



# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SADDLE HUNTING

SADDLE HUNTING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED. GET STARTED TODAY WITH THIS ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUE.



# INTRODUCTION TO SADDLE HUNTING

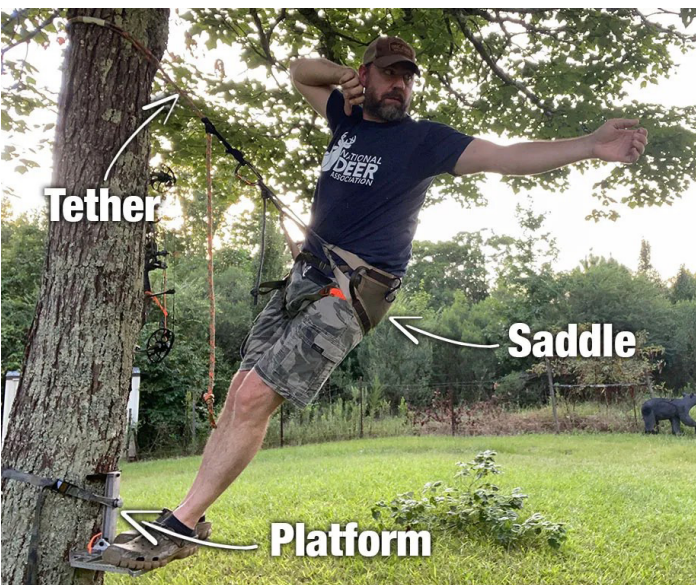
When I first looked into saddle hunting, I was overwhelmed. There seemed to be lots of equipment options, unlimited ways to climb a tree, and modifications to be made on every piece of gear. And no two saddle hunters seemed to agree on what equipment I needed or how to use it.

But once I finally bought my gear and got started, I realized it didn't have to be complicated at all. All you really need is some basic equipment and plenty of practice to get started. Once you learn the ropes (pun intended) and get comfortable in the saddle, *then* you can look into upgrading or modifying equipment, if you want.

My goal with this guide is to walk you through the basics of what you need to know and buy to get started in as simple terms as possible. If you have any questions after reading this, please don't hesitate to drop me an email at [brian@mobiledeerhunter.com](mailto:brian@mobiledeerhunter.com).

## What is Saddle Hunting?

Saddle hunting is a method of elevated hunting that involves wearing a tree saddle or harness (similar to a rock climbing harness) that is tethered to a tree with ropes. The hunter typically rests their feet on a small platform or ring of steps and leans away from the tree,



with their weight supported by the tether rope.

If that sounds confusing, we've included a photo below to help you get a visual.

## Why Saddle Hunt?

While I really enjoy hunting from a tree saddle, I wouldn't say it's any better than hunting from a treestand or ground blind. It's really a matter of personal preference.

If you only have a short walk to your hunting spot, and comfort is your primary concern, then a climber or ladder stand may be a better option for you.

Where a saddle really shines is when you have long walks to where you hunt and want to stay mobile. Saddle hunting also gives you more tree options as opposed to a climber because you can maneuver around limbs without too much trouble.

Let's take a look at some of the most obvious pros and cons of saddle hunting.

## PROS

- Extremely lightweight and mobile setup
- Unlimited tree options Can shoot nearly 360 degrees
- Because you're facing the tree, it's easier to hide from approaching deer

## CONS

- Takes time to get used to hunting from a tree saddle
- Can be difficult to shoot to your weak side
- Comfortable, but probably not as much as a good climber

# BASIC SADDLE HUNTING EQUIPMENT

From the outside looking in, saddle hunting can appear extremely complicated. It's not.

At its core, saddle hunters only need five pieces of gear to get started:

1. **Hunting saddle**
2. **Ropes (a lineman's and tether rope)**
3. **Saddle hunting platform**
4. **Climbing sticks**
5. **Backpack**

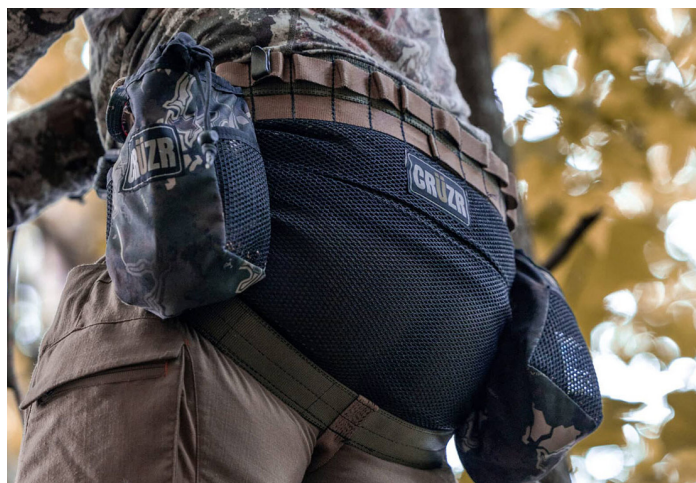
Yes, there are plenty of accessories available to simplify the process or keep you more comfortable in the tree, but most of those are not necessary initially.

