

Effective Camouflage for Archers

Many bowhunters rely too heavily on camouflage gear and too lightly on smart concealment tactics. Camo clothes and camo equipment are certainly essential in hunting. An animal's eyes are quick to pick up solid, off-color objects in the woods - particularly when these objects move. If you do not wear a broken pattern of contrasting, woodsy colors, a deer, elk or bear will instantly see your telltale human shape.

If you fail to conceal your face with a headnet or camouflage makeup, you might also tip off game. And, if you carry a bow, arrows, quiver, backpack or any other item with very light, very dark or mirror-like surfaces, you will surely frighten animals.

Nonetheless, all such precautions are fruitless without sensible hunting tactics. Only when you combine the right camouflage with the right moves can you artfully compromise game.

Clothes and Equipment That Work

Modern hunters have access to a wealth of commercial camouflage. Two or three decades ago, we were limited to a few patterns like Vietnam jungle and World War 11 Leaf. Such military camo was generally too dark for average autumn hunting and sold in noisy, hard-weave fabrics like 60/40 blend and ripstop nylon.

Today, sporting goods stores are packed with practical camo duds. Top patterns break up the human outline with sharply contrasting, fairly large patches of color. Ideally, such contrast works well up close and equally well beyond 20 or 30 yards.

Realtree's new Hardwoods 20-200 pattern is typical. Its very name implies effectiveness at 20 yards and 200 yards, and the name certainly fits the product.

When selecting any camouflage garment, be sure to back away and view it from as far away as store aisles allow. If it blends into one solid-seeming blob beyond 15 or 20 yards, it won't hide you from animals.

Today, fabrics like fleece, wool, worsterlon and saddle cloth ensure quiet movement in the field. When you combine concealment with silence, you can be an effective predator.

For average autumn big game habitats, nothing can beat patterns like Advantage, Realtree X-tra Brown, Mossy Oak BreakUp, Skyline Apparition or Predator Fall Grey. In the snow, a pattern of mixed white-and-brown or white-and-grey makes you virtually disappear. Top patterns include Snow Shadow and 3-D Snow. Desert and snow patterns also perform well in tree stands without heavy surrounding foliage. Tans, greys and whites blend well against a webwork of thin limbs, leaves and a blue or cloudy sky. Such light colors are much better than darker traditional bowhunting patterns.

There is also the so-called 3-D camo, which consists of thin fabric overlaid by loose, protruding leafy shapes of cloth. Modern offerings like the "Leafy-Lite" suit from Robinson Labs and the Camo-Tex suit from Cabelas are thinner, less bulky versions of "ghillie suits" used by the U.S. Military for many years.

In a coloration like Realtree X-tra Brown or Mossy Oak BreakUp, 3-D camo yields the best-ever concealment from wary game. The reason? Your human outline is physically destroyed by ragged rows of leaves as well as contrasting colors. If you stay still, game will not recognize you. However, if the bowstring snags leafy fabric on your chest or forearm, your shot may well miss. Consider a chest protector and large armguard to flatten clothes.

Complimenting your camo garments with other gear is also necessary: bows, arrows, packs, etc. also need to be concealed. Small pieces of gear need not be camo, provided these do not reflect light, but complete camouflage certainly never hurts.

Essential Camouflage Tactics

A bowhunter must use terrain and foliage to their best advantage. When hunting by foot, you should slip behind ridges and rocks, along ravine bottoms and hollows and against treelines and edges of brush. In elevated stands, you should choose platform sites with the heaviest possible cover behind and to the sides. If you stroll across ridgetops or open fields, every animal in the neighborhood will flee. If you perch like a buzzard beside naked, limbless tree trunks, it will not matter how high your stand happens to be. Deer will see you from a distance and run.

Using sunlight and shadow is key to hiding from spooky modern game. Wise bowhunters lurk in the deep shade whenever possible and move as slow as a turtle when they find themselves in the sun. If the situation allows, canny archers walk or sit where most animals are forced to look towards a low morning or evening sun. Sunlight dazzles animals eyes the same as it dazzles yours, so keep the sun behind you whenever you can.

Finally, never forget that movement alerts wary animals above all else. Camouflage clothes and dull-surfaced hardware let you move slowly in many close-range hunting situations. But nothing hides quick movement from the razor-sharp eyeballs of deer, elk, bear and other wary targets.