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FOOD PLOTTING

BUILDING A STRONG

The topic doesn't receive a lot of press, but quality mineral supplementation can help boost the health of your deer herd.

By Matt Harper

TURNING EQUIPMENT **BLUES INTO PLOTS OF GREEN**

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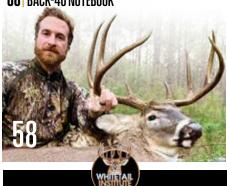
Land managers want to maximize their properties. Next Level Consulting can provide the answers and save you money, too. **■By Jody Holdbrooks**

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TAKE THESE 2 BIG STEPS TO BOOST FOOD PLOT SUCCESS

hope everyone had a great hunting season. Although deer hunting is finished in most parts of North America, don't forget that getting ready for the 2024 season starts now if you're serious about maximizing your chances for success. Here are a couple of things you need to think about at this time of year.

Rejuvenating last year's food plots: The most immediate thing to consider is frost seeding. Frost seeding is a process used to rejuvenate a perennial plot planted the previous fall or convert an annual plot for which a seedbed was prepared the previous fall into a perennial plot. In simplest terms, just broadcast Imperial Whitetail Clover or Fusion into the food plot in late winter, when the soil is thawing during the day and refreezing at night. This will also help you get ahead of

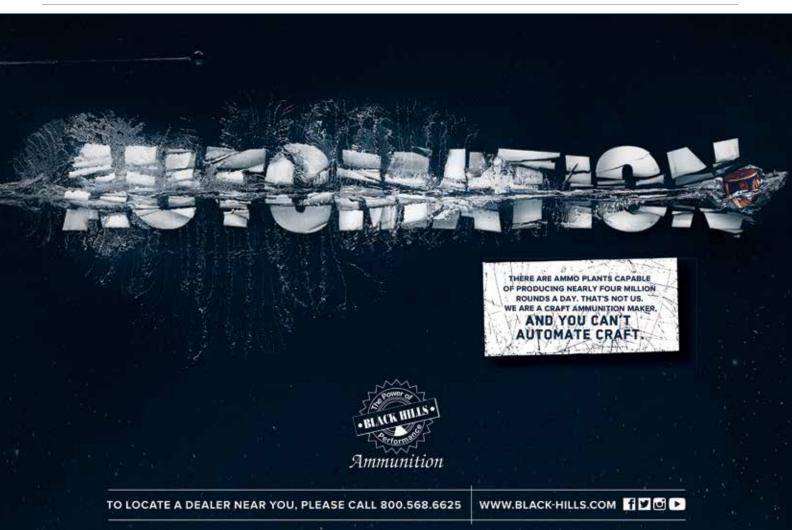
weeds that will appear later in spring and summer. Later in spring, also perform soil tests, and lime as recommended by the lab. And mow and use Arrest MAX and/or Slay as appropriate to control weeds in existing perennials.

Seed selection: Also, be sure you're aware of the benefits of planting seed that has been prepared to maximize success. Whitetail Institute seeds are designed that way. Whether you plant Whitetail Institute seeds or something else, though, there are a few universal things to look for before buying. One big factor affecting a seed's survivability after germination is a high-quality coating. Whitetail Institute coats seeds that can benefit from coatings with the most modern coating technology available. This includes Rainbond, a high-tech

polymer coating that provides several crucial functions. Perhaps the most important boost it brings to seedling survival is its ability to soak in up to 200 times its weight in moisture from the soil and keep it right next to the seed as it germinates and grows. The survivability of coated seed versus non-coated seed is huge. It can mean the difference between life or death for the seedling in times of inconsistent rainfall. Whitetail Institute coatings also contain the correct inoculants for the seed and fungicide, if needed. Not all seed manufacturers take those extra steps. Whitetail Institute does because it maximizes seedling survivability.

— William







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MADE IN USA PRECONYX CAMERAS

by W. Carroll Johnson III, Ph.D. – Agronomist and Weed Scientist



Should food plotters use conventional tillage or reduced tillage methods? Many considerations factor into that decision, and answers aren't always clear.

y previous career in agricultural research began in 1984 in southern Georgia, where the major cropping systems are peanut, cotton and many vegetable crops grown for fresh-market. When I arrived, those crops were largely grown using what I call conventional tillage. Conventional tillage used several tillage operations throughout the growing season and was grouped into two broad categories: primary tillage and secondary tillage. Nothing was standardized with tillage sequences, and implements varied among farming operations. Conventional tillage systems produced economically sustainable crops for decades.

Beginning in the late-1980s, things began to change. Fuel prices began to increase, along with the cost of most crop production inputs, such as fertilizer, pesticides and seed. Changes in agricultural

and trade policy caused wide fluctuations in prices received for raw commodities. Additionally, there were fewer skilled farm workers available. Collectively, those factors radically transformed how the major crops in my region were grown. Most of the crops are now grown using some form of reduced tillage, in which there are significantly fewer tillage operations compared to conventional tillage systems. With the adoption of precision guidance technology, crops are now established with minimal seedbed disturbance and seeded through debris from the previous crop using highly specialized planters. By specialized, I'm referring to planters with an array of cutters and furrow openers designed to slice through plant material from the previous crop and place precisely spaced seed into the soil. Necessity fueled radical changes in how these crops were grown on

a commercial scale. Although this example describes what happened where I live in the southeastern United States, similar changes have occurred throughout the country in other crops.

As a career agricultural scientist, I have always approached food plot management as a specialized form of agriculture. Does the radical transformation in commercial agriculture I described need to occur in how food plots are managed? That broad topic is subject to considerable debate, and it does not take long to find those discussions on social media, along with a legion of experts who readily offer their opinions. That leads to the fundamental question: Which is better for food plots: conventional tillage or reduced tillage?

In the context of food plots, there is not a universally correct answer or a wrong answer.

CONVENTIONAL TILLAGE IMPLEMENTS

The entire food plot tillage discussion is anchored by two extremes with infinite variations between them. For my part of this discussion, conventional tillage food plot production is the use of soil tillage implements to mechanically loosen compacted soil, mix soil amendments (fertilizers and limestone), weaken perennial weeds, and create a seedbed suitable for establishment of small-seed forage crops. The most common food plot tillage implement used in conventional tillage is a disk harrow. Disk harrows vary in size. Harrow blade diameter and spacing are the important variables for harrows, not overall width of the implement. Disk harrows with smaller and closely spaced blades can pulverize the soil and create an ideal seedbed for small seed forage establishment. Depending on food plot acreage, the horsepower sources are tractors or a UTV/ATV.

Tillage to loosen compacted soil: Tillage loosens packed soil and breaks apart large clods, which lets oxygen and moisture penetrate into the soil. This is necessary when newly cleared sites are being prepared for food plots or when soil is heavily compacted from previous use. Loosened soil also helps create optimum conditions for germinating crop seeds, which will be discussed later in this article.

Like many things in life, too much of a good thing can be detrimental. Excessive tillage with a disk harrow can create a compacted soil, especially if wet soil is repeatedly tilled. Think about how roads are constructed. A crucial step in road construction is a cyclic pattern of watering and harrowing, repeated many times. This intentionally compacts the roadbed, making an ideal substrate for the road. In food plots, the same processes can unintentionally create a compacted soil that will hinder food plot growth.

Tillage to distribute soil amendments: A distinct advantage of conventional tillage food plots is the ability to mix immobile soil amendments with the soil. Some essential plant elements are immobile and need to be uniformly mixed with the soil to maximize benefits to the crop. Phospho-

rous is an essential element that's essentially immobile in the soil. In food plot soils with a phosphorous deficiency, the fertilizer needs to be mixed with the soil for optimum performance, and a disk harrow is the tool of choice. This is also the case with acidic soils being treated with limestone. The most common liming materials are carbonates (that is, limestone), which are fairly immobile in the soil. Tillage with a disk harrow mixes limestone with the soil for optimum buffering of acidic soil, improves crop response, and maximizes overall benefits of this input.

Tillage to weaken perennial weeds: Perennial weeds are the bane of food plotters. Successful perennial weed control in food plots is based on using the systemic herbicide glyphosate before planting when the site is fallow (no crop growing). It's a well-established practice when controlling troublesome perennial weeds to combine fallow tillage with a later application of glyphosate. Tillage will weaken the perennial weeds and improve performance of glyphosate when applied to weed regrowth. For perennial weeds, this strategy is fundamental for successful weed control because of the limited number of selective broadleaf herbicides available for use in food plots. In this case, the weed control value of correctly used tillage is substantial.

Tillage to prepare seedbeds: Conventional tillage food plot systems provide opportunities to create ideal seedbeds, and this is probably the most important advantage of conventional tillage systems in food plots. For small-seed forages, it's fundamentally important to have direct contact between the forage seed and soil particles to ensure an optimum crop stand. Direct contact between forage seed and soil particles allows the seed to readily absorb moisture and germinate, and later, seedlings emerge. Seed-plant debris contact is undesirable. Poor seed-soil contact will form air pockets around the seed, resulting in delayed or erratic germination, followed by the curse of food plotters — a poor forage stand. From that point forward, a poor forage stand creates a domino effect of uncorrectable problems that usually culminate

in food plot failure — a costly disaster.