In this chapter, I'll break down the five key pieces of gear you'll need to get started and what you can expect to pay for each.

## Hunting Saddle

The centerpiece of your saddle hunting gear is the saddle itself. The saddle dictates how comfortable you are in the tree, which ultimately determines how long you can hunt and remain still. That's why it's critical to spend time trying different hunting saddle models before you spend your hard-earned money.

Before I get too far ahead of myself, though, I should



first explain what a hunting saddle is. A hunting saddle is like a rock climbing harness with a seat sewn into it. They typically have a waist strap, a strap around each leg, a fabric seat that supports your butt, and a bridge rope on the front that connects to the tether rope which then connects to the tree.

There are several different types of saddles being manufactured today, including a single panel, a two-panel, and a hybrid, pleated single panel. There are some other options out there, but most of the popular hunting saddles fall into one of the three categories above.



Expect to pay anywhere from \$150 to over \$400 for a good hunting saddle. If you're brand new to saddle hunting, I would recommend buying a kit from a reputable manufacturer that will include the saddle, ropes and carabiners needed.

## Ropes

Aside from the saddle, you'll need a couple of ropes. One is your tether and the other is a lineman's rope. When saddle hunting, the tether rope is what goes around the tree once you're at hunting height and fastens to the bridge rope on your saddle with a carabiner. It's your lifeline in the tree.

Tethers are typically around 8 feet long and come in





a couple of different diameters — a smaller 8mm or a larger 10-11mm (more on that below). The tether will have a loop on one end and a knot on the other, with a prussic knot that can be positioned anywhere on the rope as needed with a carabiner.

The second rope you'll need is the lineman's rope, which is very similar to the tether, but with two carabiners — one on the prussic knot like the tether and one on the loop end.

If you've ever used climbing sticks and a hang-on stand, then you've probably used a lineman's rope. It goes around the tree, attaching to each side of your saddle with a carabiner to keep you connected to the tree so you can hang climbing sticks and a platform hands-free.

### Saddle Hunting Platform

As you hang in a tree from your saddle, you'll want a place to rest your feet. That's where a platform comes into play. Think of it as a very small hang-on stand minus the seat.

Saddle hunting platforms come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and weights. Which you ultimately choose

depends on whether you're more concerned about foot room and being able to move around or minimizing weight. You'll also want to consider the design, finish, and grip of the platform to make sure it suits your needs.

### Climbing Sticks

The next piece of equipment you need for saddle hunting is a way to get up the tree. While there are several options for this, including screw-in steps, strap-on steps, and even climbing spurs, the most popular options — and the only one I'd recommend for new saddle hunters — are climbing sticks.

If you think there's an abundance of platform options out there, then you'll really be overwhelmed by the number of climbing sticks on the market. And because there are so many options, we created a separate article highlighting some of the best climbing sticks on the market.

### Saddle Hunting Pack

The final thing you need to saddle hunt is a backpack to carry in all your gear. For saddle hunting, not just any pack will do. You need one that will easily carry your platform and climbing sticks, along with all your traditional hunting gear like a knife, calls, extra layers of clothes, snacks, and anything else you routinely carry into the woods with you.



# KEY SADDLE HUNTING ACCESSORIES

While you may only need the five items to start saddle hunting, there are plenty of accessories that will make life easier for you. Some of them serve to keep your gear organized and accessible, while others make saddle hunting more comfortable than it would be without them.

Here are seven accessories that will help you take your saddle hunting game to the next level:

1. **Ascenders**
2. **Climbing stick aiders**
3. **Knee pads or a knee cushion**
4. **Backband or recliner**
5. **Gear strap or gear holder**
6. **Clips or gear ties**
7. **Saddle gear bags/haulers**

Climbing up a tree is one of the most labor intensive and potentially dangerous aspects of saddle hunting. The right climbing accessories can make all the difference in terms of safety, efficiency, and ease of use. In this section, we'll explore two common accessories used to ascend and descend the tree.

## **Ascender (Ropeman 1 or Kong Duck)**

An ascender like the Ropeman 1 or Kong Duck, while not necessary, is a popular accessory for saddle hunting. It is a mechanical device that replaces the prusik knot on your tether and/or lineman's rope. Unlike a prusik



knot, it allows you to adjust your tether or lineman's rope length quickly with just one hand as opposed to two.

