

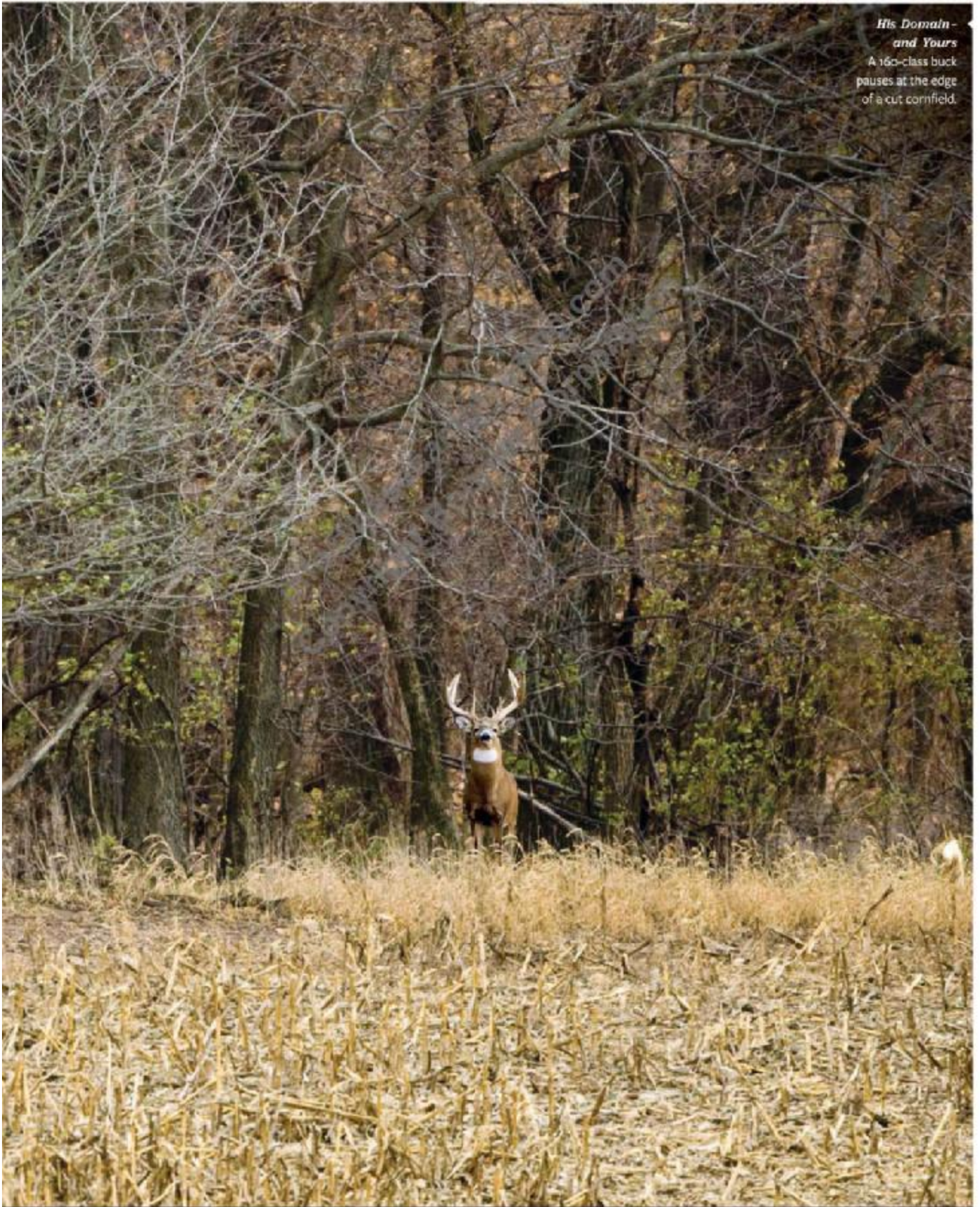
NOTICE

# GREAT DEER HUNTING JUST FOR YOU

Why are more and more whitetail fanatics renting real estate? Because, chosen carefully and managed properly, a deer lease can provide the finest hunting of your life, at a cost that won't put you in hock. Here's how to get your own ground before next season

BY SCOTT BESTUL

*His Domain -  
and Yours*  
A 160-class buck  
pauses at the edge  
of a cut cornfield.