Why is good seed-soil contact the most important advantage of conventional tillage food plots? My mentor from my previous research career was an old-school agronomist, Frank McGill. Although he was a knowledgeable and instinctive agronomist, McGill was also an exceptional communicator. Using his uniquely succinct delivery, he once told a group of farmers, "Yield potential is established the moment a crop seed is placed in the soil." Think about that for a minute. If planting conditions are marginal because of extremes in soil moisture, cool temperatures or slipshod seedbed preparation, the crop yield potential will be reduced with no chance to recover compared to ideal conditions. Although food plots are largely a discretionary hobby to support another hobby (hunting), we want a production system that maximizes food plot productivity with minimal risk of failure. Achieving that begins with crop seeds that are surrounded by and directly in contact with soil particles, which is much easier to achieve in conventional tillage systems compared to reduced tillage systems.

CONCLUSION

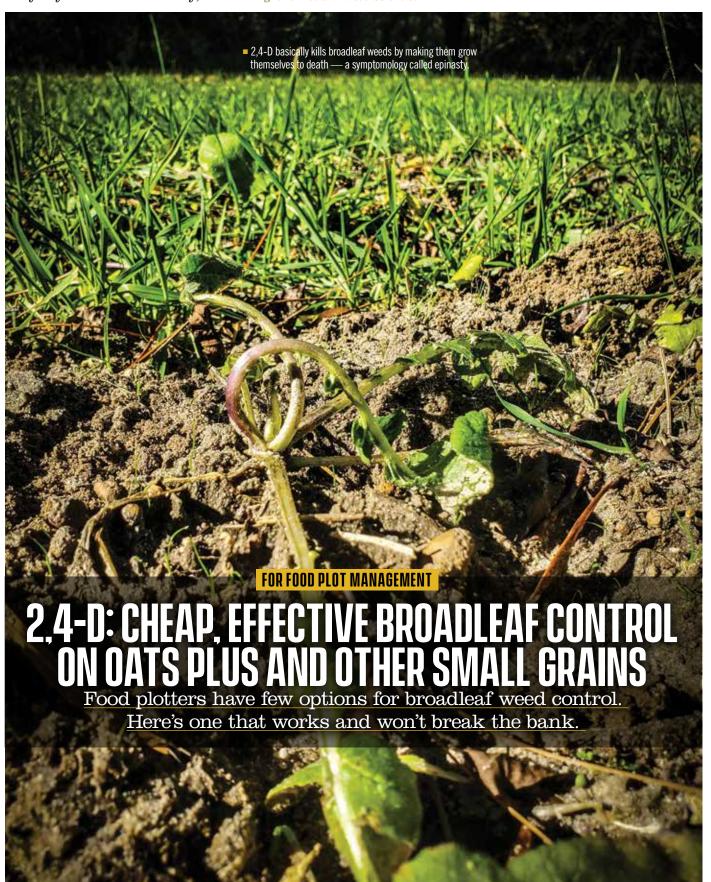
Tillage is a useful tool in food plot management when strategically used. Careless tillage does more harm than good. The rhetorical question remains: Do the benefits of conventional tillage food plot systems offset the risks? That question is impossible to correctly answer for all food plot systems. As I see it, new food plot sites or inexperienced food plotters would be better served to initially use conventional tillage to correct site-specific crop production hazards (such as nutrient deficiencies, acidic soils and perennial weed infestations) and also gain experience in successfully growing small-seed forage crops. Later, they can systematically introduce elements of a reduced tillage system into their overall food plot management plan. Both tillage systems have merits. Both have drawbacks.



ADVANCED FOOD PLOTTING

State-of-the-art tips and techniques for high-level land managers

■ by Joyce Allison Tredaway, Ph.D. – Agronomist and Weed Scientist



n today's economy, bargains are tough to come by. But if you have planted oats, wheat, triticale, rye or Oats Plus, there is still a low-cost option for broadleaf weed control. The cheap, effective broadleaf weed control herbicide 2,4-D is considered a bargain to keep your fields clean.

BACKGROUND

2,4-diphenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) was discovered in 1942 as a plant growth regulator. However, in 1944, USDA scientists reported that 2,4-D killed dandelion, plantain and other broadleaf weeds in a bluegrass lawn. This discovery of 2,4-D was the beginning of the chemical revolution in agriculture. 2,4-D is in the family of synthetic auxin herbicides. The auxins are growth regulators found naturally in plants and are responsible for cell division, and root and shoot growth. That basically means that 2,4-D kills broadleaf weeds by making them grow themselves to death. The symptomology broadleaf weeds express after the herbicide application is called epinasty. The cells elongate on one side of the plant, causing the plant to bend outward and downward.

USES AND FORMULATIONS

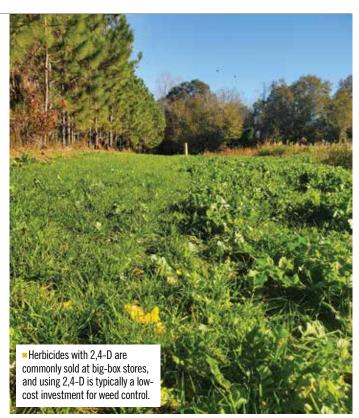
2,4-D is a cheap, effective broadleaf herbicide that is used on cereal grains, corn, sorghum, grass forage crops, turfgrass, rights-of-way and aquatics. It's absorbed by the plant through foliar uptake, so it has very few soil residual properties. When applied post-emergence, it's ineffective on grasses and sedges. However, it has a small amount of soil residual properties as a pre-emergent with grasses, although this is rate dependent. I mention this because we often recommend 2,4-D as a burndown in summer, and after applying 2,4-D, you should wait about three weeks before planting.

2,4-D is available in two formulations: ester and amine salt. The formulations have different chemical structures attached to the end of the 2,4-D parent molecule. The parent molecule is the herbicidally active portion. However, the different additions alter the chemical and physical properties of the herbicide, changing use patterns. The ester formulation has a higher vapor pressure and is thus more prone to volatilization (off-target drift) by conversion from a liquid spray droplet to a gas compared to the amine salt formulation. The amine salt formulation is the better choice for weed control in crops, specifically cereal grains. Therefore, the amine salt formulation is the recommended formulation for the purposes of this article.

APPLICATIONS

Oats Plus is composed of WTI Oats and triticale. Both are small grains that are tolerant to 2,4-D applications. 2,4-D can be applied over the top of Oats Plus at any stage, as well as wheat, rye, triticale, and ryegrass. However, spraying early (the three-to-six-leaf stage with three tillers) will be necessary for optimum weed control.

Reading online, you will see recommendations such as, "not



to apply 2,4-D to small grains in the fall." They're referring to small grains grown for grain. Research has demonstrated that 2,4-D can reduce grain yields if applied before tillering in certain small grains. However, food plotters grow Oats Plus and other small grains for forage, not grain yield. Our main objective is to produce leaves for deer to forage without having weed competition. This is where cheap 2,4-D applications fit in nicely with a weed management plan.

The cost of 2,4-D is also a great benefit. Prices will vary but 2,4-D is about \$4 to 5 per acre, which is a low-cost investment for weed control.

One thing to mention is that brassicas are very sensitive to 2,4-D. Do not use 2,4-D on products containing cereal grains mixed with brassicas and other forage species (such as Pure Attraction and Destination).

2,4-D-containing herbicides are commonly sold at many big box stores for homeowner use. It's sold as a stand-alone product in addition to many weed and feed products. This illustrates the proven safety and value of this product.

In addition, cleaning up your fields during winter will reduce the weed seed bank of broadleaf weeds for your spring plantings.

We have very few options for broadleaf weed control in food plots, so this is an opportunity to clean up your fields with a cheap, effective product.







don't like phrases used so often in writing and speech that they become cliché, like a bumper sticker slogan. Sure, they make for good country music song titles, like "Its Five O'Clock Somewhere" and "I'm Not as Good as I Once Was," but they otherwise become tired and worn.

You might ask why I titled this article in the manner I claim to dislike. In some cases, the phrase "building a strong foundation" holds so much truth and is so universally relevant that there's no better way to say it. The importance of a solid, steadfast foundation can be seen in almost every aspect of life, not just the construction of a building. A championship team must have a strong foundation in fundamentals, a marriage must have a solid foundation of love, and a business must have a bedrock foundation in the marketability of its product. The principle of a strong foundation is even found in the Bible, Matthew 7:24-27. (I suggest reading the whole chapter.).

In white-tailed deer management, fundamental aspects must be present to build the foundation for a strong deer herd. For example, good habitat is a core element of any successful management plan, as are harvest strategies, age structure, buck-to-doe ratios and the like. Of course, nutritional management is a

foundational must, as it's vitally important to a strong, productive herd. Like all the aforementioned components to construct a quality deer management program, you can double-click into nutrition to get more granular in specific aspects of needs.

