



Hunting with Daughters

By: Keith Krantz

Being a hardcore, gun- and bow-carrying outdoorsman, initially inexperienced with children, I was rather shocked when all three of my kids turned out to be GIRLS! Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with girls, but I was unsure if I could get my "doll toters" interested in the outdoors or hunting. So at the tender age of three, I began taking them squirrel hunting. I quickly found out why, as a youngster, my Dad took me rabbit hunting with beagles. A three- or four-year-old can make as much noise as a whole pack of dogs!

While there are numerous ways to introduce daughters to hunting or other outdoor activities, the most important thing to remember is to make it FUN. This requires you

to focus on your daughter first and the activity second. I have always enjoyed walking in the woods, and that is a perfect way to start cultivating young hunters.

These early expeditions can be taken when the weather is nice and the kids can make noise without consequence. While learning how to climb over obstacles, and up and down slopes, you can begin training them to identify the things you see and hear, including animal signs and sounds. These adventures will also help your daughters become comfortable and competent outdoors, so when the time is right to take them hunting, they'll be ready and you'll know what to expect from them.

Because my two older daughters

had explored the woods for a number of years together and wanted to go hunting with Daddy, I chose to take both of them squirrel hunting. We mostly had a great time, but saw no squirrels. We did encounter countless other things and made so much noise in the process that I had an empty rifle before reaching the ridge line.

The "mostly" fun part occurred because I initially attempted to keep them quiet because I was hunting; they were spending time with Daddy. By the looks on their faces, I realized I was violating the fun rule. Keep in mind that my goal is to raise pro-hunters, if not hunters themselves -- not to fill my bag limit. Since then I've found that if I want them to experience a suc-



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My daughters and I have gone on numerous hunts since. One of the more memorable had my oldest, who was eight then, retrieving a gray squirrel I had shot. She asked to carry it and I agreed. While I continued scanning the trees for squirrels, I heard her singing softly. Turning around I found her sitting in the leaves, sun beams glinting off her beautiful blond hair and “dancing” the dead squirrel down a log. Clearly, girls are different!

I began teaching them how to shoot with an adult-sized .22 caliber, single-shot rifle when they were six or seven. But, due to their small stature, they had limited success. Recognizing this limitation, I purchased a small bolt-action, youth model .22 caliber, which has proven surprisingly accurate. Initially, all three daughters learned how to shoot (unsupported and supported) with the peep sites on. After they were comfortable using iron sites, I replaced them with a 3 x 9 power scope. To make target shooting more enjoyable, we began with water-filled pop cans and progressed to fruit and other small “reactive” targets. My buddy swears by charcoal briquettes. Throughout the numerous shooting sessions, I stressed muzzle control and gun safety. It has been fun watching them progress to be fairly accurate shooters.

successful hunt in terms of harvesting a squirrel, I only take one child at a time. While I still enjoy some solo squirrel hunts, I find myself going more often now because I try to take them individually at least a few times each season.

After my first family-sized, armed-hike experience, I took only my middle daughter (kindergarten age at the time) on the next squirrel hunt. She did exceptionally well. With her assistance, I shot two gray squirrels before her feet got soaked and we had to call it a morning.

Daughters may be different, but they also want to spend time with their Daddy. Take them for walks, share your knowledge and teach them to hunt; they'll love you for it.

Last year the older girls (aged 12 and 13 at the time) and I took and passed the Division of Natural Resources Hunter Safety Education class. While they weren't too excited about attending, they recognized that it would be helpful, and eventually a requirement. They benefited from the excellent

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The author with his daughter, Kelsie, then aged 4, who helped spot these squirrels.



Mary Jo Krantz with her first squirrel.



Kirsten Long, age 9, after her first youth gobbler hunt.



Ashley Thompson with her dad, Rich Thompson.



Keith Krantz

Target shooting is a good way to teach young people the importance of practicing.

instruction they received. It is always helpful to have the lessons you taught them repeated by others in authority, especially when they wear a badge!

With the successful completion of the Hunter Safety Education class and the years of walking, exploring and hunting with me, we took advantage of the early Youth Squirrel Season last fall. The great thing about these seasons is that the youth must do the hunting. It forces the adult to focus their attention on the child and her experience. My middle daughter shot and missed a squirrel in the morning,

and the oldest shot her first bushy-tail in the afternoon on this hunt. The experience was excellent and I was proud of both of them. They are learning that hunting and target practice is not the same thing. They are also learning gun handling safety and muzzle control in an actual hunting situation, which is different than on the range or in the classroom.

Growing up in agricultural Ohio, we had plenty of rabbits, quail and pheasants to pursue as youngsters. In West Virginia, forest wildlife (squirrels, turkeys and deer) are more plentiful. Unfortunately, I

see quite a few fathers training their kids to hunt deer to the exclusion of small game. This is a missed opportunity to learn and perfect woodsmanship, hunting, and marksmanship skills. It also means a chance to spend quality time with your kids. Additionally, there is a different pressure to succeed in small game hunting versus deer hunting. Small game hunting is more relaxed and allows the young hunter more opportunities to succeed. Many of our better hunters cut their teeth learning the oak/hickory woods and stalking squirrels with a rifle long before they pursued deer.

I am a firm believer in training children in the rapidly declining art of woodsmanship through hunting small game and eventually deer. Woodsmanship skills include learning to identify hard and soft mast trees that squirrels and other game use for food, identifying animal signs and activity, finding and stalking prey, and negotiating a path through the forest. These skills are not developed hunting over a bait pile of corn!

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Top Five Ways to Cultivate Young Hunters

1. **Start young.** Take your children on walks or "expeditions" in the woods.
2. **Have FUN!** Tired, cold and miserable is not a fun condition for children. Practice shooting inanimate objects that pop or burst.
3. **Take a hunters education course.** Firearm safety is essential.
4. **Take advantage of Youth Seasons.** Yes, it *is* all about your kids.
5. **Don't forget small game.** They were good enough for you and your ancestors — your children will enjoy hunting them as well.



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Go on hikes, share outdoor lessons and have fun!