

# Opening day here for eastern wild turkey

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
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There's a saying among outdoorsmen that a man — or woman — only has so many opening days in a lifetime. The beauty of the thought is that deer, ducks, quail, rabbits, squirrel and so on all have an opening day every year.

It just so happens this weekend is the opening weekend of the eastern wild turkey season in Game Zones 1 and 2.

The season technically opened Friday, but today is often the first day many hunters have a chance to hit the woods — the beauty and majesty of the breaking of a new day and a new season are just as good.

For veteran turkey hunter Walter Mitchell, another opening day of turkey season means another chance to get in the woods and do the thing he loves most. He has killed a lot of turkeys, but he claims it's not the number that matters.

To this day, Mitchell won't admit he's an expert turkey hunter, but he does admit he has learned some things — some might call them secrets — that only seem like common sense to him that have helped him kill a limit of turkey almost every year he has hunted.

"If you're new at it, one thing is to get with somebody that understands how turkey behave," he said. "Go with them and learn how and when to use a call. I think a lot of people put too much emphasis on calling. I think location is a lot more important. Get down to learning the terrain, the



COURTESY OF WALTER MITCHELL

**Old turkey and old turkey hunters only ask for one thing — to live to see another opening day.**

area the turkey is using, and then figure out how to get him to come to you."

Mitchell said he sees a lot of turkey hunters gravitate to open areas like fields, pastures and big food plots when hunting turkey. That was never his style. His preference was to make things a little more personal.

"I'd rather hunt wood birds than I had in the field anytime," Mitchell said. "I could always get a bird to work better in the timber than I could in the open field. Most of the time in an open field, he's going to fly out right in the middle of that open

area with 15 to 20 hens, and that's where he's staying."

Mitchell's favorite and most productive tactic has been to roost a bird in the timber the night before. He will admit that's not a secret to 100-percent success — if there is even such a thing in turkey hunting — but it's one he's had the most success at.

"I'm pretty bad about putting a big gobbler to bed the night before," Mitchell said. "I'll get out there and do a good bit of scouting. Lots of times they will roost in the very same tree over and over. That's the fun part

I've always found about turkeys. They're liable to do one thing today, something else tomorrow. You think you got them figured out, but you go back in there and they've done moved five miles.

"But most times, when they've got plenty of feed, they'll stay in the area unless something or someone scares them and moves them out."

Mitchell said he believes much of his success stems from being both patient and confident. He's patient if he knows he's in the right area, and he gets that patience from knowing the lay of the land and knowing that birds are in the area. He's never been one to chase down a bird he knows nothing about. He'd rather set up somewhere and make that bird come to him.

"I never was 'run and gun,'" Mitchell said. "I do my scouting, and I'm confident I know where they're at. I'll go and get in the area and see what happens.

"Gobblers always seem to want to come uphill for some reason, especially the woods. My favorite set up is to roost a bird and get uphill from him, especially if there's an old logging road involved. Old turkeys love to walk them old logging roads."

With one more opening day under his belt, Mitchell said old tom turkey won't be the only one walking lonely logging roads this weekend. He'll be there, too.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is a freelance outdoor writer and the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at [pgandboatgirl.com](http://pgandboatgirl.com).