

What We Can Learn From Beginners

Hunting safety begins long before opening day.

Opening day. Many of us look forward to the first day of our hunting seasons with so much anticipation and excitement that it is difficult to describe. Each of us has preparation rituals and traditions and run over them in our eager mind months in advance.

Beginning hunters often look to the more experienced to establish these traditions, but perhaps we could learn something from our youth?

An experienced hunter might first think about the early morning rays breaking through the darkness and the repeated glances at a watch and scenery. Maybe your thoughts wind you through memorized wooded trails



in starlight, and climbing your tree stand. Or you might play over and over spotting that first, high flight of ducks, or the first point of your dog and the first swing of your shotgun.

Regardless of which opening day—or all of them—all experienced hunters look forward to our traditions, and we know we should prepare.

Practicing with a bow or shotgun, scouting game trails, fields and wetlands, setting up stands or blinds, or pacing out shooting lanes and trimming tree limbs are part of the preparation.

In the excitement, we're bound to forget something—a flashlight, a call, a knife, some elemental part of a decoy, and, hopefully, not a permit, license or signing a stamp.

What should be on the mind of our younger hunters are recent lessons learned about safety. And despite the number of seasons you have seen, you shouldn't neglect your safety preparation either.

Each year in Illinois, tragic hunting accidents continue to occur—some involving veteran hunters. While not all accidents could have been prevented, many could have been prevented if the hunter were better prepared and safety-aware, just as they were once as a beginner.

We should all strive to be safe and make this part of our opening day ritual. As a result, we'll return for the beginning of many opening days.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Marc Miller".

Marc Miller, Director

In order to meet growing demands, respond to the needs of today and streamline staff and volunteer efforts, the Department of Natural Resources is launching new, online hunter education training programs to supplement the programs which have been in existence since 1976.

Seasoned hunters are encouraged to access these interactive programs to learn about the latest in hunting programs and equipment, or before they venture afield to participate in a new sport. See pages 8-9 for details on this exciting opportunity to prepare yourself and new hunters for the upcoming season.