



MEMBERS UPDATE

January 2020

How to Survive Wild Animal Encounters



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Top 9 Tactical Upgrades
Lock Picking for Preppers

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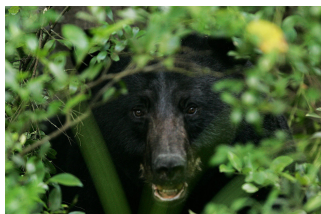
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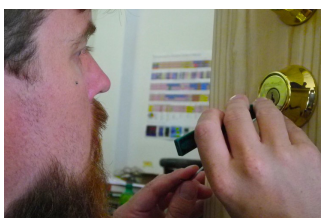
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Wild Animal Encounters

Walking through the woods at night, it's easy to feel like some big bad wolf is out to get you. But which animals truly pose the greatest threat to humans? In this article, we catalog America's most dangerous animals and what to do if you happen to find yourself face to face with one of these wild predators.



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Lock Picking for Preppers

While popping locks is best left to the professionals under normal circumstances, knowing how to pick locks could save your life in an emergency. With the right tools, practice, and an understanding of how locks work, you too can master this highly valuable skillset.



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Top 9 Tactical Upgrades


When it comes to tactical gear, it can be hard to separate the absolute must-haves from the shiny new toys that you'll never actually use. We sorted through pretty much everything you can bolt onto a rifle to find the items that deliver the best tactical advantage for your hard-earned dollars.



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The NSRA's Simple DIY Beer Recipe

Many preppers are aware of the bartering value of booze in a SHTF scenario. But few realize the value of brewing/distilling know-how, both today and in a long-term emergency scenario. Our goal with these simple recipes is to give you the confidence to get your feet wet in the booze making process.

A black bear is the central focus of the image, looking directly at the camera through a dense thicket of green leaves and branches. The bear's face is partially obscured by the foliage, but its dark fur and brown eyes are clearly visible. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a forest or wooded area.

WILD ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS AND HOW TO SURVIVE THEM

America is a beautiful and diverse country, and those who travel across it experience vistas ranging from picturesque valleys surrounded by rolling hills to sunbaked deserts encircled by towering mountains. There is certainly a lot to take in, and there is also much that should be avoided. North America is home to an enormous variety of wildlife, and many of the species hunters, survivalists, and hikers encounter are capable of inflicting grievous injuries or ending a life altogether.

NOT WHAT YOU EXPECTED

2 Most people would immediately think of bears, wolves, or other large carnivores when the subject of dangerous critters is raised, but official statistics

reveal that farm animals, insects, and dogs kill far more Americans each year than the animals people fear the most.

Almost 90 people die in the USA each year after being stung by bees, wasps, or other venomous bugs. Africanized honeybees attack in swarms and overwhelm their victims with deadly toxin, but a black widow spider is far more deadly. The paperclip-sized arachnid delivers a toxin that is 15 times more powerful than rattlesnake venom, and just one of its bites can cause extreme nausea and make breathing incredibly difficult.

Horses and cows kill far more people each year than gators, wolves, or bears, and most of these deaths take place on farms and occur when hikers or hunters

get too close to an animal that they assume is docile and friendly.

Dog attacks also claim more than a dozen lives each year in the United States, but the vast majority of fatal canine encounters involve children under the age of 4.

Alligators, sharks, and bears are relatively benign compared to spiders, cows, and dogs. The critters that most Americans fear the most when out and about only kill about three people each year in the USA.

I'M STILL WORRIED ABOUT BEARS

Official statistics are all well and good, but they are not worth much when a mountain lion is chewing on your face or a bear is deciding which part of you to rip off first. Wolves, bears, cougars, scorpions, snakes, and alligators are still extremely dangerous animals, and running into one of them miles from home can really ruin a hunter or hiker's day.

A 35-year-old Californian mountain biker learned this lesson the hard way in 2004. A search party was sent out when he failed to return home, and they found his partly eaten body on a mountainside. A cougar was identified as the guilty party.

A cougar was also to blame when a 41-year-old Arkansas woman was mauled to death in her front yard in 2003. Even animals that most would consider harmless can be capable of great violence.

In October 2019, a hunter was killed in Arkansas by a deer that took exception to being shot. Bears are even more terrifying, and encounters with them are likely to grow more common in the years ahead as human and bear habitats overlap.

OK, SO WHAT DO I DO?

The old adage that a ferocious animal is more scared of you than you are of it is usually true, but this knowledge may not be all that comforting when you are face to face with a creature the size of a compact car with a mouthful of teeth as long as steak knives.

The best way to survive an encounter of this kind is to avoid it in the first place, but there are steps that those who find themselves confronted with dangerous fauna can take to make a gushing wound or deadly sting or bite less likely.

WOLVES



An individual wolf will almost never attack a human, but that nugget is of little practical value as wolves generally travel in large groups. If you notice a wolf or a group of wolves while exploring a remote area, try to beat a hasty retreat as silently as possible and hope that they don't see you. If the wolf does notice you, remain calm, try not to show fear and avoid eye contact.

Wolves usually growl or snap their jaw before attacking, which is your cue to yell, scream, and make yourself seem as big and fearsome as possible. The grizzly strategy is the best course of action to take if wolves do choose to fight. Get into the fetal position and try to grin and bear it. If the attack continues, fight like your life depends on it because it does. Once again, a powerful firearm is your best friend in this situation.

BEARS

This is the creature that instills the most fear in people exploring the woods and forests of North America. Brown or grizzly bears are the most dangerous bear species found in the United States, but even the more docile American black bear can reach gargantuan proportions.



Bears generally try to avoid contact with humans, and most deadly encounters with them occur when hikers stumble into their safe spaces. The best way to prevent this from happening is to make plenty of noise as you walk through the woods as a bear that hears people coming will almost always head in the opposite direction.