AT NEARLY 1,900 ACRES AND LOCATED IN AN AREA KNOWN for big bucks, the farm was a deer hunter's gold mine. When a friend said he could get me hunting permission, I was ecstatic...until I heard the catch. I'd have to lease the place. I'd never paid to access land and was hesitant at first.

Five years and eight Pope and Young record book-size bucks later, I've become totally sold on the concept.

My conversion wasn't just because I've enjoyed great hunting. Leasing not only allowed me to hunt property I couldn't have accessed otherwise, but it also let me enjoy all the aspects of deer hunting—off-season scouting, camera monitoring, creating trails, tweaking habitat, hanging stands, planting food plots, and basically managing our own deer herd—that whitetail freaks who own land can do year-round. Leasing gave my partners and me (none of us wealthy enough to actually purchase hunting ground) a sense of ownership impossible to achieve with any other agreement short of a deed.

The landowner benefits, too. Many landowners view deer as no-value features on valuable property, and leasing converts them to an asset. And of course, lease fees help farmers recoup crop losses caused by deer.

Pay-to-hunt is not just a standard practice, long-lived tradition in many areas—it's a growing trend nationwide. If you're willing to invest the time and money necessary, follow this three-step guide to getting started.



## 1 Form your hunting group

Unless you're fairly well heeled, paying for even a modest lease will require one or more partners. Take your time choosing them. Every lease member will be equal parts hunting buddy, coworker, and business partner, and one individual lacking in any category can make for a long and frustrating experience. Here are some guidelines:

**A Select core partners.** Three to six members is a good, manageable starting point. It's easier to add people if you need or want to expand your group than it is to get rid of a bad egg.

**B Decide on finances.** Members should agree on a per-hunter cap on costs. This will help as you shop for ground and decide how to budget for projects such as food-plot seed and equipment such as stands, tools, signs, etc.

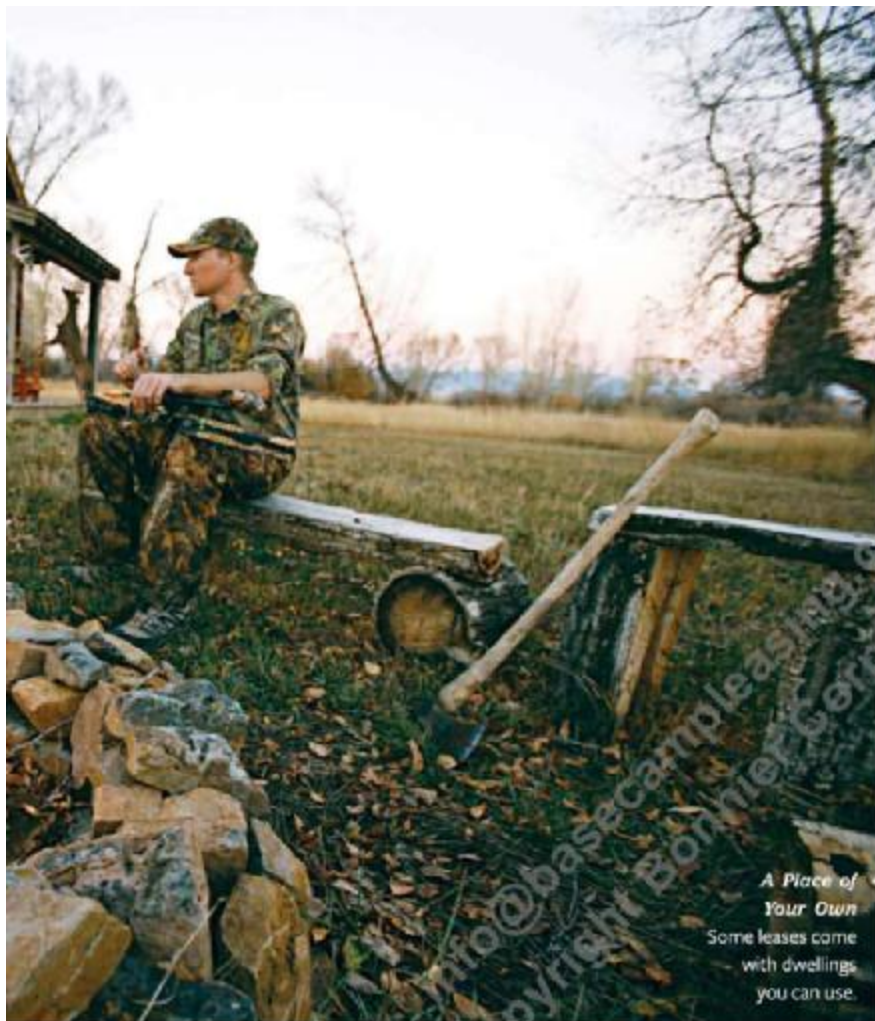
**C Establish goals.** Are you leasing simply to secure access and enjoy an undisturbed hunt, or do you want to manage for trophies? Agreeing on goals ahead of time will establish harmony among members and can help define the size and location of the property you seek.