In general, basic nutritional requirement include protein, energy, minerals and vitamins. In most cases, that's where the conversation stops. Of those four, protein is mentioned most often and touted as the critical component on which to focus. Protein is important and is often lacking in natural diets, at least at a level for deer to realize maximum genetic potential. But it's a component, not the whole, and cannot alone achieve overall nutritional objectives.

Minerals typically take the silver medal in discussions of whitetail nutrition, and like protein, they're often lacking in availability for optimum results. In either case, the conversation is broad and typically only includes the comment, "Deer need protein and mineral."

You can dissect protein to identify more specific nutritional needs and management practices. But in this article, we'll peel away the layers of mineral nutrition to understand the why, what and how of using a mineral supplement to build a solid nutritional foundation.

THE CASE FOR SUPPLEMENTATION

White-tailed deer have existed for thousands of years without the aid of manmade supplements. Deer inhabit and in some cases thrive on properties with no mineral supplementation. So, some folks argue that mineral supplementation is not needed and has no benefit. That thought process is correct in a limited way, depending on how you define needed. If that simply refers to the ability of a species to survive, it's accurate. However, if it refers to a deer herd's ability to reach maximum genetic potential, some holes in the logic begin to show. Arguing that mineral supplementation is of no benefit is even harder to justify based on what we know about the importance of mineral nutrition and mineral availability in a deer's natural diet.

Mineral is defined as a solid inorganic substance that occurs naturally, with a defined chemical composition and a specific crystal structure. Minerals are found in soil, rocks and plants but are derived from the rock ore of the soil. If an area is high in limestone deposits, it's likely the soil contains high levels of calcium. Soils vary greatly in specific mineral content based on many geological and environmental factors. The actual mineral content varies in total mineral levels and specific mineral levels, meaning that some soils might be high in calcium but low in selenium. Even in highly productive agricultural regions, soils can lack mineral content. Further, plants use minerals in the soil, depleting the dirt of minerals through time. That's why farmers fertilize crop fields each year to put back what has been removed. So although some areas might naturally be higher in mineral than others, all properties lack the appropriate level of all minerals, which prompts the need for supplementing soil with fertilizer to improve plant growth.

The same holds true for supplementation of the critters that consume plants that grow in that soil. Iowa is known for highly productive crop ground and good, rich dirt. Even in southern Iowa, where the hills and trees from Missouri start to encroach, the land is still very productive, especially for cattle. Pasture growth is abundant, and when managed well, can support some of the highest grazing concentrations in the country. You might think that mineral supplementation for cattle in that area would be a waste, but that's not true. Cattle supplemented with mineral in that area will have higher body weights, a higher breeding percentage, faster calf growth and overall better health and productivity. That area might be better than others in terms of mineral levels, but there are still insufficient natural levels to achieve full productive potential. Reams of research prove this in cattle, and although the amount of research on deer pales in comparison, the biological logic does not change, and the physiological and metabolic functions are the same. That's why deer managers have seen improvements of the aforementioned data points when using a mineral supplement.

THE FUNCTION OF MINERALS

One of the book shelves in my office has at least six textbooks that in part or entirely discuss the many and varied vital functions of minerals. I don't have the space here to discuss the function of every mineral in a deer's physiological system, and doubt you want to read that anyway. But I think it's important to have a general understanding of some of the main functions of minerals often found in deer mineral supplements to support what minerals can do in a deer herd. This will read a bit like a laundry list, but within the charts, you will recognize important mineral functions.

Minerals are divided into macro minerals and micro minerals. Macro minerals are needed in large quantity, and micro minerals are needed in smaller quantities but are nonetheless vital for optimal nutrition.

rapid growth. If a doe is in poor condition, the quantity of her milk will decrease, so fewer nutrients are supplied to the fawn.

Contrary to what many people think, the mineral that goes toward milk produc-

MACRO MINERALS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

CALCIUM Bone formation, muscle contraction, milk production PHOSPHORUS Bone formation, acid-base balance **MAGNESIUM** Enzyme activation, bone formation POTASSIUM Osmotic pressure, acid-base balance, muscle activity **SODIUM** Osmotic pressure, acid-base equilibrium

MICRO MINERALS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

IRON Cellular respiration, hemoglobin **COPPER** Bone formation, hair pigment, enzyme activity, hemoglobin **ZINC** Enzyme activity, bone formation, immunity MANGANESE Amino acid metabolism, enzyme activity, bone formation **COBALT** Needed by rumen bacteria for growth and Vitamin B12 synthesis **IODINE** Thyroid function — related to metabolism **SELENIUM** Vitamin E absorption, enzyme, immunity

Those are just a few mineral functions, but you can quickly see why proper mineral nutrition is so critical to optimal growth and production of whitetails.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF THE ENTIRE HERD

When you look at the chart, your mind will likely go straight to antler growth, as so many minerals play a role in bone growth and formation. That's true, but before we go down that road, let's start at the beginning.

That big, gnarly 10-pointer (or 5-by-5 for our Western brethren) hanging in a place of honor at your house started life as a tiny bundle of legs and slime lying in some inconspicuous weed patch being licked dry by its mother. At that point, he was 100 percent reliant on the doe and the quality of nutrition to which that doe had access. Even before he was born, he relied on what the doe had available to eat. Out in the world, he was on a life-anddeath clock, with the balance depending on his mother's abilities, milk supply and luck. The highest percentage of fawn loss occurs within the first few hours to days after birth. The physical well-being of the doe can affect her maternal drive, meaning that if she's in poor condition, she can be more likely to abandon the fawn. More important, the quantity of her milk supply has the greatest effect on the survivability of the fawn. A doe's milk is very nutrient-dense, as the young fawn needs high levels of protein, energy and minerals for

tion does not come directly from diet but rather from the skeletal structure of the doe — the bones. Minerals such as calcium are pulled from the doe's bone structure and end up in the milk. If a doe does not have a solid skeletal foundation, less mineral transport will occur, and less milk is produced. The greatest factor contributing to the availability of mineral for milk production is the mineral content of the diet. If a doe has sufficient mineral in her diet to supply the skeletal structure, more mineral can be used for milk production. That's the same process that happens with dairy and beef cows, which are fed high levels of mineral during peak or early lactation to ensure that production stays high. A doe does not produce as much milk, but the nutrient concentration of her milk is much denser, meaning her mineral requirements per pound of intake can be even higher. Beyond early survival, a fawn's growth rate for the first few months of life depends on the mother's milk. If she does not maintain a solid mineral nutrition foundation, the fawn's weaning weight, yearling weight and odds of first-winter survivability will decrease.

Fawns are one of the most overlooked groups in a deer herd. After they're weaned, they begin growing skeletal structure, muscle and skin, which require minerals. Research shows that if they are stunted during their first year of life, they do not have a great ability for compensatory gain and can remain stunted for the rest of their lives. A buck will grow its skeleton for roughly three or four years before it's fully mature, meaning that until that time, it needs mineral for skeletal growth as well as antler growth. But it's not just direct bone growth. As the chart indicated, many micro minerals play a role in enzymes and metabolism, which affect the overall digestion and usage of the diet and, therefore, the ability of a buck to reach full potential.

THE ANTLERS

Antlers are bones outside the body — essentially an extension of the skeletal system — that regrow each year. Sometime in early spring, antler buds start to appear at the pedicles and have the basic consistency of a newly born bone. At that time, and for the first few weeks of new growth, antlers are comprised of a protein matrix that makes up the framework and a skin/velvet layer that contains the blood source, which is the pipeline of protein and minerals that build the antler. Through time, mineral deposits form on the protein matrix to provide the solid, hard makeup to withstand the fighting brutality of the

upcoming rut. As summer progresses, the rate of mineral deposition increases as the protein matrix nears the end of the structural build. As fall nears, antlers become more mineralized, and eventually, the velvet slips away to reveal a hardened antler that is slightly more than 50 percent mineral. As mentioned, bucks don't reach skeletal maturity until they're 3 to 4, so until that point, the body uses mineral for skeletal growth and antler development. That's why the full potential of antler size cannot be realized until the buck reaches full body maturity.

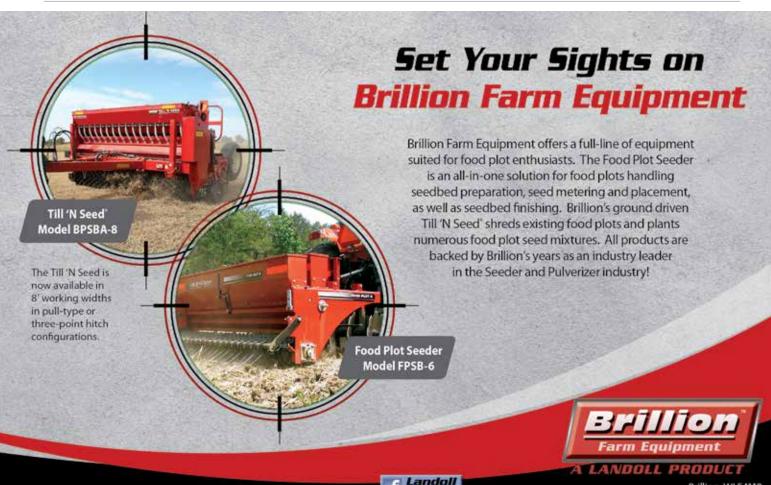
Just as mineral from the skeletal system is used in doe lactation, mineral for antler growth is also pulled from a buck's bone structure. Even at maturity, if a buck doesn't have enough mineral in its diet to compensate for maximum transport to the antlers, he will transfer less mineral. The buck will naturally not risk the health of its body for antler growth, as antlers are secondary to body health. Therefore, high-quality mineral is needed in the diet to build a solid mineral foundation in a buck's skeleton to ensure that optimal mineral can be used for antler hardening.