When encounters do happen, the most important thing to do is to avoid the urge to run. This lets the bear know that the game is afoot, and bears can run much, much faster than human beings. They are also adept climbers, so scaling a nearby tree will likewise be a waste of time.

Instead, stand up and spread your arms to make yourself seem as large as possible. Then slowly back away while never showing the bear your back. If a bear does attack, curl up into the fetal position and cover your head and neck. The bear will probably lose interest once it has taken a couple of swipes and concluded that you are not a threat.

If the attack persists, the only option you have is to fight back. If you are fighting a black bear, you have a good shot of surviving the encounter. If you engage in mortal combat with a grizzly, your chances of seeing the sun rise again are extremely slim if you don't have a gun.

ALLIGATORS

Alligators rarely chase human beings, which is a good thing because they can reach speeds of up to 35 mph. If you are ever chased by a gator, run like heck in a straight line and try to get on top of something. There is a popular belief that running in zig-zags will

4 confuse an alligator, but this is just a myth.



If you encounter an alligator in the water, try to get to shore while splashing as little as possible. Flailing about will make the alligator think that you are in trouble and encourage it to attack. If an alligator's powerful jaws latch onto any part of your body, poke furiously at its eyes and hope for the best.

RATTLESNAKES



People bitten by rattlesnakes are not usually among the most intellectually gifted of individuals. These critters want nothing more than to be left alone, and their signature rattle is a warning, not a threat. Most people who learn how much a rattlesnake bite can hurt are bitten on the hands or forearms, which suggests that they ignored the warning and tried to pick up the snake that bit them. This is not a good idea.

If your afternoon walk is interrupted by a rattle, freeze, determine where the sound is coming from, and then move slowly away in the opposite direction. The old western movie trick of cutting the bite and sucking out the toxin can work, but it is best reserved for situations where no other course of action is possible.

Avoid exertion after any kind of snake bite as an elevated heart rate makes it easier for venom to do its work. A stout pair of boots, thick pants, and a healthy dose of common sense are your best defenses against dangerous snakes.

MOUNTAIN LIONS



Mountain lions, which are also known as pumas, cougars, panthers, and catamounts, are extremely stealthy and have very keen senses. This means that they will almost always spot you long before you get a glimpse of them. If you do see a mountain lion, it may be wise to worry as there is a good chance that it has been watching you for some time and has taken an interest in you.

While mountain lions do not usually look at human beings as prey, they may be attracted to the things we carry with us when we enter their neck of the woods. Hunters carrying meat should remain especially vigilant in mountain lion territory.

Cats of all sizes are among nature's most efficient killing machines, so fights with them should be avoided at all costs. You may have stalked that 10-point buck for hours before you bagged it, but it is not worth dying over.

As with other ferocious animals, the strategy with mountain lions is to make yourself big, show no fear, and edge away slowly without turning your back.

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Tucking up into the fetal position just makes things easier for a mountain lion, so fight back immediately if one of these critters does decide to take a chunk out of you. A gunshot may be enough to scare a mountain lion off, but don't expect to be able to hit one that is charging straight at you.

SCORPIONS



It is said that soldiers fighting in North Africa during World War II were more afraid of scorpions than enemy fire. That may be an exaggeration, but some of these little arachnids pack a very powerful punch. In fact, some of them such as the southwestern bark scorpion are life-threatening.

Scorpions are nocturnal creatures, and most of the people stung by them encounter them unexpectedly early in the morning. Therefore, it is always a good idea to give clothes and boots a good shake before putting them on.

Another prudent precaution is to sleep up off the ground if possible, and move beds or sleeping bags away from walls or tenting. Using a black light makes it much easier to spot scorpions as they glow when exposed to ultraviolet light.

FERAL DOGS

An unfortunate fact of life is that many pet owners are irresponsible and release unwanted dogs outside of their home. And, while it's a shame to see them abused or neglected this way, many survive and become feral, losing all fear of humans; basically, the opposite of a "good dog." That's when the likelihood of a bad bite or an attack increases when you encounter one on your foot travels.



Consider this: the bite force of an average pooch is about 230-250 PSI, even though some dogs such as wolf-dog hybrids are stronger. In comparison, a Nile crocodile's bite is approximately 500 PSI. Ouch! Dog attacks can be ferocious and bloody, and you can find yourself in a life or death situation very quickly.

The good news is that whether you are strolling through your neighborhood or embarking on a solo hunting trip, the risk of attack by a single feral dog or pack of them can often be managed.

The first rule of thumb is to not look a feral dog in the eyes. They will view it as a challenge. Also, keep your cool. Not doing so can give them signals that you are scared or want to fight them. Both scenarios can be detrimental to your health.

If you happen upon an aggressive dog during your trek, here are a few steps to take to keep them from attacking.

1. Try a few commands on Fido such as "sit" or "stay." If they are familiar with these commands, it can give you time to contemplate what to do or even escape.
2. Avoid appearing as a threat by not making any sudden movements and keeping your hands down at your sides.
3. Display your front to the dog. If you turn your back on them, they may interpret this as weakness and see it as an opportunity to attack.
4. As mentioned before: Don't run away! This can activate an attack dog's strong and instinctive prey-drive, causing them to move in for the kill.

5. Bared teeth signify aggression, so you don't want to smile at a dog as an attempt to be friendly and disarming to them.

6. Slowly back away once the aggressive pooch no longer pays attention to you.

These actions could work before resorting to more serious tactics.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way. In that case, consider the following.

NON-LETHAL WEAPONS

Many non-lethal weapons that can deter a human can be used on an advancing feral dog. Additionally, the alpha dog of a pack advancing on you getting pepper sprayed or going down after being stunned with a stun gun or baton may be convincing enough to result in them seeking easier prey. There are also instruments known as ultrasonic dog deterrents that emit sounds that Fido perceives as unpleasant and high pitched.