**D Set bylaws.** They aid communication and make things fair to everyone. For instance, you'll need to establish work days for scouting, hanging stands, planting food plots, etc. And you'll need to come up with a guest policy. Will friends or family members be allowed to hunt? How often? How long? Also, some members may have the whole season to hunt; others only a weekend or two. Some will want to bowhunt only; others will opt for firearms. Who goes when? And where? Should there be a limit on the number of deer members can take?

## HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU PAY?

As with any real estate, lease fees vary wildly and are influenced by a variety of factors: property size, habitat condition, hunting history, even the neighborhood (fees in a trophy hotspot like Buffalo County, Wis., may be double what landowners are asking just three counties away). And of course, demand drives price; if hunting opportunity is scarce in a particular area, expect to pay more than you would in a region chock-full of whitetail ground.

What does this mean in cold cash? The lowest fees I've heard of recently were a shade under \$2 per acre, the highest well over \$40. But these numbers can be deceptive. For example, it may take 1,200 acres in Oklahoma to grow enough bucks for three hunters, whereas 120 acres in Illinois could easily entertain the same group. If the Prairie State parcel commands \$30 per acre and the Sooner plot only \$3, which is the better deal? Only you can answer that, and your decision will be based on nonmonetary issues like travel, management goals, and other factors. —S.B.



*A Place of Your Own*  
Some leases come with dwellings you can use.

## 2 Find good hunting ground

If you already live in good deer country, the best lease is often the one that's closest to home, so you won't waste precious hunting time on travel. Monitoring your property—everything from food-plot maintenance to patrolling for trespassers—is much easier, too. Here are some tactics for securing ground near home:

**A Obtain a plat book.** This atlas of landowners and property sizes (available from the county clerk or recorder) will help you identify potential properties by size and location.

**B Make personal visits.** Nothing beats a face-to-face meeting. An introductory phone call can save time, though, and in the case of absentee owners, may be your only option.

**C Advertise.** A classified ad in the local paper can make some property owners come searching for you. Posters placed in stores, restaurants, and post offices can have the same effect. State that you're an ethical, respectful hunter seeking access and willing to pay.

**D Network.** Biologists, foresters, and employees of

ag-related businesses and agencies can be great resources. They're familiar with both local properties and their owners.

**E Use a service.** Websites such as [basecampleasing.com](http://basecampleasing.com), [hightechredneck.com](http://hightechredneck.com), [nationalhuntingleases.com](http://nationalhuntingleases.com), and [leasehunting.com](http://leasehunting.com) list properties for lease by state, species, hunting implement, and cost. Some charge a fee, but you get results quickly. See the "Actual Lease Ad" boxes on these pages for descriptions of properties found on [basecampleasing.com](http://basecampleasing.com).