Good mineral nutrition in bucks results in larger antlers, but more notably, greater antler density, strength and mass. That has been seen in many cases in which bucks are not given mineral supplement. They showed far more antler breakage during rut than bucks that had optimal mineral nutrition. Finally, even at maturity, bucks tend to have heavier body weights when on a mineral supplement versus deer with poorer quality mineral nutrition.

CONCLUSION

A good foundation becomes the bedrock on which a strong building can be produced. Good nutrition, including mineral nutrition, is one of the components needed to assure a solid foundation. A house can be built on a weak base and might remain upright for a time, but when adverse conditions arise, the poor foundation immediately becomes evident. Many elements can go into a good whitetail management structure, but don't forget to start with a foundation that can help produce results year after year.









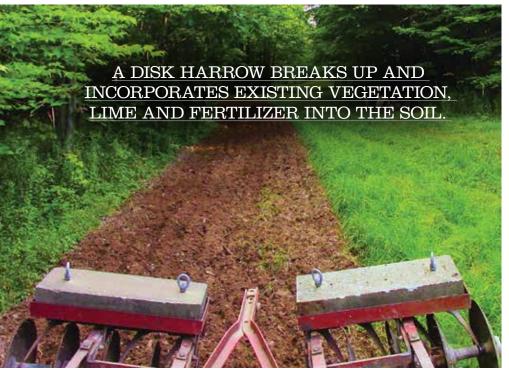
If you're thinking about upping your game and really putting high-quality forage on the table for deer, having the right equipment is as important as not going broke in the process.

Text and Photos by Kristopher M. Klemick

s history shows, barriers are just objects - mostly tangible placed in your way for mind or machine to overcome. We look objectively at problems and develop logical solutions to eliminate them. For example, in 1903, the Wright brothers solved the technology equation and flew, albeit only briefly. That first flight lasted just 12 seconds and traveled just 180 feet, but six decades later, we conquered another unknown: space travel. In 1969, we set foot on the moon. Bringing these examples down to ground level, we can see similar challenges still exist for mankind, though on a less significant scale.

Whitetail hunters love all things deer. The fact you have this magazine in your hands is a testament to your unwavering commitment to and successful pursuit of white-tailed deer. We know that food plots are a fundamental part to land management and overall habitat improvement. However, the ability to provide deer with abundant sources of high-quality food is often limited by access to the right equipment. That's another fantastic barrier, but fear not. Although countless successful food plots are planted each year with nothing more than a few hand tools and a healthy dose of elbow grease, (been there, done that and still have the aches and pains to prove it), to place significant tonnage across the landscape and save your body and sanity, you must have the right tools.

Fortunately, you don't need a second



mortgage to make it happen. Getting your hands on the right equipment isn't nearly as difficult or expensive as you might think.

Second- and even third- or fourthhand farming essentials can be the answer to your troubles. You just have to know where to look.

SOURCING EQUIPMENT

Local newspapers, penny-savers or weekly savings guide-type mailings are great for discovering upcoming public auctions where you can obtain used equipment. Websites such as Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace are also great resources. In 1990, when my uncle received mailings from the Whitetail Institute announcing the availability of Imperial Whitetail clover, he decided he was going all in. He recognized that he needed a small to medium-sized tractor to plant 3 or 4 acres and do it as efficiently as possible. A few months later, I was at an auction, cheering him on as he acquired a tractor and some equipment for dimes on the dollar. The disk, three-bottom plow and cultipacker were ancient but able, and were essentially being sold for scrap. But my uncle saw their value, so he was sure to have his hand in the air before the hammer dropped on each. And here we are more than 30 years later, with each one of those pieces of equipment still working hard each year in the field.



Another way of course, is the triedand-true boots on the ground door knockin' method. Travel the backroads through your local farming community and you might be surprised to realize the number of farms where old relics have been cast to the end of a field. Farmers count on their equipment to make a living, and through the years as yields have increased, so has the need for larger, more efficient equipment. It isn't unheard of for those older, smaller pieces that are perfect for food plots to be on the market — if only you'd ask. Farmers are salt-of-the-earth people and though they might curse deer for damaging their crops, they recognize when someone takes an interest in cultivating the land. You'd be surprised just how favorably some used equipment can make its way into your fields thanks to a friendly farmer.

TOOLS IN THE SHED

All you really need to get started are three things: a disk, cultipacker and something to pull them. A disk harrow is used to break up and incorporate existing vegetation, lime and fertilizer into the soil. Comprised of individual smooth or notched concave metal disks (think pizza cutters), each set of disks make up what's called a gang. A disk harrow can be as small as a four-wheeler (typically one to four gangs) to as large as a full-size truck or bigger. More disks equal more ground that can be covered and less time, making multiple passes to break down clumps of soil to a manageable size for the next piece of equipment you'll want to consider.

A cultipacker is also an important implement. After your soil has been disked, this would-be giant rolling pin, comprised of a series of ridged metal wheels stacked together running the length of the axle, helps crush small clumps of soil, eliminate pockets of air under the surface and help firm up the seedbed, which is crucial for many small seed food plot forages. If a cultipacker isn't available, any weighted drag will do, such as a piece of unrolled metal fencing with cinder blocks

strapped to it. A medium-diameter tree or part of an old telephone pole with heavy bolts and cables also makes for a great substitute.

Finally, you must decide whether you intend to use the horsepower at your disposal, whether it's a rototiller and lawn tractor pulling the lawn roller, a four-wheeler and its appreciably sized disc and drag, or a small or medium-sized farm tractor. Don't be afraid to start small, and like the farmers mentioned earlier, as the acreage you plant begins to increase each year, so can the size of your equipment.

TIME TO PLANT

Now that you're equipped with some knowledge, resources and a case study, it's time to get out there and turn that equipment blues barrier into lush food plots of green without spending a ton of greenbacks in the process.









he morning was crisp and cool; the kind deer hunters dream about. I was fortunate to harvest two adult does — the area warranted some thinning — during the first few hours of daylight. After field-dressing and dragging them toward my vehicle but within view of my stand, I quickly reassumed my perch.

At noon, the first antlers of the day appeared. Numbed by the scent of the does that had moved through earlier, the dandy 8-pointer posed perfectly broadside 100 yards away. One of his G-2s was broken off at the main beam. I acquired his ribs beyond my scope's reticle and felt the trigger. Immediately, I let up. With two does down, I had plenty of venison. And although the buck's antlers were nicely framed, he'd be better the next year. I let that Wisconsin buck go.

A few days later, I learned that a neighbor had killed it. Still, I had no regrets. If I'd shot the buck, he wouldn't have had any chance of surviving for another year. Obviously, he met his demise anyway, but that's how it goes. At least I didn't shoot the deer just to say I filled my buck tag.

The topic of passing up bucks is controversial, but I'll approach the discussion in a non-shaming way. In this article, we'll consider some of the deeper matters that will hopefully make you think a little bit more the next time a young buck poses broadside in your shooting lane.

OUR TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

In many of the places I hunt, encountering truly mature whitetail bucks seems to be an increasingly difficult task, even though I'm a better, more detailed hunter now than I've ever been. Other experienced hunters report likewise. It doesn't take an expert to understand why.

First, traveling to hunt in other states is more popular than ever, and droves of hunters are doing it. A lot of that is because of YouTube content and social media posting, which sparks interest among viewers. Unfortunately, many hunters kill deer on traveling hunts they wouldn't take in their home states because they don't want to eat their expensive nonresident tags. That takes a big toll on the buck age class.

We also must consider our weapons. They're deadlier to longer distances than weapons of yesteryear. Modern crossbows in skilled hands, for example, can place accurate arrows to 100 yards and beyond. That doesn't mean it's a responsible shot, but some folks take it anyway. My latest Mathews compound bows also can place accurate arrows to 100 yards and beyond, and although I'm not taking such shots at deer, I can confidently shoot a deer at 50 to 60 yards during ideal conditions. And there are 100-plus-



yard deer bow-kill videos on YouTube. Ethical or unethical, most hunters in the '90s couldn't have imagined such things.

The same holds true with firearms. Muzzleloaders were once a 100-yardsand-in deal. Then manufacturers pushed the envelope to 200 yards. Then 300. And now, I've heard of custom muzzleloaders that shoot accurately to 700 yards and farther. Rifles? I was recently in a deer camp at which a hunter shot a coyote at more than 1,200 yards.

