

# Crossbow Hunting Changes

## Questions and Answers

Fall 2025



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

Hunters should be aware of changes to crossbow hunting opportunities for the 2025-26 hunting seasons. Check DEC's website prior to going afield for more information.

### Changes to Expand Access to and Use of Crossbows

**Q. What license and privilege do I need to hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting seasons and what tag do I use when I harvest a deer during these seasons?**

A. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting seasons, a hunter must have a hunting license and bowhunting privilege. To be eligible to purchase a bowhunting privilege, a hunter must have bowhunter education certification. Obtain bowhunter education certification through [the online or in-person course](#).



*Successful deer hunt in Delaware County*

Deer harvested with a crossbow during a bowhunting season may be tagged with a bow/muzzleloader either-sex tag, bow/muzzleloader antlerless tag, Deer Management Assistance Program tag (antlerless deer only), or a Deer Management Permit (antlerless deer only) for the WMU where the deer was harvested. A regular season deer tag may be used during the late bowhunting season for a deer of either sex.

**Q. In prior years, big game hunters were required to carry their hunter education certificate dated on or after April 1, 2014, or carry the completed Crossbow Certificate of Qualification to hunt with a crossbow. Does that process or a previously completed certification still allow use of crossbows for deer or bear hunting?**

A. No. Big game hunters are required to take the NYS Bowhunter Education course to hunt deer or bear with a crossbow, regardless of past crossbow certification of qualification.

**Q. What license and privilege do I need to hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the regular (firearm) season and what tag do I use when I harvest a deer during this season?**

A. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the regular (firearm) season you need a hunting license and bowhunter education certification; you do not need a bowhunting privilege. Deer harvested with a crossbow during the regular (firearm) season should be tagged with your regular season tag (antlered deer only), Deer Management Assistance Program tag (antlerless deer only), or with Deer Management Permit (antlerless deer only) for the WMU where the deer was harvested.

**Q. What license and privilege do I need to hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the muzzleloader seasons and what tag do I use when I harvest a deer during these seasons?**

A. Crossbows are no longer associated with muzzleloading privileges. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting seasons that overlap muzzleloader seasons, a hunting license and bowhunting privilege are required. See information above about hunting with a crossbow during the bowhunting season.

**Q. What are the age requirements for hunting deer and bear with a crossbow?**

A. Hunters ages 14 and up with a valid hunting license and bowhunting privilege may hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during any season and in any location where a longbow is permitted. Hunters ages 12 and 13 that have a valid hunting license and bowhunting privilege may hunt deer with a crossbow only in those counties that have passed a local law allowing such hunters to do so. Check [DEC's website](#) for details.

**Q. Can I use a crossbow to hunt deer in “archery only” areas like portions of Albany and Monroe counties and in Westchester and Suffolk counties?**

A. Yes. Hunters may use a crossbow in archery only areas; however, the minimum setback distance from homes and other structures (i.e., dwelling, farm building, school, playground, occupied factory, or church) for discharge of a crossbow in Westchester and Suffolk counties is 500 feet. In all other counties where deer and bear hunting are permitted, the minimum setback distance is 250 feet. Hunters may discharge a crossbow at shorter setback distances with permission from landowners that have homes or other structures within these setback distances.

**Q. Have the physical specifications for a legal crossbow changed?**

A. Yes. Crossbows must have a working trigger safety and a minimum peak draw weight of 100 pounds. There is no minimum limb width, no minimum length, and no maximum draw weight.

**CONTACT:**

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