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Preparing Yourself for Climbing Stand Hunting

I have hunted in various stands in my life. The most versatile is the climbing stand. The climbing stand is a two-piece stand that you use to shimmy your way up a sturdy tree (preferably a pine tree). I have hunted in these stands for over ten years. I am more than comfortable guiding young or inexperienced hunters to use this type of stand. These stands are useful and versatile in many situations; they are also some of the most dangerous stands to use. These stands require finding an ideal area, preparing the said area, and making the changes in the area.

Step one is find an ideal location. An important first step when choosing a location to stay away from other hunters. This is for safety and common courtesy; no one wants to be interrupted when hunting. Next, survey your area. Look for white oak trees (fifty to forty-foot-high tree, white/ grey bark, and large, green acorns in or around the trees). The white oak is a deer’s favorite food source. You would also like to have a few creeks near your area. White oaks grow near creeks, so if you have found them, you are near one. Creeks are a main source of water for deer so heavy traffic will be expected. After you’ve found a creek and white oaks, make sure you have plenty of cover. The last thing you want in your area is to be out in the open. Make sure there is plenty of ground cover, bushes, shrubs, and small trees to cover you as you move through the woods. The last thing you MUST check in your area is any dead trees. You can easily identify these trees by the starch-white bark and lack of branches. These trees could fall at any time. It could be ten years from now or ten minutes. If you do find a dead tree in your area, move to a safe distance away from the tree. DO NOT TAKE SAFETY LIGHTLY!!! If these trees fall on you, they will kill you. Best not to go near them for any reason. These are the steps in finding an ideal area to hunt; now you need to begin setting it up.

Step two is setting up your area. When you begin to set up your area, you need to search for a pine tree (a sixty to seventy-foot-high tree, straw-like leaves, and pine cones on or around the base of the tree) to hang your stand in. you use pine trees because the loose bark of the tree can easily be pierced by the “teeth” on the stand. The teeth are a gripping tool that helps keep the stand attached to the selected tree. After you have found the ideal tree, attach your stand to the tree using the chain on the back of the stand. Make sure that the bolts on the stand are tight and secure. Double check your safety harness to make sure it is attached to the tree properly as well as to yourself. After you have checked and rechecked all the safety equipment, begin shimmying your way up the tree. Do not climb any higher than around thirty feet. The average human can survive a fall from thirty feet. This does not mean you should be expecting to fall; this is just a safety procedure to make sure that if the worst case were to happen, you would be okay. While you are in the tree, look for dead limbs that could potentially be hazardous. If dead limbs are present, try to remove them as long as they are not too large. After you are comfortable with your tree, look down below and mark any kill zones (areas that you could easily see/shoot a deer). If you are by yourself, mark them mentally in your head. If you have a partner with you, have him/her mark them for you. After you have completed this step, you can start making any final changes that your area needs.

Step three is making changes to the area. Climb back down the tree, and go to the spots you marked in your head. Look closely at the area and clear out any vines or small branches that would otherwise become obstacles for your shot. Once you have cleared your kill zones, you can add a bait of your choosing to the areas, such as corn, hay, or doe estrus (which is basically doe urine). An important thing to remember is not to damage the surrounding areas by cutting too much vegetation or by leaving the trash from your bait scattered everywhere. Be sure to follow the Leave No Trace Rule. The rule is to clean up after yourself, do not leave anything that could damage the environment, and try to leave the area better than when you found it. After you have successfully followed all the steps, give the area time to settle. You just caused a lot of commotion in the woods, and you need to stay away for at least a few days to give the animals time to get used to the new subtle changes in their environment. After a few days have passed, give the area a try. If you do not see anything the first day that is fine. Consistency is the key to hunting. If you do not see anything in a few weeks; however, it might be a sign that you need to change locations. If that is the case, start back from step one, and try your luck in a different area.

These are the steps I have learned to follow when hunting with a climbing stand. This is a very fun and rewarding form of hunting. As long as you do not hunt recklessly and follow all safety protocols, then you will have an excellent time. I have hunted with climbing stands for around ten years my grandfather taught me everything about the trade. You have been given all the basic instructions on how to successfully hunt with these stands. Good luck in the woods!