In general, killing bucks is less challenging. It isn't hard in most places to encounter a little fork buck or 6-pointer. If hunters toting modern equipment aren't more selective, we'll see a decline in buck populations and especially age classes. In fact, I believe we already have. And that's especially important to consider alongside other challenges that lead to buck mortality, such as predation, diseases and winter kill.

MATURING AS A HUNTER

Each year, you'll likely see deer in the age class that you harvest. For example, if you pass up two 2-1/2-year-old bucks and harvest a 3-1/2-year-old, you'll likely have at least one 3-1/2-year-old buck to hunt the next year. That doesn't work everywhere. I know. States such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and most of Wisconsin host armies of hunters, and many 1-1/2- and 2 1/2-year-old bucks don't survive.

Hunters often say, "If I didn't shoot it, someone else would have." That's highly probable in high-pressure areas, but you can't conclusively say that, and no one wins when people make greed-based decisions. Further, if even a handful of hunters in a specific area lost that mentality and passed young bucks, the area would see a boost in buck age class. It has to.

Of course, it's acceptable for a beginner hunter to harvest any legal buck he likes. In fact, it should be celebrated. But as a hunter gains more experience and harvests a few more young bucks, I always encourage them to set the bar higher. Waiting for an older buck challenges folks to become better hunters. Plus, it's more rewarding for most of us to harvest a more mature deer rather than raiding the 1-1/2-year-old buck pool year after year. In other words, you've done something if you passed up a fork-horn and a 6-pointer for the first time in your life and then harvested an older deer as a result.

In a perfect world, hunters would mature as the years pass and challenge themselves by setting the bar higher. It lengthens the hunt and gives you more time afield when you pass young deer.

"IT'S MORE REWARDING FOR MOST OF US TO HARVEST A MORE MATURE DEER RATHER THAN RAIDING THE 1-1/2-YEAR-OLD BUCK POOL."

The more you're afield, the more you can potentially learn, and the more you learn, the better the hunter you can become. As a byproduct, that gives young deer the chance to age and older bucks the opportunity to breed does. Then you should have the opportunity to one day harvest a mature buck.

But many hunters simply want an easy hunt, or they want to say that they filled their buck tag. This mentality is rampant in my home state of Wisconsin, especially during the firearms season. If you're legitimately happy with harvesting a young buck, go ahead. But if you're doing it because you're afraid of being the only one in your group to not fill your tag, you're shooting a young buck for the wrong reason. Greed is never the right answer.

I'll acknowledge that many of us hunt for different reasons. Some are in it for the time afield, others want the venison, others enjoy the camaraderie, and others want the challenge of harvesting mature bucks. Regardless, even most meat

hunters would love the opportunity to shoot a big buck someday. However, only a small fraction of hunters are willing to eat their tags for a year or two and watch 2-1/2-year-old bucks walk out of their lives.

If you're truly interested in killing a big buck, lay off the young bucks. From there, you have to pay attention to details. Don't fry bacon in your orange coveralls. Don't drive your four-wheeler right to the base of your ladder stand. Cut out things that hold you back from encountering big bucks, and your odds will increase.

CONCLUSION

There's a saying: "Don't pass up a buck on the first day that you'd shoot on the last day." I'm not sure I like that saying, because I believe we shouldn't settle on the last day. If we choose to pass on a buck early in the hunt, we shouldn't regret it. I love to fill a tag as much as anyone, but we must set goals and do our best to hold to them throughout a hunt. If we go into a hunt with no intentions of shooting a 3-1/2-year-old buck, we shouldn't do it, even on the last day.

Ultimately, each hunter must decide what will make him happy in terms of buck harvest. Killing big bucks isn't easy, and holding out for a mature buck can lead to a pile of unfilled tags through the years. But if more hunters pass up young bucks, the age class can increase and allow for more opportunities in the future to harvest older bucks, because more will exist. Plus, passing young ones makes it sweeter when we harvest big bucks.

Big buck hunting isn't for everyone. Some folks just don't have the time because of personal circumstances. I get that. But for those of you who love to hunt and want to mature as hunters, one of the best things you can do is give young bucks a free pass.







Years of food plotting experience have helped the author glean tips that optimize Whitetail Institute food plots. Try these tactics on your property.

■ Text and Photo by Gerald Almy

he goal of most Whitetail News readers is to grow the best food plots possible. That's an unwritten assumption. We do this because we enjoy seeing and hunting deer and want to ensure that our land offers the best forage to support quality animals. We also grow plots to increase our edge for harvesting deer — particularly mature bucks — by offering nutritious forage with strong taste appeal that meets the varying nutrition needs of deer during all seasons.

But there's another reason we grow food plots. It's an immensely fulfilling and life-enriching activity. I've met many deer managers who rate growing plots as being almost more fun than hunting. And unlike hunting, which lasts a few months, growing food plots is a year-round activity that always gives us a reason to be afield, where we're most happy.

Whatever your reasons for growing forage for deer, you'll likely agree that you want to have plots that grow tall, last long, rate highest in protein and nutritional value, and attract the most mature bucks. You've started well by choosing the leader among wildlife seed companies: the Whitetail Institute. But you can take other steps to increase the benefits you and deer receive from your plots.

My introduction to food plotting began about the same time Ray Scott unveiled his groundbreaking Imperial Whitetail Clover in the late 1980s. Since then, I've set annual goals to grow better plots than the previous year and increase their benefits for deer. I don't always succeed, but I try. Here are a few steps I take to enhance the attractiveness of my plots and entice deer to stay on my land in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

1) KEEP IT VARIED

When I got into food plotting, I was a fan of Imperial Whitetail Clover, which had just come out. I planted it in every open spot of land, and deer loved it. It's perhaps the best deer forage ever created. But as the Whitetail Institute expanded its offerings, I gradually increased the variety of plants I used. First came Winter-Greens, soon followed by Tall Tine Tubers and then Whitetail Oats. All paid off, because deer loved those mixtures, too. During some periods, they even preferred them to my clover plots.

No individual forage is enough to keep deer on your property year-round. That's why the Whitetail Institute has a variety of offerings, most of which are blends of several plants. Take advantage, and offer products to suit the needs of deer and their taste preferences during different seasons. Give deer Ravish Radish in fall, and blends such as Winter Peas Plus, Destination and Beets & Greens. Give them Chic Magnet, Alfa-Rack Plus and Power Plant for summer forages, or use Extreme for poor soil areas. Any food plotter who uses only a few forages is missing an opportunity to offer deer the taste and nutritional variety they want and the ability to supply them with forage all year.

I've seen some whitetails feed on one forage while another group makes a beeline to another type of food in a nearby plot. Deer are a lot like people: Some like chicken, and some like steak. The more varied your offerings, the more likely you'll always have some forages that are at peak production and palatability, as well as various offerings that appeal to the tastebuds of individual deer.

2) SUBDIVIDE LARGE FIELDS

Most small to medium-sized plots do well with one forage. But with larger fields, I've found offering two or three forages in sections will attract more deer. Instead of having to travel to other fields, a buck can eat a bite of clover, then nip on Winter Greens and move to a snack of Whitetail Oats without having to travel to another field. Deer that prefer one or all those offerings can find it in one field.

During rifle hunts, I can cover those separate sections and get a shot opportunity at whichever forage a buck prefers. One memorable day, I watched three mature bucks in one of my subdivided fields, each eating a different forage. (Although the one I shot that day wasn't eating but watching a doe eat clover and trying to get her attention.)

Mix up your offerings, planting strips or blocks of various foods however the contour and shape of the field dictates. I believe the edge effect of the various heights and density of the plants abutting each other also makes the plot more appealing to mature deer than one large field planted with one even-height forage.

3) CUT CLOVER

Cut clover in strips or blocks at various times so a field has varied growth stages available. If you've watched a clover field, you'll notice deer hammer it in early spring, when there's little other natural forage available, and the clover is tender, young and packed with protein. In time, though, feeding might slack off. The way to overcome this is to mow the forage and encourage new succulent growth. Cutting also reduces weed competition, encourages stolon, or "runner root," development, and reduces blossoming.

To keep deer coming to your clover fields even more consistently, cut the field in staggered sections or strips at various times, usually about a week apart. Mow one section, and then cut another a week later so there's always part of the plot at the perfect stage for maximum palatability and protein content. That also increases the edge effect by having various heights of clover in different sections.

4) TREAT CLOVER WITH ARREST MAX AND SLAY EARLY

The best time to apply herbicides to perennial fields is early in the season, when weeds and grasses are young. Cutting the tops of weeds when you mow clover will reduce their abundance and keep the plants from reproducing and spreading. However, you'll never totally stop weed and grass competition with clover in most cases unless you spray with selective herbicides. The Whitetail Institute has the answer, with Arrest Max, for grasses, and Slay, for controlling various broadleaf weeds and other forage competitors.