LETHAL WEAPONS

The weapons above are designed to ward off feral dogs without inflicting any permanent damage. However, non-lethal weapons are used with the assumption that you don't have a gun, knife, or other deadly weapon on you. Be mindful before using lethal force that most canines only act aggressively if they are starving or feel that you are an immediate threat to them or their family.

If you find you are attacked by a single wild dog that can't be stopped, then you can use weapons such as a baseball bat or survival knife to inflict serious injury. Using your knife, aim for their carotid or internal organs.

Slice the carotid but twist the knife once it is inside the internal organs.

Guns will also work, especially when you are attacked by three or more feral dogs. Odds are high that you won't escape without injury if multiple dogs move in and you don't have a gun.

Also, dogs you've trained to attack in certain circumstances of your own can protect you in the event of an attack. Even dogs that aren't formally trained may make you seem like less of an easy target. Be mindful that there is strength in numbers, too, so take a human friend or four-legged friend with you when you are outdooring.



NO WEAPON?

If a feral dog is advancing on you and you don't have a weapon, it's time to fight dirty. Grab what's around you, be it a sturdy stick or rock; both will make a formidable weapon. They can be used in several ways from bopping the ferocious pooch on the nose to more aggressive options if that doesn't do the job. Also, you can strike directly at the dog's eyes or throat with your fingers or fists.

Still, these tactics may fail. In that case, a wild dog may knock you down. You'll want to minimize injuries if this happens.

Here's what to do:

- Curl into a ball and tuck your head in.
- Make a fist with your hands to protect your digits.
- Use your arms and hands to cover up your neck and back.

Make sure you have a first aid kit when you are outdoors in case of injuries, including those made by wild animals.

RABIES MENTION



Rabies is some scary stuff, and infection by it is synonymous with a horrible death if you don't get medical treatment early on. Most of the human cases involve bites from dogs that have contracted it, but it's also carried by cats, certain wild animals, and even livestock.

Your best defense is using the protective measures mentioned above to survive an attack, followed by getting prompt medical treatment if you are bitten or scratched. You'll also want to avoid animals that display the typical signs and symptoms of rabies.

Animals with rabies often act aggressive, vicious, crazed, confused, or sickly. On the other hand, they can also appear normal or act overly friendly or docile.

Infected animals often display unusual habits that they normally wouldn't. For instance, bats that usually come out at night may come out in the day instead.

COMMON SENSE IS YOUR BEST DEFENSE

The best way to avoid becoming an animal attack statistic is to do your homework and use your head. Learn about the animals that live in the areas you will be visiting, and keep your wits about you as you make your way through their habitat.

Most wild animals spend almost all of their waking hours thinking about food, so it is a good idea to not look and smell like the backwoods equivalent of a deli counter.

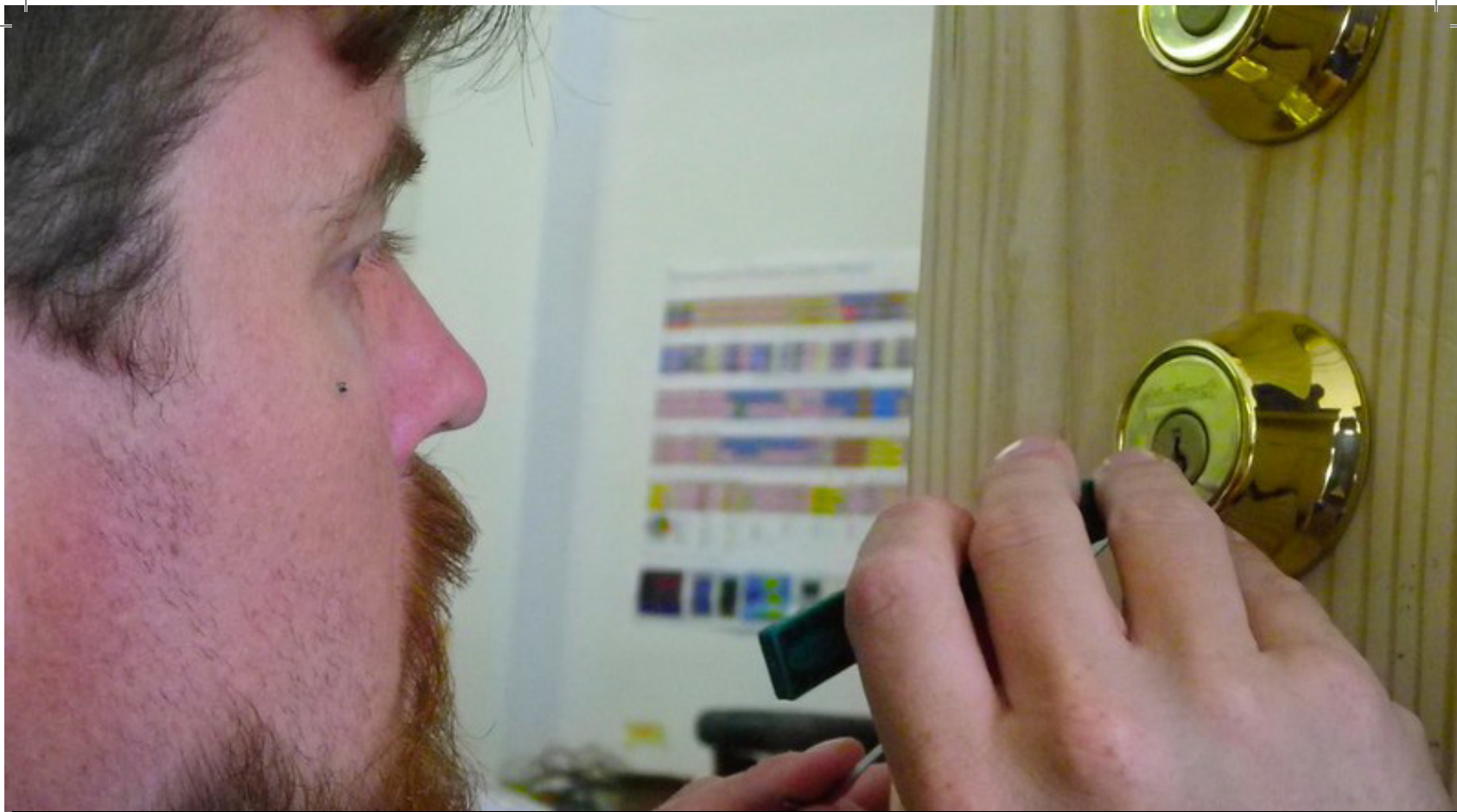
WRAP UP FOOD: Animals will smell your food before they see it, so keep your supplies in airtight containers and wash plates and utensils after eating. Also remember that your garbage smells just as enticing as your supplies to the local fauna.