The Ropeman 1 is rated for ropes 10-13mm in diameter, while the Kong Duck will work on ropes from 8-13mm. So, if you plan on using smaller ropes to shave some weight and space in your pack, you'll probably want to go with the Kong Duck. However, if you're using standard 11mm ropes, you can save a few bucks with the Ropeman 1.

## **Climbing Stick Aiders**

The second and last climbing accessory on our list is aiders for your climbing sticks. Aiders are small "ladders" made from rope, nylon webbing or cable, that attach to the bottom of your climbing stick, essentially extending the length of each stick. They typically have anywhere from one to four steps.

Aiders are extremely light and affordable, making them a great alternative to buying extra climbing sticks. The downside is that because they are made of rope or nylon strapping, they aren't as stable as a climbing stick. The more steps the aider has, the more likely it is to kick out from the tree while climbing, which can result in a fall. So keep that in mind as you choose which aiders to buy.

A lot of saddle hunters will add a three- or four-step aider to their bottom stick, where if it were to kick out





they wouldn't fall far, and then use one- or two-step aiders on the rest of their sticks. Personally, I stick with one-step aiders on all my Tethrd One climbing sticks.

Once you're up the tree, comfort becomes key. In this section, we'll take a look at the different accessories you can use to stay comfortable during a long hunt.

### **Knee Pads or a Knee Cushion**

Most saddle hunters spend at least some of their time in the tree sitting, which typically means your knees are up against the tree, supporting some of your weight. If you have bony knees like I do, that means you're going to get very uncomfortable very quickly. An easy fix is a good set of knee pads or a knee cushion.

The good news is that knee pads are readily available, fairly inexpensive, and most any pair will get the job done. Obviously some fit better and are more comfortable than others, but you don't need anything fancy to get the job done.

Some saddle hunters, myself included, don't care about wearing knee pads. Knee pads have a tendency to shift around and the straps can wear on the back of your knee, causing discomfort. For me a better option is to strap a cheap foam hunting seat to the tree and lean my knees against that when I feel the urge to sit in my saddle.

You can pick up those cheap foam seats, throw on a nylon strap long enough to reach around any tree you may hunt, and you're ready to go.

### **Backband or Recliner**

When it comes to saddle hunting comfort, you won't spend a better \$30 than on a backband or "recliner". The backband is a really simple nylon strap that forms a loop. The loop hooks into the same carabiner as your saddle's bridge rope, then goes around your body just under your arms.

The portion of the strap that goes behind your back is padded, and there are adjusters on each side of the band so you can tailor it to your size and how far back you

want to lean.

The sole purpose of the backband or recliner is to provide support for your back while in the saddle. When a deer approaches and you're ready to draw your bow (providing you're bowhunting), you simply lean forward and the backband slips down on your body and out of the way.

Deer hunting requires a lot of gear, and keeping it all organized in the tree can be a challenge. There are several saddle hunting accessories that can make all the difference in terms of keeping your gear easily accessible and organized, including the three discussed below.

### **Gear Strap or Gear Holder**

While you could get by without many of the accessories on our list, a gear strap or gear holder is an absolute necessity. You have to have a place to hang your hunting gear so it's easily accessible to you in the tree, and a gear strap/hanger is your best option.

Most of these gear straps are constructed of a nylon strap that loops around the tree, with a series of loops sewn on the strap where you hang your gear using a variety of clip types. This is where I hang my rangefinder, grunt call during the pre rut and rut, binoculars, my backpack, and sometimes my bow. I say sometimes, because if I'm hunting an area that allows me to use a screw-in bow hanger, then that's what I use. If not, I attach a Hero Clip to my gear strap and hang my bow on that.

### **Clips or Gear Ties**

There's a wide variety of molle clips that will work with your gear strap, or the popular Nite Ize Gear Ties that will work to attach your gear to the gear strap. Get enough for all your gear, plus extras.

For your bow or gun, you'll want something that can handle the weight. Many saddle hunters use a Hero Clip for the task. There are certainly other options out there, but I haven't found a better one.

Saddle Gear Bags/Haulers

Saddle gear bags or haulers are accessories that are used to transport equipment while hunting. They typically attach to the saddle and provide a convenient location to store and carry items that you use the most.

I have a gear bag on each side of my hunting saddle, and it’s where I keep my gear strap, pull rope for my bow, headlamp, bow release, and my rangefinder. Once I’m up in the tree and get my gear strap on the tree, and hang my rangefinder on the strap, I now have an empty pocket that I use to keep my cell phone easily accessible.

