

...Dove Season

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Have valid hunting licenses, stamps and permits: Hunters must purchase valid hunting licenses for the 2024-25 before hitting the field. Hunters must also have a Migratory Game Bird Endorsement (Stamp) and Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification to hunt dove.

In addition to obtaining the above licenses and endorsements, purchasing an Annual Public Hunting Permit (APH) gives hunters access to more than one million acres throughout the year to hunt multiple species. This must be purchased in addition to a hunting license.

Have Hunter Education Certification: Game wardens across the state say the number one problem they run into is the lack of hunter education, which is required for anyone born after Sept. 1, 1971. TPWD's Hunter Education certification is valid for life and is honored in all other states and provinces. Texas also honors Hunter Education certification obtained in other states but hunters must be able to provide proof upon request. Hunters can find more information on requirements, exemptions or print a replacement card at no cost online.

"I highly recommend everyone stepping out into the field to hunt, whether they are exempt or not, obtain their Hunter Education Certification," said Roel Cantu Jr., Hidalgo County game warden. "Many of the safety issues and violations we run into are topics covered in the course that could have been easily prevented if the hunter had received that prior education."

Know your firearm and handle it safely: The safest practice when handling firearms of any kind is to treat them like they are loaded. Maintain muzzle awareness, avoid pointing at any accidental targets and always have the safety engaged until you're ready to fire. It's also important to make sure you use the correct ammunition for your shotgun. Using the wrong size shell can result in accidents and injuries.

"Accidents can happen quickly and can result in very unfortunate outcomes," said Kevin Frazier, Frio County game warden. "I've seen things as simple as not being aware your shotgun is loaded while packing the ATV or falling while walking through the field carrying a gun with the safety off end in injuries to others or the hunters themselves."

Hunt with a legal firearm: A shotgun is the only legal firearm for hunting migratory game birds. It also must not be larger than 10-gauge, and if applicable, must be plugged. When purchasing a new shotgun, pay attention to what is in the box, wardens caution. While manufacturers sell shotguns with plugs, they may not be installed in the gun.

"Because our very mission

statement is to conserve wildlife resources for present and future generations, many of our laws and regulations are based upon the 'fair chase principle,'" said Drew Spencer, Lubbock County game warden. "One such example pertaining to dove hunting is that shotguns cannot be capable of holding more than three shells at any given time, including one in the chamber."

Know your target and what's behind it: Stay within your lane of fire so you aren't shooting toward anyone else. Don't shoot toward people or homes and know how far your shot can travel. While not required on private property, Fraiser recommends wearing hunter orange clothing if hunting in a group for high visibility.

"With many of our area properties being rural and unfenced, I occasionally see hunters getting lax regarding shooting over or across our many dirt county roads," said Spencer. "Those are still public roadways and still a public safety issue. We want to encourage mindfulness when it comes to shot angles and direction."

Don't trespass: Hunters are responsible for knowing property boundaries and making sure they have landowner consent. This applies to hunting and retrieving birds from neighboring properties. If pellets cross onto another property, that is considered trespass by projectile, which is a violation and potentially unsafe.

"If you are invited on a hunt or book one online, do your homework first," said Frazier. "I've run into instances where hunters book a hunt online, believing they have landowner consent to hunt a property when in fact, it was a scam neither the landowner nor hunter were aware of. I recommend doing some research to make sure things are legitimate."

Follow state and federal regulations, including daily bag and possession limits: Be aware of what zone you're hunting in and what the daily bag and possession limits are. Hunters must also keep their birds separate and identifiable from other hunters' birds. This will make interactions with wardens smoother and faster and is required by law while in the field and absent proper documentation.

Hunters in the South Zone should be aware of dates for the special white-wing dove days, which can be found in the Texas Outdoor Annual. Additionally, hunters are responsible for knowing whether they're hunting a baited area or not. Hunting over a baited field is prohibited by federal and state law.