EAT OUT AND CHANGE CLOTHES: Eating in your tent and then crashing out may seem like the perfect end to a long day, but it could be a very costly mistake. Eat as far away as possible from where you plan to sleep, and change into clothing that does not smell like what you had for dinner before crawling into your sleeping bag.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS: Even timid animals can be unpredictable, and using food to lure cute critters like chipmunks and squirrels could also attract the mountain lions who eat them.

CARRY A BIG STICK: Human beings are not particularly strong or fast, and we don't have sharp claws or huge teeth. What we do have is big brains that allow us to make things like guns and knives. A gunshot will probably be enough to scare away most dangerous animals, and a well-placed shot from a high caliber firearm is probably your only hope against something like a grizzly.





LOCK PICKING 101 FOR PREPPERS

Surviving and thriving in a world without cable TV and 911 dispatchers will require a very particular set of skills. These are skills that you are unlikely to have developed working in an office or on a construction site, but they can be learned. Knowing how to purify water, create a meal from what nature provides, and hit a moving target with a rifle, shotgun, or pistol will all help you to stay alive when the SHTF, and so will learning how to pick locks.

In fact, lock picking is going to come in handy in a society that doesn't value currency so much as certain skill sets. What's more, scavenging for supplies will become a daily ritual if civilization collapses, and most of the best stuff will be hidden behind locked doors. Breaching most doors will require no more than a swift kick or a strong shoulder, but the most valuable stashes are likely to be better protected.

You can expect mother lodes of food, weapons, and ammunition to be hidden behind stout doors and kept secure by locks, padlocks, and deadbolts, and a good set of lock picks is probably going to be the best way to get at them. Getting past a lock

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in a video game usually involves pulling out a gun,

but shooting at a lock in the real world will probably make matters worse and waste a precious bullet.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Television shows and movies make picking locks look easy. A secret agent, jewel thief, or private investigator usually pulls a tool out of their pocket and makes quick work of any lock they encounter.

Things are a lot different in the real world. While a basic understanding of how locks work and what has to be done to defeat them can be learned in an hour or two, honing lock picking skills takes patience, perseverance, and practice. Aspiring lock pickers should also continue to practice to improve their speed and skills even after they have become adept. This extra effort could mean the difference between a cache of fresh supplies and beating a hasty retreat when the SHTF.

Putting in the extra effort pays off because picking locks requires confidence as well as skill. It is a trial-and-error process that can be frustrating at the best of times, but it becomes exponentially more difficult

when the owner of what is behind the door could return at any moment with a shotgun in their hands. This is why you should not think your work is done just because you can open a padlock in the comfort of your home while your favorite television show plays in the background.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



The first thing you will need to acquire if you want to learn how to defeat locks is a quality set of lock picks. These invaluable tools are extremely compact and can even be carried in a small pocket, which makes a lot more sense than hauling around a cumbersome bolt cutter. Look for a set of tools made out of quality materials that include:

A SHORT HOOK: This is the tool that you will be using the most. It moves lock pins to allow lock cylinders to turn.

A DEEP HOOK: The deep hook is used on larger locks to get to pins that are beyond the reach of the short hook.

A TENSION WRENCH: Tension wrenches are bent pieces of metal that allow lock pickers to apply leverage to turn the cylinder while the lock is being worked on. The tension wrench also keeps pins that have already been picked out of the way.

A CITY RAKE: This is a tool that you will use instead of hooks to pick simple locks quickly. It is also called a skeleton key. Inserting a city rake into a lock and then jiggling it up and down is sometimes all that is needed to move the pins. These tools are especially effective against locks with shallow pins in the middle of the cylinder and high pins at either end.

A PETERSON REACH: This is a long and curved pick that allows access to deep pins and can work behind pins that are cut lower. It will be a must if you hope to defeat high-security locks.

BOGIES: These tools look like smaller city rakes and work in much the same way.

THE ANATOMY OF A LOCK



Picking locks will be a lot easier for you if you understand how locks work. The first locks and keys were made out of wood almost 6,000 years ago, and the fundamentals of lock design have not really changed much over the centuries. Video hosting sites like YouTube are a good place to learn how locks operate as many uploads include animations that show all of the parts working together. The vast majority of the locks you encounter in the post-SHTF world will be of the pin and tumbler variety and will feature a housing, cylinder, or plug and a set of spring-mounted pins.

THE HOUSING: This is the case or outer shell of the lock that holds all of the other parts together.

THE CYLINDER: The plug or cylinder is the part of a lock that the key slides into. When the right key is slotted in, the cuts on the top or top and bottom move the pins and allow the cylinder to turn.

THE SHEAR LINE: This is sometimes referred to as the shoulder, and it is the gap between the housing and the cylinder that the pins must clear in order for the lock to open.