Final Thoughts

Saddle hunting can seem complicated and gear-intensive to someone just getting started, but it’s really not. Once you have your five key pieces of gear to get started — your saddle, ropes, platform, climbing sticks, and a pack — there’s not a whole lot left you need.

Basic Equipment Cost Breakdown		
Item	Budget Price	High-End Price
Saddle Kit	\$200	\$500
Platform	\$70	\$300
Climbing Sticks	\$100	\$400
TOTAL	\$370	\$1,200

Accessory Cost Breakdown	
Accessory	Price Range
Ascenders	\$120.00
Backband	\$20-40
Gear Pouch	\$20-30
Gear Strap	\$20-30
Bow Hanger	\$15-30
Knee Pads	\$20-70
Saddle Pack	\$70-300
TOTAL COST	\$285 – \$620

GETTING STARTED

Once you have all your equipment, the only thing left to do is start practicing! And you should do plenty of that long before you ever climb a tree for an actual hunt.

Start by hanging your platform in a tree just a foot or so off the ground. This will not only give you a chance to practice hanging it and getting it snug on the tree, but you’ll also be able to adjust to using the saddle without any fear of falling.

Once you have your platform attached, put your saddle on and step onto the platform. Attach your tether rope around the tree at eye level. As you get more experience under your belt, you may want to play around with tether height to see what provides you with the most comfort, but eye level is a good starting point.

Hook your tether’s carabiner to the bridge rope on your saddle, and lock your carabiner shut. If your bridge rope

is adjustable (it should be), I would start with it near its maximum length. That should produce the least amount of hip pinch. Again, as you gain more experience, you can try different bridge rope lengths to see what works best for you.

You can now lean away from the tree, putting tension on the tether rope to hold you upright. Adjust your tether length by moving the prusic knot or ascender up and down the tether rope to find an angle where you feel most comfortable. Practice in the leaning position, as well as in the sitting position.

As you get used to maneuvering around in the saddle, you can start incorporating your bow (if you’re a bowhunter) into the mix to get used to shooting from the saddle. Practice shooting in all different directions so you can get a feel for how you will need to maneuver depending on which way a deer might come in.

You'll quickly discover strong-side shots (your left side if you're a right-handed shooter) are much easier to make than weak-side shots. But with practice, you should be able to shoot almost 360 degrees.

Once you've had time to get very comfortable at ground level, you can begin using your climbing sticks to get a little higher in the tree. Make sure you are using your lineman's rope to climb the tree and hang your sticks and platform. And don't disconnect that until you've hooked into your tether rope.

**You should be connected to the tree 100% of the time your feet are off the ground!**

As your comfort level increases, you can eventually practice a full hunting setup. Figuring out your process,

from how you pack your gear in, to setting up in the tree and organizing your gear, will take time. I'm three years in, and still regularly tweaking my setup.

I can promise you this, though. When you finally climb a tree for your first actual hunt in the saddle, you will thank me for all those practice sessions. Opening day is not the time to be figuring out how to use all your new gear.

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## 4 MISTAKES NEW SADDLE HUNTERS MAKE

While most hunters who try saddle hunting seem to stick with it, some growing pains are often involved. And sometimes those growing pains are enough to make them hang up the saddle and decide it's not for them.

I just finished my third season hunting from a tree saddle, and while I don't see giving it up anytime soon, there was certainly a learning curve and some mistakes along the way that had me questioning if it was for me. In this article, I'll discuss five common mistakes new saddle hunters make, so you can avoid them and shorten the learning curve.

### 1. You Have Unrealistic Expectations

I think one of the most common mistakes would-be saddle hunters make is going in with unrealistic expectations. Saddle hunting is often hyped as the perfect option for those seeking increased mobility. And while saddle hunting can excel in that area, it doesn't always live up to the hype.

A full saddle setup can weigh nearly as much as a

lightweight climber or a hang-on stand with climbing sticks. It can also be nearly as bulky by the time you fill your pack with a platform, climbing sticks, and all the necessary accessories.

Beyond just the mobility of it, don't expect saddle hunting to be quite as comfortable as that Summit climber either. It's certainly more comfortable than it looks, but not necessarily the most comfortable hunting option for spending the day in a tree.

I say all this not to discourage anyone looking to saddle hunt, but I want you to go in with realistic expectations. It's not the only way to deer hunt, or the best way for every situation. It's simply another tool in the deer hunter's toolbox.