The trick to getting the most from those products is to apply them when weeds and grasses are young, when they are most vulnerable. That often means late spring, but another application might be necessary later in summer, as new competing vegetation emerges. And remember to always use Sure-Fire surfactant.

5) PLANT STRIPS OF CONCEAL FOR TWO STRATEGIC REASONS

This new mixture of tall-growing stemmy forages from Whitetail Institute serves several purposes, two of them crucial. One of the most important benefits of Conceal on my property is to provide a shield or barrier that I can stay behind to sneak undetected into a blind or tree stand. Plant

rows of this 6- to 10-foot-tall plant you can walk behind while moving into the wind to reach stands from your camp or vehicle without being seen or scented.

A second major use of Conceal is to calm deer as they approach a plot. Plant strips that lead from the direction of buck bedding areas toward the edge of and right into the plot. The cover gives bucks a feeling of security as they approach, encouraging mature animals to enter the plot during legal shooting hours.

That dual use means you'll have strips or rows of Conceal on two sides of the plot — the side deer use as they approach the forage, and the opposite side, where you walk to your stand.

6) KNOW WHEN TO GIVE UP ON A PERENNIAL PLOT

The plants in Whitetail Institute perennial plots were created for deer and to help hunters. Longevity is a critical component, as it's ideal to make plots last as long as possible. That's typically three years but at times up to five.

When you have a reliable Imperial Whitetail Clover or Alfa-Rack plot that usually produces a good buck, it's hard

to admit its time is up. But eventually, the plot's production will decline, and weed competition will increase to the point that it's best to throw in the towel and convert the plot to a new product. Pull a few plants up to check the roots and see if they look healthy or if they're struggling. Also, look for possible insect damage, and consider whether the plot's overall production is declining.

I find it easier to call it quits on a perennial plot because I know the spot will likely produce a good annual, perhaps with Ravish or Winter Greens, because of the extra nitrogen the clover or alfalfa has left in the soil. I also know that taking a break from clover or alfalfa and planting an annual will reduce weeds and improve the compacted soil, because of the brassicas' deep-drilling roots and by producing weed-inhibiting glucosinolates, which are biologically active compounds in plants in the brassica family.

If a plot is perfect for Alfa-Rack or Imperial Whitetail Clover, I can replant it in a year or two with those perennials after briefly switching to annuals. When the new perennial crop comes up, it will be



younger, hardier and more appealing, with fewer competing weeds and grasses because of the help the annual provided the soil. Crop rotation will improve soil health.

7) ADD NITROGEN TO BRASSICA PLOTS 30 TO 45 DAYS AFTER THEY EMERGE

Add a fertilizer such as 46-0-0 or something similar. Brassica blends such as Tall Tine Tubers and Ravish Radish benefit from an extra dose of nitrogen.

Many deer managers skip this step because it's often needed during hunting season. But if you apply it at midday, odds are you won't spoil the hunting at that plot for more than one afternoon. And after the plot sees a surge in growth and renewed vigor, with a rich, deep green color, chances are it will produce better hunting. Deer sense when a forage offers the greatest benefits and will flock to the newly enhanced plot.

8) PLANT RAVISH RADISH TO IMPROVE THE SOIL FOR FUTURE PLANTINGS OF OTHER FORAGES

This blend from the Whitetail Institute is extremely attractive to deer and benefits

The taproots of these plants grow deep, excavating large holes in the soil that break up compaction (hardpan). This allows additional moisture and air into the soil column. When the root dies, the holes it leaves let new plants dig deeper and obtain moisture and nutrients from lower levels in the soil column. These plants grow aggressively, so they also choke out competing weeds and release glucosinolates, which further inhibit weed growth. The final benefit Ravish Radish provides is its ability to bring up phosphorus from deep levels and leave it higher in the soil for future crops.

9) ROTATE CROPS

If one plot site does well with a specific plant, it's tempting to put the same forage there every year. That's a mistake — one I've made more than once. Diseases and harmful insects increase if a plot is sown with the same plant year after year. Brassicas are particularly vulnerable to these problems if you plant them more than two consecutive times at a site.

Changing what you plant in a plot also their health, and it also improves the soil. lets you obtain benefits from the previous

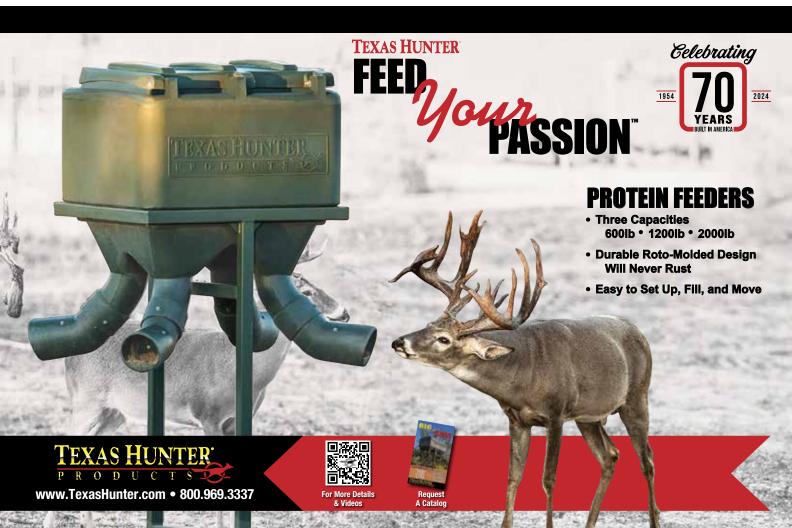
planting. After growing Power Plant, for example, there will be extra nitrogen in the soil from the legumes that will help a Winter Greens or Whitetail Oats plot grow better and reduce fertilizer costs.

10) FOLLOW PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

This is a simple step but one of the most important to get the most benefits from your food plot. The Whitetail Institute tests every variation in planting times, locations and seed depth for every blend. And it does that for each region of the country.

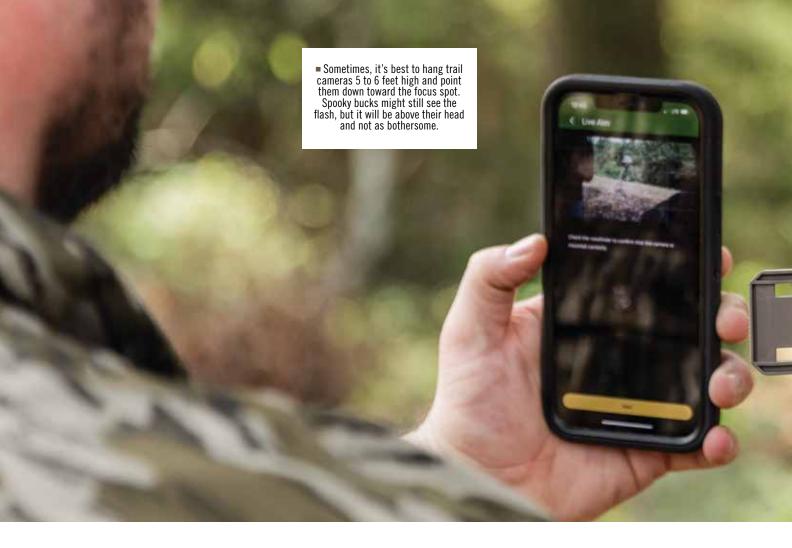
To get the best tasting, most nutritious forage, first do a soil test, and then follow site preparation and planting instructions precisely. Take care to prepare the soil, and plant exactly when and how the instructions specify. Cutting corners or ignoring carefully formulated advice on the bag is a recipe for poor results.











arly archery and muzzleloader deer season are months away, but as someone who has as much fun running trail cams as I do sitting ■ in a tree stand, I'm ready to declare cam season is open, and I'm off to the races.

I've been running cameras long enough to have seen their infancy, and I can attest that today's models are about as efficient and user-friendly as possible. Still, these are electronic, nonsentient beings that can be more maddening than a bored toddler. Like many trail cam nuts, I've learned a few tips through the years that have helped me get better. Here are a few of my favorite basic suggestions to get you started with a few advanced-level hints.

* Drop the alkali: Sure, gas prices are ridiculous, and grocery bills make us groan, but this is no time to start skimping on trail cam batteries. Yeah, you can save a few dollars buying cheapie alkaline batteries, but trust me, it's not worth it. Cough up a bit extra for lithium batteries, which will simply

last longer and power your cameras better and more efficiently. Save the cheap stuff for your kid's toys.

* Bug off. If you've never had ants colonize your camera, you're missing one of nature's great wonders. How these tiny critters can infiltrate nearly water-tight seals, crawl into every crevice by the dozens and lay eggs in places that defy description is truly impressive. Sadly, this invasion can also fry your circuit board and render a marvelous piece of technology basically worthless. On a happy note, you can prevent this by adding a dryer sheet to the inside of your camera. If space is tight, you don't need the whole sheet. Just trim a small section off a full piece with a scissor and cram it in a corner. Hint: The smellier the sheet. the better, and if you're worried about deer spooking from the scent, don't. I have plenty of pics of nanny does sticking their nose right up to a lens, apparently inhaling the odors from my dryer sheet.

more than a year old, they've spent some time in the weather, enduring heat, cold and moisture. All that exposure can oxidize the battery contacts and result in a poor connection that will compromise camera performance. Before I deploy my veteran cameras for another season, I use a small section of Scotch-Brite pad to lightly buff the battery contacts inside each cam.

