

Blowguns

(Always Safety First!)

Legality:

First, some legality issues. Blow guns are not legal in California or Massachusetts, or the District of Columbia. As far as I can find, they are legal in the rest of the US, with no age limits on use.

Canada, the UK, Australia, and Guatemala all have some type of prohibition against blowguns, though it varies by country. Those are the only countries that I am aware, but I did not research it in depth.

Types:

There are many types of blowguns, but most have the same basic premise and features. They consist of a hollow tube of material, through which some type of dart or other projectile is propelled by the force of a person's lungs. Some have mouthpieces, where some use the plain end of the tube for blowing.

They can vary in length from a few inches to four feet long and more. Internal diameters can be from slightly larger than a needle, to as much as 0.75 inches. There may be larger ones, but I am not aware of any commercially produced ones larger. Most common calibers are 0.35", 0.40", 0.50", 0.625", and 0.68".

Projectiles:

Uniform seeds, clay balls, plastic costume jewelry beads, and even push pins have been used in appropriately sized blowguns. Most, however, use some type of dart, consisting of a thin wooden skewers or metal wire, with some type of fletching.

The fletching varies with the culture of the shooter, and availability of suitable natural materials. Plant fibers, down, feather tips, and animal fur are just a few of the natural items used.

Modern fletching can be paper or plastic cones, and formed aluminum or plastic shapes. The aforementioned plastic beads, sometimes used alone, are often fitted with a piano wire dart shaft. Dart length varies depending on use and the type of material.

There are many types of darts available, from beads to blunts to dull points to sharp points to a form of broad head. In a variety of calibers.

Uses:

A few cultures have used blowguns as offensive weapons, but the majority have been used for the taking of small game. With or without the use of poisons. Even some large game has traditionally been taken with poisoned darts.

Nowadays, small game hunting, pest control, and target shooting are the primary uses here in the States. The use of poisons is regulated, not to mention highly dangerous, so DO NOT DO IT! Darts designed for hunting are adequate for the purpose. If you feel you need poison, you are hunting something you should not be.

How to use:

Using a blowgun is simple. But to become proficient, as with almost all shooting, requires practice. It is going to take some experimentation to decide how best to hold the blowgun for you, and how to sight it.

There are a wide variety of holds, from both hands near the mouthpiece, extending one hand forward and the other at the mouthpiece, or with both hands extended, all held free hand or with a rest.

I have found that extending my left hand forward, and holding the mouthpiece in my right works best for me, with the blowguns I have. Try that first, and if you are not satisfied, try some other holding techniques.

I simply sight over the far end of the tube with both eyes open. There are some end-of-tube sights available, but I do not feel the need. With practice, you will be able to determine if you need to hold the end of the tube below the target, right on the target, a bit above the target, or somewhere in between. It will vary with the distance to the target, and your lung capacity.

When ready to shoot:

Step #1:

Retrieve a dart, from a pouch or a carrier on the blow gun.

Step #2:

Holding the blowgun level, insert the dart into the mouthpiece. If it is a safety mouthpiece, push the fletching through the stopper.

Step #3:

With your face averted from the blowgun mouthpiece take a deep breath. Do not try to take a huge one, just a good deep breath.

Step #4:

Turn your head toward the blowgun, look at the target, and bring the mouthpiece to your mouth.

Step #5:

Sight over the tip of the blowgun, holding the tube steady.

Step #6:

Explosively release the breath without moving your head or hands. Do not try to overdo it. Just a sharp release of the held breath and blow.

This is the way I do it, and it works for me. I would urge everyone to do some research on their own to learn more about blowguns, how to hold them, how to sight them, and best practices. Then practice, practice, practice.

There is one overriding factor. Safety.