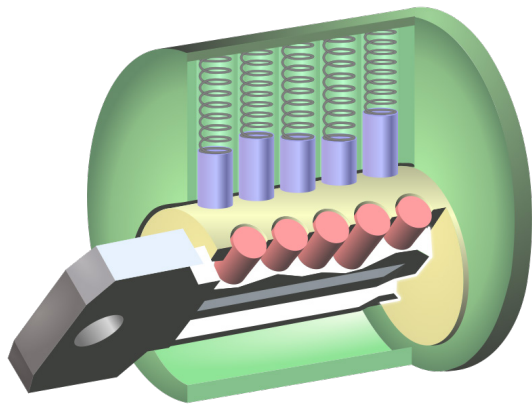
DRIVER PINS: The pins in locks are made up of two parts. The driver pins are connected to a spring and

clear the shear line when the key is inserted.

KEY PINS: These are the lower parts of the pin assembly that make contact with the key. Key pins are different lengths to correspond with the cutting or biting of the key. When the correct key is used, the key pins match the key and push the driver pins above the shear line.

SPRINGS: The springs in a lock push the pins down to stop the cylinder from turning without a key. They also make sure that the key pins are pushed against the key so the lock can open.

LOCK PICKING STEP BY STEP



The two ways of picking a lock are called single pin picking and raking. Single pin picking is the most intricate and effective method and will be needed to defeat high-security locks. To open a lock this way, you will need a tension wrench and a set of hooks or picks.

Insert the tension wrench: The first step is inserting the tension wrench into the lock and determining which way the cylinder turns. There should be a little play in each direction, but there will be less resistance in the direction the cylinder is designed to turn. It is crucial to keep some pressure on the tension wrench as you work to prevent all of the pins you have moved from falling back down again. Most people think the tricky part of picking a lock is using hooks, but mastering the tension wrench is actually a far more difficult and important skill. This is delicate work, so only light pressure is needed. One finger on the tension wrench should be enough.

11 Find the binding pins: The pins in a lock must be moved clear of the shoulder or shear line in a

designated order. Once the tension wrench is in place, use a hook to find and gently test each of the pins. One pin will offer more resistance than the others. This is the first binding pin. Push it up with a hook until you feel the cylinder turn slightly. Maintain pressure on the tension wrench as you repeat the process to find the second binding pin. You may need to change tools to reach deeper pins. As each binding pin is moved, you will feel the cylinder turn slightly.

VOILA: When the final binding pin is pushed over the shear line, the tension wrench will turn the cylinder to open the lock just as if you had the key.

Raking is a lot faster and much easier, but it does not work every time. However, it only takes a minute or two, so it is probably worth giving raking a shot before turning to a single pin pick. You can use regular hooks to rake a lock in a pinch, but the job is best left to tools designed for the job like city rakes and bogies.

INSERT THE TENSION WRENCH: A tension wrench is also used when raking a lock, and maintaining pressure is just as important as it is during conventional picking.

INSERT THE RAKE OR PICK: Slide the rake or pick to the very back of the lock. Then pull it toward you and back again repeatedly while exerting upward pressure on the springs.

JIGGLE, JIGGLE, JIGGLE: The idea is that you will push the binding pins out of the way far more quickly when you rake, but it will probably take a minute or two of jiggling to clear the last pin. This method is usually effective on cheap locks, but sturdier devices with pins of dramatically different sizes may be able to withstand even the most persistent raking.

A SPECIAL CASE: PICKING COMBINATION LOCKS

Picking combination locks gets a negative rap, especially. Thieves often perform it in times of plenty for malicious reasons. Take shady characters that defeat combination locks, for instance. Usually, these nefarious individuals that engage in this practice are breaking into lockers to steal valuables or breaking the code to abscond with items such as your expensive mountain bike. However, picking

combination locks when the SHTF isn't the same. Your life might even depend on it.

MASTERING 4-DIGIT COMBINATION LOCKS



Picking a combination lock without false gates is surprisingly easy. And you don't even need tools, to boot.

Here are the steps to master a 4-digit combination lock:

- Pull the body down away from the shackle with constant pressure.
- Test each dial wheel and find out which one is the most difficult to turn.
- Turn this wheel until you hear a loud click and feel the body move down.
- Repeat this process for the other wheels.
- Release the pressure when you get to the last wheel.
- Use trial and error until you find the last digit.
- Pull down and the shackle will pop open.

Congratulations! You can now pick the lock.

CRACKING CODES TO MASTER PADLOCKS

There are more steps to picking master locks that have 3-part combinations than there are with 4-digit combination locks. However, it's not difficult to learn, and there are many YouTube videos you can check out that allow you to practice and master the skill. Styles 662 has a fantastic YouTube tutorial titled:

12 "Crack a Masterlock combination lock in 60 seconds!

Without knowing the combo!" that is an excellent source to start with.



Keep in mind these techniques will only work on about 70 percent of master locks. However, with practice and plenty of trial & error, you can get that percentage rate to go up. If you run into those pesky 30 percent, though, the value of a pair of good bolt cutters that are capable of cutting master padlocks can't be understated. That being said, bolt cutters can be a good part of your tool repertoire that you might want to include in your bugout bag. In addition to cutting locks loose, a good pair of bolt cutters can cut through chains, padlocks, wire shelving, many more things, and of course, bolts.

FINAL THOUGHTS


Lock picking could be a life-saving skill when the SHTF, and it can be learned by just about anybody with patience. From escaping handcuffs, to taking shelter in a building that's locked, there's a bevy of uses for it .

That being said, you don't have to wait until the world goes to pot to get good at picking locks. Interestingly enough, there is a popular recreational pastime for enthusiasts known as locksport. Those engaging in locksport have fun beating locking systems. Practitioners also learn valuable skills besides lock picking such as lock bumping.

Confidence is king in the real world, so get a sample of all the most popular padlocks and don't quit until you have defeated all of them. Then go to work on improving your speed. The road to mastery will be long and frustrating, but success is assured if you believe in yourself and keep going.

Learning how to pick locks will also teach you a valuable lesson about security. You will realize how feeble even expensive locks are and how little protection they really provide. This could encourage you to put more robust security measure in place to protect your valuables and loved ones from whatever may head your way.