* Wipe your eyes: If you wear eyeglasses, you likely clean your lenses at least once — if not several times — per day. Nothing is more irritating than trying to see through streaks, smears and water spots, right? It only makes sense to treat your trail cam lens similarly. After all, it's out there getting hammered by rain and blasted by dust 24/7. I give my cam lenses, sensors and flash unit a thorough wipe-down at the beginning of season, and I carry lens wipes with me as I make milk runs to check my cameras. Clean cams are more sensitive and simply take better pics.

* Make a kit: Anyone who knows me * Stay in contact: If your cams are well can attest to my disorganized na-



"MODERN TRAIL CAMERAS ARE EFFICIENT AND USER-FRIENDLY, BUT SOME TRICKS CAN BOOST THEIR EFFECTIVENESS."

ture, and I spent a long time cussing myself when I forgot the tools needed to do a good job running trail cams. I overcame that by assembling a trail cam kit that goes in my truck at the start of summer and never leaves. I stuff a plastic ammo box (a backpack works nicely too) with extra batteries, SD cards, zip ties, deer scent, clippers, a zip-loc baggie with dryer sheets, and as many prepped-and-ready fresh cameras as I can fit. Now when I visit my cams, I'm ready to replace or tend to them, as well as slap up a new unit where I've spotted a good buck.

* Hang 'em high: Many deer — including some old, massive bucks — are pretty mellow around trail cams, but let's face it: We've all had those oneand-done bucks who freaked out when a flash (even an infrared or no-flash) went off. This typically happens where deer linger (a mineral lick, bait pile or mock scrape), because the flash isn't a one-time event, and the continued

exposure finally makes deer goosey. You can largely eliminate this by hanging your cameras 5 to 6 feet high and pointing them down at the focus spot. Simply leave a little slack in the camera's strap and jamming a stick behind it. A buck might still see the flash, but it's definitely not as bothersome. My working theory is that deer see light sources above their head fairly frequently (lightning bugs, aircraft, stars, for example), but a flashing light 3 feet from their nose? Not so much.

* Spit on a stick: In a world where mineral licks and bait piles are increasingly taboo, trail cammers have to get creative, and I can always count on my friend and whitetail expert Ted Marum to do that. One of Ted's favorite tricks is to jam a stick in a logging road, or at the junction of several deer trails, and train a camera on it. Before he walks off, Ted spits on his palm, and rubs it up and down the stick.

"Every buck that walks down that

road or trail is gonna stop and smell that stick," he said with a laugh. "And that includes bobcats, coyotes and foxes. I've got pics of 'em all, not only sniffing that stick, but licking it themselves and returning to do so whenever they're on that trail."

* Make a quickie-licking branch: Mock scrapes are some of my favorite cam sites, and I make a lot of them. Sometimes I simply don't have the time to do the full deal and create a complete scrape, or I might want to check the edges of a soybean or alfalfa field but not want to damage plants by creating a scrape. Quick and easy fix: Simply zip-tie a chunk of grape vine (lacking a vine, a chunk of frayed rope will do) to a branch that overhangs the field edge. Although there might be several existing branches, bucks will spend more time at my viney one than all the others. I don't know what magical elixir grows within a vine, but bucks adore it. Hang your cam pointing at the vine and you'll get the best mount on the underside, and there are bucks in the neighborhood. And hey, if they start a scrape there and wreck some hay or beans, it's the buck's fault, not yours.

* Establish a milk run: Although it's generally a good idea to keep cams away from sensitive spots such as bedding areas, it's not always possible, especially when bucks are bedding close to food sources (which is common in summer). The trick is to drive as close as possible with your truck or ATV at the same time midday on a regular schedule. These predictable visits condition bucks to your presence and quickly become routine for them, especially in farm country, where vehicles are a normal part of everyday life

* Organize your pics: Most of us run more trail cams every year, and with SD cards holding more images than ever, the sheer number of pics we gather can quickly become ridiculous. It's a happy problem but also frustrating

lots of commercial rods made specifically for cameras that can be driven in the ground at any location. Being a cheapie, I had a welding buddy attach appropriately sized bolts on metal rods I already had, for a fraction of the cost. I've also used camera tripods and fence posts for camera mounting, but my masterpiece was making a "tree" by gathering three stalks of standing corn together and wrapping the camera strap around them. No corn plants were harmed in the process, and I got some nice pics of a buck I'd have never captured from the tree line.

* Stock up on SD cards: The folks in electronics at my local superstore know me well. Every time I swing through, I ask them to unlock the SD card rack so I can buy a couple more. I don't have an accurate count, but I easily have three times as many cards as I do cameras. Not only does having an arsenal of SDs let me swap them out frequently on my milk runs, but I've learned the hard

a look at the rack because the sun has blown out the pic."

Avoiding the sun will also reduce those blank shots when the camera was simply triggered by heat.

* Study the conditions: Some of the most consistently successful trophy hunters I know are masters at identifying conditions that make a buck vulnerable to harvest: wind direction, barometric pressure, temperature and others. In the pre-camera era, the only way to glean this data was to observe a buck on his feet — a decidedly laborious and time-consuming process. Trail cams have all this data stored on a time stamp, and noting that information every time you get a daylight pic of a target buck can reveal reams of info on when the buck is most likely to move. In addition to offering huge hints about the best conditions, daylight pics can reveal clues about where the buck beds and feeds during legal shooting hours.

* Scan the plot: One of the least-used functions of trail cams, I'm convinced,

"NEVER FACE A CAMERA DIRECTLY EAST OR WEST UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING TO COMPLETELY SACRIFICE MORNING OR EVENING PICS."

your favorite bucks. Solve this by creating folders on your computer and label them by buck name or camera location, and immediately filing each new pic you want to save in the folder. If you start this immediately, it will save you tons of time later.

* Fight the dew: Moisture can also compromise camera performance, and although the seal on most cams will keep out dew and driving rain, some locations (or cameras) just seem more prone to moisture problems. Fight this by slipping in a desiccant pack (those annoying packets you find in jerky and almost anything else these days) into your camera. You can tape it to the door if you don't want it rattling around in there. These packets can absorb up to 40 percent of their weight in moisture and help keep your camera humming along nicely in damp conditions.

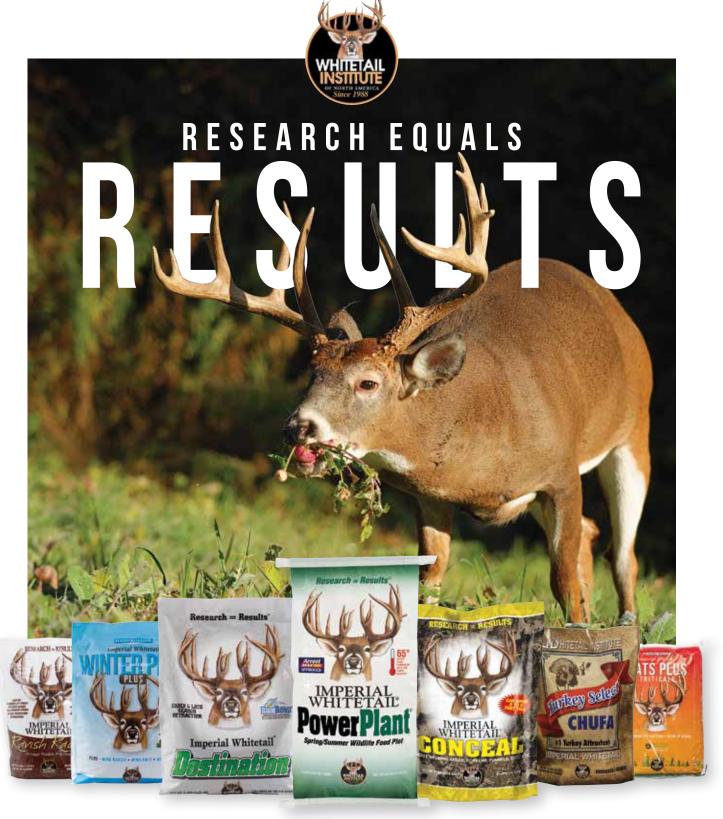
* Leave the trees: Strapping cams to trees is Trail Cam 101. Trouble is, insisting on a handy tree to find a good buck is foolish. Most cams have a threaded

when you're trying to find a photo of way that some cameras simply don't like certain cards. I'm not enough of an electronics geek to explain this, but I know if I get an error message when I power up a camera, the easy fix is to feed it another card. That's a far better solution than taking the camera home, calling customer support, and having them troubleshoot the situation — until they tell me to try inserting a different SD card. Oh, weirdness alert: The same card rejected by one camera will often work just fine in another.

