

All About Bowhunting Sights

There are more excellent hunting bow sights available at reasonable prices today than ever before. Bow sight design and manufacture are evolving rapidly, the result being innovations like easy-to-see sight pins and/or stadia wires, easily-adjustable sights featuring fewer and fewer moving parts and compact construction are becoming common.

Sighting Systems

A bow sight is part of a total sighting system that can include a peep sight or kissers button as well as some "add-on" sight accessories like small lights for illuminating the top sight pin in dim light. Peep sights, which force you to keep your head erect and anchor consistently, are used by most archers today.

More and more bowhunters are shooting a peep today simply because it helps them shoot more accurately. One reason is that most all top 3-D shooters are using peeps and bowhunters feed off their success.

It also takes much more practice time to become a good shooter without a peep than with one and that's something most bowhunters don't have these days."

The key to using a peep sight for bowhunting is to make sure the aperture is as large as possible. This lets in the maximum amount of light, critical when you're trying to find your pins or stadia wire at dawn or dusk and won't noticeably affect accuracy when hunting.

Fixed-Pin Sights

By far the most popular sight type today, fixed-pin sights offer tremendous flexibility in that several sight pins can be added or removed as your needs dictate. Each pin can be set for a precise distance. Shots taken when not at these distances -- as most shots at animals are sighted at "between the pins." Because of the simple design of most fixed-pin sights, they can be made with few moving parts and constructed like a rock.

The choices between the sight pins themselves are varied.

Small-diameter pins are best when distances are long and the light is good, with larger-diameter pins better in lower light. For many years the only pins available were either 6/32-inch or 8/32-inch, but now many sights feature .019 diameter in both the crosshair and pin models.

The first sight pins designed to help bowhunters see in dim light are fast being replaced by the new wave of fiber-optic sight pins. These pins gather the maximum amount of available light in dim light conditions when deer and other big game animals are most active, making shots possible earlier and later in the day than ever before without the use of electronic lights.

Crosshair Sights

Crosshair sights are excellent hunting sights. They function the same as pin sights do with horizontal stadia wires moved up or down to place the arrow on target at a specific distance. The vertical stadia wire helps the shooter from inadvertently letting the bow

cant left or right during the shot and also helps when shooting between the pins. The best however are built to take the inevitable bumps and bruises a bowhunter will give it.

Movable- Pin Sights

The theory behind bow sights with movable pins is that by moving the sight pin to adjust to the target distance the archer could always aim with his pin dead-on the target, thus eliminating the guesswork of shooting between the pins. The ideal situation would permit the archer to dial in the distance to the target with a range finder before coming to full draw. If you are in a stand and know the exact distance to your likely target, a movable sight may work, if you are sure the animal is going to be where you expect it.

Pendulum Sights

Designed expressly for the tree stand hunter, pendulum sights feature a single horizontal cross wire or pin that is permitted to freely pivot on a hinge so it rises as you take aim closer to the base of your tree and drops as you aim farther away.

Together with a fixed vertical stadia wire, the two give a precise aiming point out to 30 to 35 yards, the exact distance being directly proportional to arrow speed. Beyond that distance the system breaks down. Some pendulum sights attack this problem by adding a couple of fixed horizontal pins or stadia wires to give the shooter an aiming point at longer distances.

The better pendulum sights will allow you to adjust the length of the pivoting arm thereby fine-tuning the sight for your own individual arrow speed. However, sights without this feature give acceptable accuracy at the distances at which they are designed to be used. One disadvantage of some pendulum sights is that they tend to be a bit noisy and their moving parts can break or stick.

Important Hunting Sight Features

When it comes to hunting bow sights, the KISS principal-Keep It Simple, Stupid-certainly applies. Those bow sights with the fewest movable parts, least number of screws and knobs, that need the fewest number of different Allen head wrenches to adjust and secure are compact and relatively light weight are the ones that will cause you the least grief over time.

The better sights have simple vertical and horizontal adjustments. Many of today's sights also permit the entire sight pin block to be moved as a single entity while maintaining the solid integrity of the sight. This is a great feature, especially if you sight the bow in, then bump the sight bracket or find the bow goes out of tune just a bit and you are forced to adjust the arrow rest or move the nock point slightly to regain the tune you want. You then must re-sight in only one pin- usually a mid-range pin-and the others are going to be very close to exactly on the money. This will save you a bundle of time.

One often-overlooked hunting sight feature is a rugged pin or stadia wire guard.

A pin guard cannot be too beefy. After dinging pins for many years, I have often cannibalized a bow sight I didn't particularly like just to get it's oversized pin guard for one I did like to shoot.

Some bow sights feature a beefy clear plastic pin guard that does two things-protects the sight's fiber optic sight pins and allows in additional light for easier aiming in low-light situations.

Hunting sights must also attach securely to the bow riser. Some attach directly to the riser with two large screws, while many more use a dovetail mounting system. The dovetail system provides the most flexibility while still holding the sight in place like cement. With a dovetail mount you can easily remove the bow sight for transportation then reattach it quickly and easily. One helpful hint is to mark the edge of the both the male dovetail and female dovetail bracket with the sight attached with white paint or an indelible marker. This way you can be sure that the sight is replaced in precisely the same position each and every time, assuring a consistent point of impact. To minimize any noise that may be created where the bow sight attaches to the riser, pad both the riser and the bottom of my sight's dovetail bracket with a small piece of stick-on felt.

With today's speed bows, stacking the sight pins becomes necessary in order to have a pin set at the distances most of us like to set our sight pins at - 20, 30, 40, and 50 yards. When selecting a bow sight with this feature try and choose one with as few moving parts as possible. There are several available like this, but also many with lots of thin arms for each pin that will certainly rattle loose at just the wrong moment.

Choosing a Hunting Sight

There's no secret formula in choosing a hunting bow sight except to select one that fits your shooting style, hunting technique and personal preferences. With sight design and technology changing rapidly, the best way to see what's out there is to visit a well-stocked archery pro shop and look over several different makes, models and designs. Ask the shop owner to let you shoot a couple of different sights on the indoor range to get a feel for them. If two or three appeal to you about the same, make your final decision based upon the KISS principle.

However, KISS doesn't include the word "cheap." To avoid heartbreak at the wrong time -- like when a good buck finally walks into range after a season of searching -- buy the best bow sight you can afford. Then take your time and precisely adjust the pins or crosshair stadia wires until you know exactly where your bow is shooting at various distances.