TOP 9 TACTICAL TOOLS YOU ACTUALLY NEED



As an NSRA member in good standing, it's safe to assume that you value versatile, high-quality equipment that earns its keep. Conversely, you probably aren't a big fan of keeping tons of superfluous junk that just sits around taking up space and reminding you of the oftentimes ridiculous chunks of change you shelled out to get it.

In the world of tactical shooting, it can be hard to draw a line in the sand between what's functional and essential, versus those gear items that seemed like must-haves when you ordered them online, but frankly turned out to be a big waste of your hard-earned dollars. If we tried to catalog all of the items in the latter category, this article would be longer than a John Grisham novel.

Above all else, the key thing to remember when it comes to your tactical gear is that it must be tailored to your specific needs. There's no single comprehensive list of items that you do or don't need. You've got to consider the scenarios you deem to be the most likely

13 to unfold in your own life and plan accordingly.

For example, you may work in security, law-enforcement, or the military. And thus, the gear that's absolutely necessary for your daily work is practical for you, but may also be highly impractical for home defense scenarios. Our goal isn't to cast judgment on what we see as overpriced or impractical gear. Instead, we're seeking to highlight the tactical equipment we have found to be universally useful and practical for the Joe 6-packs of the world, the must-haves of a tactical tool chest.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A MUST-HAVE TACTICAL TOOL

While night vision goggles would no doubt be helpful if the Russkies were to launch a full-scale house-to-house invasion à la *Red Dawn*, there are plenty of other items that you'd need first in order to make your night vision goggles relevant. These weapons, blades, and optics are more fundamental and, thus, fall closer to the "must-have" side of the spectrum.



As we created this list, our primary goal was to give you a concise list of items that apply to nearly everyone interested in holding a tactical advantage in a home defense scenario. Since most of our readers have a place they call home, and defending homes is a fundamental act of self-defense, we'd say these criteria cover the vast majority of the self-reliance community. Spoiler alert: Neither RPGs nor armored vehicles made our list.

Another factor we traditionally place great importance on is, of course, getting maximum bang for your buck when it comes to your self-reliance tools. The items we selected, as well as the level of sophistication of said items, is reflective of what is required to put a bold and confident checkmark in each box.

The goal is not to impress those crotchety guys at the gun store, but to give you the best tactical advantage possible without an unlimited budget. The truth is, many of the ideas we hear repeatedly on message boards are highly flawed, highly ridiculous, or both.

In the context of a home-defense scenario, caliber-envy, ammo-stockpiling, and high explosives don't necessarily deliver any tactical advantage. On the other hand, target acquisition speed, accuracy, and weapons training are always relevant.

SEMI-AUTOMATIC CARBINE

We know what you're thinking, "But I use my handgun for home defense." We'll be the first to admit that, yes, several of us at the NSRA have also selected a handgun as our primary home defense weapon.

14 Modern handguns do boast several very compelling features in a compact, concealable package.



Here's our take: There are many considerations that go into choosing a home defense weapon, and those may lead you to choosing a handgun. But if tactical superiority is your number one concern, an MSR or equivalent is the winner hands-down. There are several reasons for this, but accuracy and muzzle velocity make the most compelling arguments.

Modern sporting rifles (or ARs if you prefer) offer high-capacity magazines, while also delivering excellent accuracy. Many of these are chambered in 5.56 NATO, capable of producing muzzle velocities over 3,200 feet per second. That's dramatically more energy than a handgun is capable of. For reference, the muzzle velocity of a 9mm is somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,200 fps. In short, the 5.56 NATO goes through obstacles that a 9mm can't (that's both a pro and con).

A 25-yard shot is easily makeable with a carbine, yet equally miss-able with a handgun. Projectiles fly faster and with greater accuracy from a longer barrel, even in the case of a pistol caliber carbine such as the Kel Tec SUB2000 chambered in 9mm. In fact, these types of weapons illustrate the advantages of a carbine over a handgun quite well, since they use the same ammo with greater accuracy and produce higher velocities.

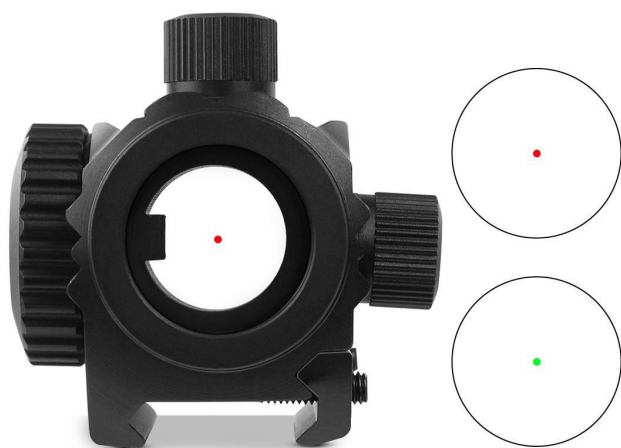


Suffice it to say, you may not want your home defense weapon to penetrate walls too effectively. Perhaps you live in a small apartment and you're willing to give up mid-to-long range accuracy for easy maneuverability.

These specific considerations aside, the one holding the tactical carbine is the one with the advantage in the majority of scenarios. AR variants are an excellent choice, particularly those with shorter barrel lengths. However, your carbine doesn't need to be an AR-15 clone, or even an AR pistol, as there are many excellent options out there to choose from.

Some of our favorite non-AR based weapons are the Ruger Mini 14, Ruger PC Carbine, Kel Tec SU16, FN PS90 bullpup, AK-47 variants, and the Norinco SKS.

RED DOT SIGHTS



For those who are unfamiliar with “red dot” sights, these optics superimpose a glowing dot over an unmagnified (1X power) glass lens, creating a natural looking field of view in which the dot is always true with the weapon's aim, despite the shooter's position behind the optic. It's one of those things that are hard to explain in a non-technical manner, yet incredibly simple to understand immediately upon first use.

