

## Hunting private land - safety guidelines

The search for permission to hunt private land should begin months before the hunting season. You need permission to hunt on private agricultural land even if it is not posted. Mark attractive hunting areas on a county or topographic map, and then find out who owns the property. Get permission early. Phone the landowner ahead of time to explain who you are and why you are calling. Inquire as to the best time to visit the landowner to discuss your request.

Keep in mind that in most cases you will be visiting the landowner's place of business. Be polite and friendly, sincere and brief. Express your willingness to help with odd jobs, such as hauling wood or mending fences for the landowner in exchange for the privilege of hunting.

If your request is denied, try to be understanding and remain polite. Your reaction could have an important bearing on future interactions with the landowner.

Landowners who permit you to hunt on their land are doing you a favor and

placing their trust in you. To prove their trust was not misplaced: A landowner who allows persons onto his or her land free of charge for recreational purposes (including hunting), as defined by Minnesota Statutes chapter 604A, is generally not responsible or liable to such persons for injuries or damages they might sustain while on the land. For complete details, please refer to Minn. Stat. Ch. 604A.20-604A.27.

Respect the landowner's property as you would your own. Don't litter. Carry away litter left by others. Understand clearly where you can and cannot drive or park your vehicle and abide by those restrictions.

Leave your name, address, phone number and also make, model, and license number of your vehicle with the landowner. Some hunters have found it is well worth their while to have such cards printed up before the season.

If you have permission to return, find out if there are certain times or places that you should avoid. Always attempt to let the landown-

er know where you will be and when. Know the property boundaries of the land you have permission to hunt and stay within those boundaries. Try to keep the size of your hunting party small and always let the landowner know exactly who else will be hunting with you. Don't crowd other hunters. Think before you shoot. Know your target and what is beyond it. Don't walk through unharvested crops or hunt near livestock or buildings. Leave gates as you find them. Cross fences in a manner that will not break or loosen wires or posts. Keep your dog under control, especially when near domestic animals or livestock.

Do not build or start fires at any time, unless you have specific permission from the owner. Do not cut, injure or permanently mark trees with an axe, nails, or spikes. Always obey the law. Hunt Safe! Remember that you are a guest on another person's

property. Make an effort to express your appreciation for the opportunity to hunt the land. The wise hunter might also: Let landowner know when you have completed your hunt. The landowner may want to let others hunt on their land. Offer to share any game (cleaned) with the landowner. Follow up with a token of appreciation such as a gift certificate to a restaurant or perhaps a card with a hand-written note. (Alcohol is not a proper gift.) At all times remember that landowners who give you permission to hunt their property are doing you a favor.



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## Squirrel hunting tips and strategies

Now you see them, now you don't. Fleeting glimpses are often the most positive results of early-season squirrel hunts. Spotting a tree squirrel is difficult enough in early fall while leaves are still on the trees. Seeing them long enough to make a shot can be downright frustrating.

**STRATEGY TIME** Catching squirrels unaware is the trick to early-season hunting. Seeing one climb up a tree is not enough. You might wait there a long time and not see it again. Once it gets up among the treetop leaves, it might go anywhere. You might not be able to find it even if it stays in that same tree, and you might not be able to follow it if it runs through the limbs to another tree.

Do you move, or do you wait? The problem with moving is that it is very difficult to see squirrels before they see you. The problem with waiting is that you must be in just the right place or you will wait in vain.

**THE WAITING GAME** Your best chance to catch squirrels unaware is by sitting quietly in a place where you are confident that you will see squirrels. Scouting, of course, is the way to find such places. Of course, if you find squirrel food you will probably find squirrels, but there is more to it than that. Squirrels eat various mast crops, particularly nuts. They prefer some nuts over

others and at different times of the year. This varies from area to area. One of the biggest problems with early-season hunting is that the nuts might not yet have fallen on their own. As early as September, squirrels may be high in the trees cutting nuts loose, sometimes too high to reach with a shotgun. Waiting for the squirrels to come to the ground to retrieve the nuts they cut (which they may not do the same day) calls for a lot of patience and uses up a lot of hunting time.

Squirrels are also very fond of agricultural crops, with corn being the most common food in many areas. Hunting around corn fields offers the clear advantage of seeing more squirrels on the ground.

When food is plentiful, it is unlikely that you will find a concentration of squirrels in one place. There is no reason for them to congregate. Waiting for squirrels is best when food is scarce, especially the season after a year of abundant food and squirrels are plentiful. A remote corn field or a tree that has nuts will attract squirrels from a wide area.

If it is allowed where you hunt, use a .17- or .22-caliber rimfire rifle in a feeding or denning area. The relatively mild crack of these rifles does not scare squirrels nearly as much as the blast of a shotgun.

If you must use a shotgun, use the relatively quiet .410 if you have this option. A

.410 might be the optimum firearm for hunting squirrels. Anyone who is serious about this sport should consider owning one. Choked either full or modified, a .410 will reach out as far as a 12 gauge. The only difference is the amount of shot, which is not critical. Squirrels are not difficult targets for a shotgunner unless they are running in trees. Just a couple of No. 4 or No. 6 shot from a high-velocity load will dispatch a squirrel. However, do not use 3-inch magnum loads for squirrels. These contain more shot than standard loads, but the velocity is lower. Squirrels are tough, with tough skin. One shot pellet that completely penetrates does more good than a dozen that barely penetrate the skin.

You can expect to wait as much as 30 minutes after shooting a 12-gauge shotgun before squirrels will come out of hiding. A little simple math will demonstrate clearly that you will not have time to bag many squirrels during a late-afternoon hunt, even if things go right. Shooting more than three squirrels is very unlikely during a two-hour hunt.

**STILL-HUNTING** Waiting for squirrels is not the style of choice for some hunters. Some prefer to hunt on the move. Expert squirrel hunters have two distinctly different approaches to hunting squirrels on the move.

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