Blowgun Safety

1. Blowguns are tools, and just like all projectile launchers, can be dangerous if misused, used carelessly, or used to intentionally cause harm.
2. Although there are some 'toy' blowguns, all blowguns can be used in dangerous manners.
3. Blowguns should be used only by adults or under adult supervision.
4. Do not leave blowguns and darts out where children can get their hands on them.
5. Wear eye protection when using blowguns! Even blunt darts can damage eyes!
6. Know where your dart is going.
7. Use a good backstop when practicing. Not just to save darts, but prevent ricochets and hitting anything behind the target you do not want hit.
8. Avoid shooting down narrow areas where someone could walk into the path of the darts.
9. Shooting at house and apartment walls can be dangerous. If they penetrate the wall covering and hit an electrical wire they could become energized. Touch that dart and you could get a nasty shock. In more ways than one.
10. Do not shoot at elastic or bouncy items such as rubber balls, footballs, basketballs, volleyballs, etc. The darts almost never penetrate and will bounce in wild directions, often with great velocity.
11. Shooting at any round surface, bouncy or not, unless very soft, will likely result in ricochets, even sharp darts, and especially blunt darts.
12. Shooting at anything that can be easily damaged, scratched, scarred, or injured is not just irresponsible, it can be deadly, and get one in more trouble than it is worth.
13. Most darts are sharp. Do not carry them in pockets or anywhere else they are not carefully contained. Use quivers, pouches, or some type of container that protects both the dart and everything around them.
14. You are not a ninja or a blowgun warrior. Do not run, tumble, jive, juke, and roll, or do any other gymnastics with the blowgun up to your mouth.
15. Even wooden blowguns can be a conductor of electricity in some circumstances. Do not carry or use a blowgun in any way that could bring it into contact with overhead power lines.
16. Darts can slide from blowgun tubes. If you carry your blowgun with a dart in the tube, chances are it is going to fall out at some point. And that is dangerous. You, or anyone else, is likely to step on it or otherwise get it shoved into their body. Do not carry with a dart in the tube. Load when you have a target and are ready to shoot.

17. Be extremely careful of what you use as a blowgun rest. Using your own, or anyone else's body, to support the tube is asking for trouble and injury.
18. When carrying a blowgun, use a sling or pouch on your shoulder or back, or carry it open end down by hand.
19. Make sure the blowgun tube is clear before loading. DO NOT hold the end up in the air to look through it. Anything in it is coming straight for your eyes, protected or not. Hold it level, or downward when checking the tube.
20. It should go without saying, but I will say it anyway. Do not put the dart in the far end of the tube and suck it to the mouth piece!
21. Always put the dart in from the mouth end.
22. Never inhale through your mouth with the blowgun mounted. Always inhale with your nose, or preferably, when you do not have the blowgun mounted. This goes even with safety mouthpieces. They can fail.
23. It is not a good idea to shoot on the move, as already stated. But even when on the move, when you stop, steady yourself and get your breath before you load and mount the blowgun. The risk of inhaling a dart is much higher when you are gasping for breath.
24. Again, know your target and the backstop. Shooting blind, shooting high into the air, or any other type of shooting where you will not know exactly where that dart is going to impact is a firm no-no. A high arc dart can easily penetrate the skin. And even the skull, in some instances.
25. When starting out to practice, start closer to the target. But not closer than about 15'.
26. Extremely hard exhalation is not always necessary, and is often counter-productive. You do still have to blow. And it is heavy work for your lungs. If you have any type of respiratory problems, consult with your doctor before attempting use.
27. Note that continuous use of darts can eventually wear them so they do not fly properly. Replace the darts regularly.
28. Always remember that you have a long stick in your hand, with the attendant dangers of that, regardless of any darts. Be careful not to poke, prod, or swat anyone with the tube, accidentally or intentionally.
29. Again, the darts are usually very sharp. And in use can pick up all kinds of nastiness. If you prick yourself, or someone else, with one of the darts, take all first-aid precautions. Wash with soap and warm water, and disinfect the wound. You do not want any type of infection, even from a dart prick.
30. Finally, as with all things interesting, showing curious children what a blowgun is, how it works, and the dangers inherent in using one, and then letting them use one under supervision is usually much better than simply telling them 'hands off'.

Just my opinion.