### 2. You Didn't Try Multiple Saddles

One of the challenges of getting into saddle hunting is being able to try out different equipment before you buy. Many of the hunting saddle manufacturers sell direct, so you can't just head to your local Bass Pro or outdoor store and try out the latest saddle hunting





gear. That seems to be slowly changing as it gains in popularity, but we still have a long way to go in that regard.

That doesn't mean, however, that you should just go online and buy the same equipment your buddy has or what some guy in a Facebook group recommended. Every saddle is made a little differently, and each of us have our own unique body shape. Just as it is with jeans, shoes, or other apparel, just because a specific saddle is comfortable to me doesn't mean it will be the best hunting saddle option for you.

I would urge you to take time to try some different saddle types and brands before dropping your hard-earned money on one. I personally use the Tethrd Phantom, and I've been happy with it, but you may find a different one that suits your needs better.

### **3. You Didn't Give it Enough Time**

About an hour into my first "sit" in a saddle, I was already beginning to doubt my decision to give this style of hunting a try. I was uncomfortable and my hips were starting to hurt. If I had based my saddle hunting decision on that first experience, I'd be back to packing in the Summit Goliath everywhere I go. Fortunately, I stuck it out long enough to learn what worked best for me in terms of equipment setup and body position to stay as comfortable as possible for long hunts.

I've heard a few guys who tried saddle hunting and gave

up after a few hunts because it "wasn't for them." And that may be true. Saddle hunting isn't for everyone. But in some cases, if they'd just given it a little more time to figure things out, they would probably still be saddle hunting today.

The lesson here is to give yourself a couple of weeks — and multiple hunts — before you make a final decision on whether saddle hunting is for you.

### **4. You Didn't Practice Enough**

Saddle hunting is a whole new ballgame for most deer hunters, especially those used to a climbing stand. There's a relatively steep learning curve. The sooner you can start practicing prior to deer season, the better off you'll be.

Not only will you want to familiarize yourself with the equipment and practice the entire setup process, but you'll also want to spend time in the saddle getting used to the feel of things. It's a whole different feeling leaning away from the tree you're tethered to, putting all your faith in a single rope. The best way to get used to that feeling is by setting up and practicing just a foot or two off the ground.

In addition to practicing hanging out in your saddle, if you're a bowhunter, you'll also want to practice shooting from the saddle as well. Don't wait until that buck you've been after all season is standing at 20 yards broadside to figure out you can't make the shot in that direction.

### **Final Thoughts**

Saddle hunting can be a great way to stay mobile and hunt those out-of-the-way locations. Because it's so different from any other style of hunting, though, there is a learning curve involved. Mistakes made during that initial learning period can be the difference between becoming a lifelong saddle hunter and hanging up the saddle to return to the climber. If you can avoid those common mistakes outlined here, it should make the transition as smooth as possible.

# SADDLE HUNTING RESOURCES

If you'd like to learn more about saddle hunting, we have a ton of great resources on the Mobile Deer Hunter Website. Listed below are links to some of our most popular content broked into a few categories to help you quickly find the information you need.

If you come across questions not answered in this guide or our website, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [brian@mobiledeerhunter.com](mailto:brian@mobiledeerhunter.com), and I'll be glad to help you out as much as possible.

## Articles for Beginners

[Beginner's Guide to Saddle Hunting](#)

[The 5 Things You Need to Start Saddle Hunting](#)

[7 Saddle Hunting Accessories You Can't Live Without](#)

[7 Tips to Make Saddle Hunting Comfortable](#)

[6 Climbing Methods for Saddle Hunting: From Easy to Extreme](#)

[16 Saddle Hunting Tips from Experienced Saddle Hunters](#)

[5 Mistakes New Saddle Hunters Make](#)

[Stay Safe While Saddle Hunting With These 7 Simple Tips](#)

## Saddle Hunting Equipment

[What it Costs to Start Saddle Hunting](#)

[5 Great Saddle Hunting Setups for Any Budget](#)

[Single Panel vs. Two Panel Hunting Saddles: Which is Best?](#)

[How Many Climbing Sticks Do I Need for Saddle Hunting?](#)

[Choosing the Right Ropes for Saddle Hunting](#)

[A Guide to Ascenders for Saddle Hunting](#)

[Ropeman 1 vs Kong Duck: Which Saddle Hunting Ascender is Best?](#)

[Best Places to Buy Saddle Hunting Gear \(and It's Not Direct From the Manufacturer\)](#)

## Other Saddle Hunting Content

[The 4 Best Ways to Silence Your Saddle Hunting Gear](#)

[5 Reasons to Give Saddle Hunting a Try in 2024](#)

[Is Saddle Hunting Overrated?](#)

[A Complete Guide to One-Stick Saddle Hunting](#)