There's a reason the US military adopted this technology for combat rifles. The combination of acquisition speed and accuracy that “red dot” sights provide is a clear advantage over an enemy without such a sight. Likewise, it levels the playing field for those with poor eyesight that makes it difficult to align their weapon's front and rear sights.

Instead of practicing front sight or target focus, you simply focus on a single plane, placing the bright red (or green) dot over your target. For any type of rapid-fire shooting situation, red dot sights have become the go-to option for placing the most shots on target when time is of the essence.

Clearly, these sights weren't developed for long-range target shooting, as they're not typically magnified. Inside of 100 yards, however, this type of sight can deliver surprisingly good groups and very quickly too.

Another benefit of using a red dot is that you can shoot with a more heads-up position, allowing for better peripheral vision. If you're hog hunting, for example, trying to track multiple moving targets and switch between these targets quickly, a red dot is hard to beat.

WEAPON LIGHT AND OR TACTICAL FLASHLIGHT



There's no way around it; it's very important that you can see what you're aiming your weapon at. Period. End of discussion.

If you're a regular on the tactical message boards and comments sections of various tactical blogs, then you'll see a fair amount of controversy over this seemingly reasonable declaration. Many of these “tacti-cool” meatheads will argue that a weapon light should be avoided because it gives away your position.

Alas, weapon lights do have cons as well as pros, but shooting at a dark unidentified object certainly seems less than tactically sufficient. In fact, it's negligent and ineffective. You might think of it like this: being blindfolded may have some advantages, but wouldn't

you rather be the one who can see clearly throughout a dangerous encounter?

Weapon lights that mount directly to your carbine or handgun are ideal for several reasons. First and foremost, they're already fixed to your weapon and save you the extra seconds you may spend fishing around in the drawer for your flashlight. Second, rail mounted lights don't require an extra hand to operate.

Tactical flashlights can be very effective when paired with a handgun. In fact, this is the combination most commonly used in law enforcement settings. Different agencies recommend different techniques, however. The FBI technique involves holding the flashlight up and over your non-dominant shoulder. Other agencies recommend holding the flashlight across your body, using your non-dominant forearm as a rest to steady your handgun.

As for the idea that lights give away your position, both rail mounted lights and handheld tactical lights should be easily toggled on/off, as the situation requires. Any tool is only as effective as the operator's level of training.

FOREGRIPS



Foregrips, forend grips, or forward grips, whatever you want to call them, are so beneficial versus what they cost, that it's really a no-brainer. The only potential downside is you'll want to install these on every rifle and carbine you own.

What is it about foregrips that create such a tactical advantage? That question is possibly best answered with another question, when was the last time you held a weapon up at the ready-to-fire position while walking for several minutes? Hint: It's not super comfortable.

Yes, the foregrip helps you steady your weapon and manage recoil, but we would argue that the biggest benefit is the extra handle, i.e. more ways to hold your weapon and distribute the weight.

Other benefits include, as we said, creating more pressure into your shoulder, which is especially helpful when you are firing rapidly. Managing recoil and staying on target (or reacquiring your target quickly) is a major tactical advantage.



Another set of potential advantages are also available with your foregrip addition. Someone much smarter than we are figured out that adding a laser, tactical light, or bipod to the foregrip turned this upgrade from a no-brainer into a slam dunk. Your forend

grip can definitely function as a makeshift monopod in a pinch, but having a built-in bipod function is optimal.

TACTICAL SLING



When it comes to tactical upgrades, there's nothing that makes more sense than some type of patrol sling that allows you to use your hands freely while also not dropping your weapon in the dirt. Opening doors, gates, picking up magazines, all of it is much easier if you know that you're not going to drop your rifle. These are actually critical factors when you're moving through brush on a hog hunt or scooting through a simulation.

But that's not all, folks. No, that's not all. Slings can deliver lots of value when it comes to off-hand shooting support. "Shootings slings" excel at this, as the name indicates, though they are a little less tactically oriented.

Single point slings are the most versatile when it comes to shooting positions. You can even use these to create back tension, transferring some of the weight of your weapon to your shoulder, rather than your arm. This work best with shorter carbines such as AK variants, AR pistols, bullpups, etc. The one major downside with single point slings, as far as we've experienced, is the tendency for them to direct the weapon down toward your crotch. It's not ideal in any scenario.

Two-point slings offer relieve from that crotch smashing feature, though they restrain your shooting position a bit more. They still provide good offhand shooting support. All-in-all, the two point is what we recommend to meet the most needs. It's best to test drive slings and decide what feels best for you.

LASER SIGHTS



As we discussed with red dot sights, instant target acquisition is a critical advantage when fragments of a second count. Red dot sights are excellent for both rifles and handguns, but lasers are equally advantageous, and possibly more so depending on the home turf you are defending.

That's because lasers, apart from being ridiculously fun to play around with, allow you to fire accurately from improvised positions. If you are in a tight space, this can make all the difference. With a rifle or carbine, operating in a hallway, around corners, or from behind cover can be a battle within itself.

Bringing your weapon up to your proper shooting position is often not an option. The same dilemma is true with handguns as well. In addition to improving your quick acquisition, you get the ability to simply keep your eyes on the target, not your front sight.

This is a major advantage in both close quarters and in a situation where you are tracking a moving target. Again, this is an excellent upgrade for hog hunters (check your state's hunting regulations to make sure lasers are legal for your chosen quarry).

SOLID EDC KNIFE

Edged weapons are not your first best option in a tactical confrontation; it's true. It's also worth noting that they're not nearly as effective fighting weapons as some would have you believe. That applies to big nasty 7" Ka-Bar fighting knives, and it damn sure applies to 3.5" EDC blades.

