping. We don't even discuss it. I simply

See the next page ...

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