

## Harvesting Bucks by Age Class

You will not have good harvest management unless you know how to identify a mature, quality buck. For most hunting clubs and landowners growing bucks into the 2.5 year age class satisfies their degree of willingness to participate in a quality deer management program. Deer in the 2.5 age class will average 6 to 8 antler points, but will not achieve sufficient sized racks to be included in state record lists or even attain mountable size for most hunters.

For those who want to go further and start producing deer of near trophy quality on a more consistent basis, additional restriction on harvest are necessary. Harvest restrictions implemented to achieve 3.5 year old bucks and older in the population need to be more involved than restrictions designed to achieve 2.5 year old populations. Antler points are not indicative of age class and deer quality once deer have graduated beyond the 2.5 year old category.

To start selecting for more mature bucks, characteristics such as antler mass, spread, neck girth, overall body size and appearance and behavior need to come into play. Mature bucks tend to have heavier antlers and bodies. In the fall, he should have a thick, muscular neck and torso. His stomach should be full and round, giving the appearance of shorter legs. If you take the time to notice these characteristics, it becomes easy to distinguish between young bucks and mature ones.



A yearling buck exemplifies the undeveloped, lanky body that is often referred to as a doe with antlers.



2.5 year old bucks have features similar to yearling bucks, but their rack and body have matured slightly.



This 3.5 year old buck is starting to develop mature features. His muscle tone is starting to develop and his rack and body are beginning to put on mass.



This 4.5 year old buck displays mature features in clear contrast to the immature buck attributes. Regardless of number of points, his rack has good mass and spread. His neck is well developed along with his wide body and a full stomach.



This 5.5 year old buck is fully mature, showing his fully developed front shoulders with a neck that is flush with the brisket. His back is starting to sway downward while his belly appears rounded.



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