"A fairly common violation we run into is hunters trying to 'double dip,'" said Cameron Ramsey, Coleman County game warden. "Fifteen birds per day means 15 birds per day. Not 15 birds every time you go out to the field. If you reach your limit in the morning, you can't hunt again until the next day."

Bring the kids: Involving children in hunting is vital to continuing the hunting heritage of Texas.

Wardens recommended eye and hearing protection for children and adults.

"I love to see people take their children hunting," said Cody Buckaloo, Medina County game warden. "We want future generations to get involved and the best way to do so is by making that a safe and memorable experience for them and setting a good example through ethical hunting practices and adherence to safety."

Be weather aware: Elevated temperatures will likely continue through the first part of dove season. Being aware of temperatures, staying hydrated and taking proper precautions is vital. If you feel dizzy or begin to exhibit signs of heat exhaustion, let someone know and find a spot to cool off. You should also always make sure someone knows your plans for the hunt like where you'll be, when you'll be done, etc.

Don't forget about your four-legged friends. If you are hunting with dogs, make sure to bring plenty of water for them and monitor them closely for signs of heat stress.

Leave the alcohol at camp: Alcohol and firearms don't mix. Consuming alcohol while hunting can lead to careless actions and potential accidents. It's best to avoid it.

At the end of the day, the best tip is to practice common courtesy.

Wardens enjoy getting out in the field, engaging with hunters and want every contact to be positive. Having your license and other documentation readily available, leaving heads or fully feathered wings attached

for bird identification, and unloading your shotgun before handing it over for inspection go a long way.

"I always appreciate when everyone in the group stops hunting while I'm doing a compliance check," said Calvin Atkinson, Cameron County game warden. "It can make things difficult and even unsafe if you continue hunting while a warden is checking your hunting partner's information. Pausing to get your stuff together will make the entire contact go quicker so you can get back to hunting and I can hit the road to the next field."

Many of the tips above focus on regulations and the issues wardens commonly come across in the field. All hunting regulations for this year's hunting season can be found in the? Texas Outdoor Annual mobile app? or at? _OutdoorAnnual.com. Being aware of the specific regulations for the county you are hunting in and the species you are pursuing will likely alleviate many of the above problems.

Apply to be part of TFB's Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee

By Julie Tomascik

Nominations are open for young farmers, ranchers and agricultural professionals to serve on Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) Advisory Committee.

"The YF&R Advisory Committee helps grow the future of Texas Farm Bureau and Texas agriculture," said Roger Hall, associate director of Organization Division, Leader Development. "Serving on the committee is an opportunity to make a real impact by collaborating with fellow young

producers who are passionate and dedicated."

The committee will consist of a minimum of eight and a maximum of 15 members. There are five members returning and up to 10 open positions.

Committee members will serve a one-year term for a maximum of three years if they are between the ages of 18 and 35 on or before Feb. 1 of the year in which they serve.

"Young producers and agricultural professionals can step up, share their insights and help guide Farm Bureau's future," Hall said. "Now is a great time to get involved."

Advisory committee members are responsible for recommending, promoting and evaluating programs and activities that encourage young people to become involved in Farm Bureau at the local, state and national levels.

The committee plans the YF&R Spring Conference and Fall Tour, as well as some regional meetings. Committee members also visit Washington, D.C. to discuss agricultural issues with Congressional lawmakers.

"This is an opportunity to contribute to agriculture, grow your network and develop leadership skills," Hall said.

Farm Bureau encourages individuals from diverse backgrounds, industries and experiences to apply.

The committee members will be selected at large through the nomination process.

The nomination form is available online at texasfarmbureau.org/YFR.

Completed nominations, which include a county Farm Bureau president's signature, must be submitted to youngfarmers@txfb.org by Sept. 30.

Contact Hall at rhall@txfb.org or 254-399-5021 with questions.

Please Pray for our Communities, Our County, Our State and Our Country

