Back to Bowhunting

As the October 1 opening date for Illinois' statewide archery deer season draws near, restless sportsmen prepare for everything whitetail.

Story By Joe Bauer
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Ah, summer! That glorious time of the year filled with trips to the lake, barbeques with friends and drifting for catfish. As the northern hemisphere continues its trek around the sun, some folks begin to look forward to the splendors of fall.

I have to say fall is my favorite time of year. Look at everything that is happening during early fall. The baseball playoffs are in full swing. The football season is still in its infancy and I haven't yet had to give up on my beloved Vikings (Cubs fans, I feel your pain). The leaves start to change color and the air begins to cool to tolerable levels. But the best part of fall is the return of hunting season.

Sure, you had a couple of weeks of good dove hunting, but the season many have waited for is here. Archery deer season starts October 1. Hunting for deer with archery tackle has simply exploded in popularity in recent years. I figure this is for several reasons.

First, Illinois supports a large and healthy deer herd making the possibility of harvesting a deer a decent bet for hunters willing to put in the time. Second, archery hunting equipment has vastly improved over the years, making hunters more confident in their abilities. Third, it is a long season that stretches from the very beginning of October to nearly the middle of January giving the hunter greater opportunity than almost any other hunting season Illinois hosts.

Bowhunters have three favorite seasons: Opening day (Oct. 1), the November rut—and every other day of the long season which ends in January.

Because the season is so long, methods have a tendency to change during these three and a half months. There are still the givens. You need a bow, hunting license, habitat stamp, permit...and patience. From here, things can change from week to week.

Early in the season there are decisions to be made that involve the weather. "It's supposed to be 85 degrees this afternoon. The mosquitoes are going to eat me alive. Do I really want to go out in this?" "Thunderstorms. I don't think I need to be sitting in a tree on a metal stand during a thunderstorm." This, by the way, is a very wise decision.

There also are early season decisions made concerning deer movement. Deer are most active early and late and many hunters feel it is best served to hunt a few hours in the morning and a few hours in the evening.

As time wears on, the most exciting part of the season starts to emerge towards the end of October. The rut is getting fired up. The rut is the mating season of the white-tailed deer. It is a wonderful time of year when the bucks throw caution to the wind in search of a mate. Actually, as many mates as they can get their hooves on.

Hunting methods during the rut change and many hunters will tough it out in their tree stands all day for the chance at a deer. Bucks will roam the woods at all times of day and night and they will keep the does on the move as well. The weather is generally cooler and this is helpful when spending all day strapped to a tree. (You need to be strapped to your tree. Safety first.)

Many hunters will begin to use artificial lures and scents during the rut, some even earlier. I have never been a big fan of artificial scents, only because I have never learned to use them properly. I have been told by many a hunter whose abilities I respect that using scents incorrectly is a huge red flag to the deer. Improper use and you can spend the entire day with the only mammal you see being a squirrel that won't shut up. Besides, I spilled some in my truck once and I wasn't allowed in the shed (deer camp) for three weeks.

By the middle of December, the rut is waning and the deer have been through two firearm seasons and a muzzleloader season. Their movement seems more erratic with a general trend towards getting back to a schedule of early and late activity. By now, hopefully, most deer hunters have a deer or two in the freezer. An all-day haul in the deer stand doesn't seem like such a brilliant plan anymore. It also can get back to weather considerations. "Wow. Six below zero. I think I'm going back to sleep."

For some of us, thoughts now turn to waterfowl or upland game. There are a few, those hearty souls, the true die-hard archery hunters, that will brave the elements late in the season in continued pursuit of the famed Illinois white-tailed deer. I'm not one of them. The woods are all yours.

What time are the Vikings on?

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