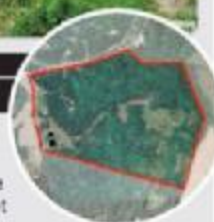


ACTUAL LEASE AD

### KENTUCKY

**LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION!** When you want to kill a big buck, you have to go where he is. THIS is that area. You can't get in a better part of the number three county in the U.S. than right here. I have personal history with this area, and know of the management on the neighboring farms. Huge tracts surround this, and 150+ is their program. If this farm was bigger, it would have been taken by my group. Several places for food plots, trails throughout from logging last year. It is thick from the cut. I saw a nice buck growing while walking it this week.  
Source: [basecampleasing.com](http://basecampleasing.com)

Acres: 150    Max Hunters: 4    Price: \$4,000



ACTUAL LEASE AD

### MISSOURI

This property has that magical untouched feeling to it, 154 acres of hardwoods that has never been leased before and has not been hunted for the past five years. There is a very good camp site with a primitive one-room log cabin that could be used if fixed up. In some of the fields that were grown up, we were pushing fawns left and right out of them as we walked the property. There is a lot of deer and turkey sign on this property, which also has a two-acre pond water source. You are sure to find that wall hanger living here. This is a deer and turkey lease only!  
Source: [basecampleasing.com](http://basecampleasing.com)

Acres: 154    Max Hunters: 3    Price: \$1,800





**High Yield**

Three trophy bucks in a central Ohio winter wheat field.

## 3 Do your paperwork (carefully)

A lease is a business deal, so a formal agreement signed by your hunting party and the landowner is crucial. Lease agreement templates are widely available on the Internet (a good sample can be found at [michfb.com/ecology/hunting](http://michfb.com/ecology/hunting)). Our group combined elements of several samples to draft a customized document. Every agreement should contain the following basics:

**A Compensation.** Explicitly state how much money the landowner will receive and when payments occur.

**B Liability.** The landowner should be absolved of liability should a club

member (or guest) get hurt while on the property.

**C Conduct.** Most landowners will want to stipulate where you can or can't drive, areas off-limits to hunting and shooting, placement of stands and blinds, etc.


**D Exclusivity.** Your hunting party should enjoy sole access to the property for hunting. If the landowner wants to reserve some rights for other activities, make sure the specifics are spelled out clearly.

**E Trespasser protocol.** Will the landowner patrol the property and/or prosecute interlopers, or will

your group perform that function?

**F Land use.** If the landowner agrees to food plots, habitat work, trail creation, and other modifications, indicate clearly where these activities can occur and what they entail.

Have all club members and any co-owners of the property sign the agreement. The hunt club stores one copy, the landowner another.

**G Consider obtaining insurance.** The Quality Deer Management Association ([qdma.com](http://qdma.com)) offers a strong and thorough hunt-club insurance policy, underwritten by Lloyd's of London. 

## STRIVE FOR THE LONG TERM

Short-term leases are nothing but trespass fees. Think about it: You spend hours planting food plots, improving habitat, hanging stands, and doing all the labor-intensive activities associated with managing a property...do you want to start all over again on a new place next fall? I don't, and I wouldn't appreciate another group's enjoying the fruits of my hard work.

Most happy lessees I know have worked out long-term agreements with the landowner; three years is a typical minimum. Many property owners balk at multiyear contracts—the cost of living rises as sharply for them as it does for the rest of us, and their concern that your fee won't keep up with inflation is legitimate. If that's the case, propose a small-percentage increase for each successive season. —S.B.



**ACTUAL LEASE AD**

**ILLINOIS**

This farm is located in Greene Co. There is a large creek bottom that winds through the center of the farm. There are big ridges, bluffs and ravines running all directions that funnel the deer accordingly. The timber is rough. There are 40-foot-deep ravines in several spots. About half the timber is very thick and brushy that looks to have been timbered several years ago. The other is a little more open with good hardwood stands. Landowner has seen several good bucks this season. Source: [basecampleasing.com](http://basecampleasing.com)



Acres: 215 Max Hunters: 6 Price: \$6,500



**ACTUAL LEASE AD**

**OHIO**

This is one nice southeastern Ohio farm for lease. Corn, Muskingum River frontage and some nice woods. Good ATV access, some remote hollows; crop edges, this farm will hunt like it's much larger. Landowner lives on the tract, the in-holding is NOT hunted. Landowner says dozens of deer have been killed in that little strip along the river. He says that it's a major river crossing for them too. ATVs are OK, some great primitive campsites along the river. Source: [basecampleasing.com](http://basecampleasing.com)



Acres: 270 Max Hunters: 8 Price: \$6,500

**FIELDANDSTREAM.COM/BESTULLEASE**

How the author managed his land to produce eight Pope and Young-class deer

DEER: LANCE KRUGER