On the other hand, your knife won't ever run out of ammo. And with modest training and the

understanding of a few basic knife techniques, these tools can be a whole lot more effective than an empty handgun. That's not to mention, your EDC blade functions as a pry tool to clear jams, if needed.



Here are the key criteria we place on an EDC knife. First and foremost, it must be a knife you're willing to carry almost constantly. Thus, a sleek and lightweight design should be prioritized over a heavier yet more capable knife that you keep in a drawer.

The second piece of criteria is that your EDC knife must deploy quickly. A rapid deployment mechanism is preferable, but there are plenty of manually opening "flippers" out there that are virtually just as quick.

The last piece of criteria for an EDC is, of course, it must fit you. Try out as many options as it takes to find one that feels capable and nasty in your hand as well as comfortable in your pocket. That way, you've always got a tool on your person that doubles as a weapon in a pinch.

EXTENDED MAGAZINES



Look, one thing's for certain when it comes to tactical supremacy; nobody wants to feel "outgunned." We've all seen those shootouts in movies like *Heat or Hell or High Water*, where the police are tasked with taking down a suspect armed with a high-powered semi-auto carbine with their service pistols. The fact is, this phenomenon isn't just Hollywood fiction.

More firepower is more firepower; it's just that simple. Now in our home defense scenario, chances are that you will not take the time to put on a tactical vest with 5 fully loaded 30-round magazines in the pockets. However, one 30 round magazine will give you a roughly 12-15 round advantage over someone carrying a modern handgun.

If you are carrying a handgun for home defense, you should definitely take this into consideration. We're not necessarily telling you to get one of those ridiculous 50 round Glock magazines. But do consider topping off your home defense weapon.

It's easy to image that 8 rounds will be more than enough. Yet, it's very common to hear about shootouts where police fire 40 rounds at a suspect, all missed. These are trained professionals, mind you. But in the adrenaline of the moment, so much of that training goes out the window.

There's a commonly held belief that, as humans, we rise to the occasion during critical moments. That's not how our elite military organizations see it, however.

"Under pressure, you don't rise to the occasion, you sink to the level of your training. That's why we train so hard." – Anonymous Navy SEAL

With that said, more bullets equal more opportunities to make your shot. It's just that simple. This also leads very directly to our next tactical tool, perhaps the most important of all.

ROUTINE WEAPONS TRAINING

Sure, this doesn't necessarily meet most people's definition of a "tool," but as we've already touched on, any tool is limited by the ability of its operator. Ability is, of course, linked to the level of training that an operator has cultivated.



There are lots of interesting ways to load up on weapons training. Some of these come in the form of gear and others in the form of memberships at the local shooting range. One thing is sure, it's hard to find an equivalent for actual time spent on the target range.

Many concepts such as recoil management are nearly impossible to replicate outside of live fire. However, there are actually many tactical concepts that are better in a non-live fire setting; it's true.

Before you roll your eyes, consider practicing things such as drawing from concealment, tactical reloads, and firing on multiple targets at a typical gun range. This would not make the range marshals happy.

If you have access to a true tactical range, that's great. Most people don't. But even if you do have a complete tactical shooting course on your back 40, it's much safer and better to spend significant amounts of time dry fire training.



Snap caps, laser training replicas, and other such tools can speed up your progress immensely – specifically because they are safe and allow you to focus on your mechanics. We can't stress this enough: safe dry-fire

training is the ideal way to practice holster draws, multiple threat scenarios, and many other concepts.

You'll want to get plenty of repetitions in before you even consider performing these with live fire. That's how to install good techniques before the pressure of live fire erodes them back to the level of your training, to paraphrase our Anonymous SEAL.





THE NSRA'S SIMPLE DIY BEER RECIPE

In last month's article, we took a look into why fermentation is a highly valuable self-reliance skill, both in the here and now as well as in a SHTF scenario. People like their booze, and if America learned anything from Prohibition, it's that people will go to great lengths to get it.

Crafting great booze is a far more complex and artful process than we can cover in a single article. However, we've found an extremely simple recipe to help get your feet wet, so to speak, if you want to try your hand.

Since beer is an all-time favorite, we'll start there. Its frothy goodness can be imbibed in a variety of options throughout the globe. Beginners can even join forums and online groups before the SHTF to learn everything they'll need to hone their skills.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BREWERS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

You now know enough of the basics to consider brewing your own beer. Since the sh*t hasn't hit the fan yet, it's a good idea to start practicing while you can still access message boards or even take a beginner's brewing class.

Brewers have a long, distinguished history, and that's not going to change during the apocalypse. In fact, learning how to brew beer will make you part of a noble (and intoxicating) tradition that dates back to at least 10,000 B.C.

20 Since that time, beer has been used for everything from religious ceremonies to liquid courage. It's

quite simply part of the social fabric, and it's been an important part of socializing and celebrating for centuries. Therefore, it's not surprising that even after civilization collapses, we'll still be craving a tall, cold beer from the local pub.

Interestingly, the beer we drink today owes a massive debt to German monks from the year 1150. That's when wild hops were first added to beer. If you can find wild hops, they can be added to any beer recipe. Simply boil them for at least 20 minutes and add them in! Note: adding hops will make it necessary to store your beer for a month or so to obtain the optimal flavor.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS FOR MAKING BEER THE MODERN WAY

- Boil 5 gallons of water to 170 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Add your specialty grains and let them soak for 30 minutes between 160-170F.
- Add malted extract and aroma hops to the solution.
- Bring it to a boil for 90 minutes.
- Cool the mixture with a wort chiller.
- Transfer the cooled wort to the fermenter.
- Activate and pitch yeast. Ferment at 68F to 70F.
- Wait 1-2 weeks as the yeast ferments the sugars to release CO2 and ethyl alcohol.
- After the main fermentation process, add your priming sugar for carbonation.
- Keg or bottle your beer.

H/T to 52Brews.com

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