> * Run from the sun: My friend and Kansas outfitter Tim Clark is adamant about directional positioning of cameras. "Never face a camera directly east or west unless you're willing to completely sacrifice morning (east-facing) or evening (west-facing) pics, at least in daylight," he said. "And now we've got the solstice, so the sun will be dropping farther south by the day. Any time I can cheat a camera to the north side of a setup, I'm taking it. Nothing drives me crazier than getting a washed-out pic of a big-bodied deer and I can't get

is the field scan mode offered on most models. Rather than triggering solely on the heat or movement of an animal within the cam's detection range, field scan simply takes a pic at a designated interval programmed by the user. This function is an excellent tool to learn when deer are visiting a food plot of ag field, and it also offers clues about where deer are entering and exiting the field. I love to use this function when I'm hunting a plot for the first time, or during late season, when bucks are spooky and sensitive to intrusion and the presence of camera flash going off in their faces at night. I simply set the camera on one end of a plot, program it to take pics only during daylight, and walk away. When I check the card later, I know the prime feeding times of deer and where they enter the plot or field. I can then plan the best hunting times and places to hang a stand.





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UNDERSTANDING WHITETAIL BROWSING

Are deer eating you out of house and home? Here's a look at all things overbrowsing and some solutions you can implement.

■ by Josh Honeycutt

hitetail land management involves many facets. Habitat is one, as it's vital to the success of a deer herd and hunters. Folks who hope to maximize the potential of their hunting properties — more specifically, their food plots — must understand the full scope of whitetail browsing

That includes many elements. Observing habitat, studying current food sources, and interpreting how much impact deer are having on them are crucial in evaluating the browsing pressure at a property. Further, assessments affect the next steps a land manager should or shouldn't take.

UNDERSTAND HOW WHITETAILS FEED

Some people believe that whitetails are browsers, much like cattle and other ruminants. That's not the case. Whitetails are best described as concentrate selectors. Deer select the best parts of the best plants available to them.

According to Penn State University (ecosystems.psu. edu/research/centers/private-forests/news/scouting-fordeer-this-fall-scout-for-deer-browse-too), deer must consume 6 to 8 percent of their body weight in food each day. For a 200-pound deer, that's about 14 pounds per 24 hours.

When food sources become depleted, deer can no longer select the best parts of the best plants. Instead, they must consume less nutritious parts of remaining plants. When that happens, overbrowsing becomes more of an issue. When more than the smallest, most nutritious parts of a plant are consumed, regeneration becomes more difficult for that plant. When deer are forced to eat farther down the plant, it leads to habitat damage, including crop depredation, food plot destruction and the degradation of

natural browse. Obviously, the imbalance of deer density and food source availability can lead to overbrowsing.

COMBAT OVERBROWSING

When overbrowsing is a concern, you have three options. The first and most important is to reduce the deer density. Second, and equally important, is to offer more and better-quality food sources. And third, implement quick fixes to limit or delay overbrowsing severity.

If overbrowsing is serious enough, bring in a biologist to gauge the deer population and property's carrying capacity. Then, tags allowing, remove the necessary number of deer.

Obviously, converting more of the landscape into food for deer is vital, too. Increasing the acreage that provides nutrition will limit — and perhaps even eliminate overbrowsing. Whitetail Institute offers various options to fit your land management goals. Select from an array of warm- and cool-season plants to boost herd health and increase habitat health.

Although increasing the tonnage of forage is the primary goal, another option to reduce premature food plot overbrowsing is planting something that's new to the local deer herd. Planting a food plot species that's new to the area can delay initial feeding until deer get used to the new option. So if you have a severe overbrowsing issue, consider planting a new food plot variety.

There are many other ways to keep deer out of food plots temporarily, too. First, consider an exclusion fence. Most exclusion fences are electric. For best results, run a dual-laver fence.

Usually, the outside fence is about 18 to 20 inches tall. A couple of feet inside of that, place another fence that's about 10 to 15 inches tall. Some market options run just one layer but with multiple strands at various heights.



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Mesh fencing, which stands 7 to 8 feet tall, is a less common but viable option. Usually, that will deter deer. That's even more true for deer that aren't already used to mesh fencing.

In dire situations, implement aroma-based deterrents to temporarily limit exposure to deer. Examples include human hair, specialty sprays and other pungent odors.

Milorganite fertilizer is an extreme example of this. It's a byproduct of sewage processing. Although it's sold as a low-level fertilizer, it also deters whitetails, as they seem to greatly dislike its smell. Research studies have determined that food plots treated in this manner receive significantly less browsing pressure until the smell fades. This can allow young food plots to reach stages where they are more resistant to overbrowsing.

Obviously, it's good to plant proven food plot seed. Whitetail Institute's PowerPlant and Sunn Hemp products offer high-protein feed and have an incredible ability to withstand heavy browsing pressure.

too heavily, consider replanting. Cover crops and nurse crops can aid in this battle, too.

GAUGE PROPERTY-LEVEL BROWSING PRESSURE

Understanding whether your property registers as being overbrowsed is crucial. That said, determining that is the true challenge. Fortunately, there are ways to observe and reach a conclusion.

First, use your eyes. Deer herds that are overpopulated or underserved with food tend to overbrowse and damage the landscape. Hunters must be able to recognize this and remedy it. Often, this is easier said than done. It takes a trained eye to see the signs.

As with any animal, whitetails prefer certain foods over others. Deer eat many types of plants (more than 700 plant species nationwide). However, certain food sources are more common. A few examples include red oak, white oak, maple, white ash and more popular tree species. Check those for browse pressure.

Of course, mature plants and trees Finally, if a food plot has been browsed are more resistant to browsing pressure.

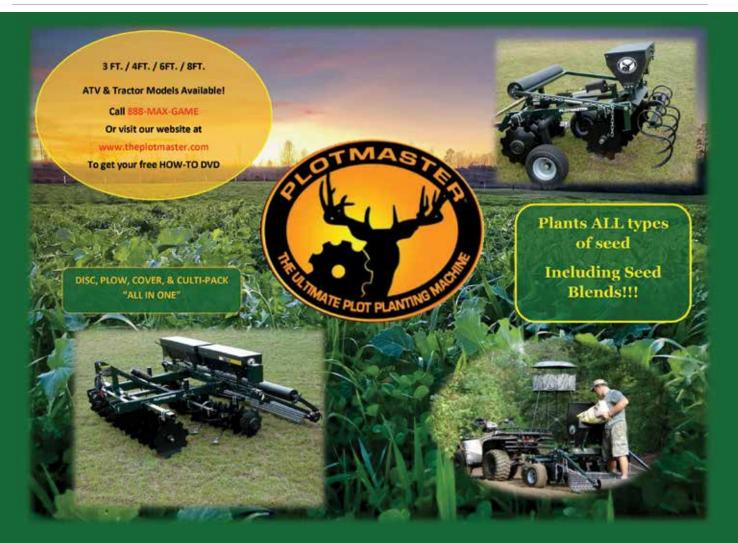
Young trees, especially saplings, are at risk. When food is limited, deer can wipe out young growth quickly.

Next, study your crops and food plots. If they're not reaching acceptable heights at maturity, this can be a sign of heavy browsing. Other issues can cause this, but if you notice the tops have been cut out of each plant, leaving nothing but the stem, that's a browsing issue, not a soil quality issue.

Also, study natural vegetation. Do you see a browse line inside the timber? Is all early successional growth bitten back to nothing? Is there very little young growth remaining? If yes to any, but especially all, overbrowsing is likely the culprit.

Even if you don't have a trained eye for this, don't fret. Exclusion cages are optimal for determining exactly how much browsing pressure deer are applying to crops, food plots and even early successional habitat, such as saplings, shrubs and other browse.

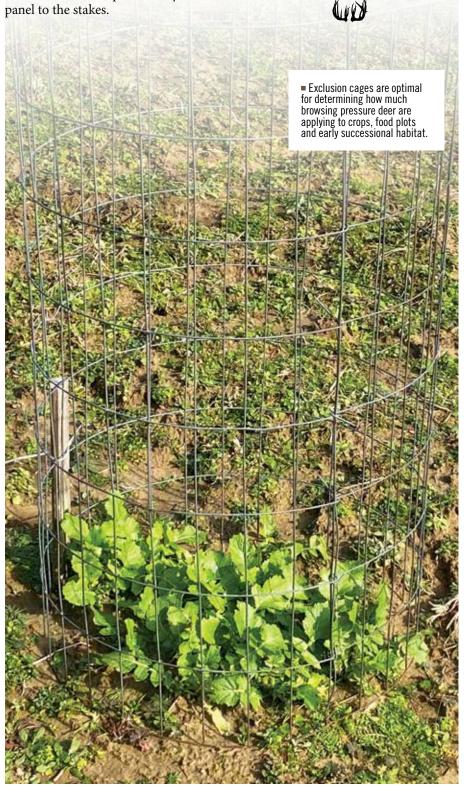
Creating an exclusion cage is simple. Use a 3- to 5-foot-tall fence wire. Chicken wire can work if reinforced, but it's usually too flimsy. A stronger woven wire

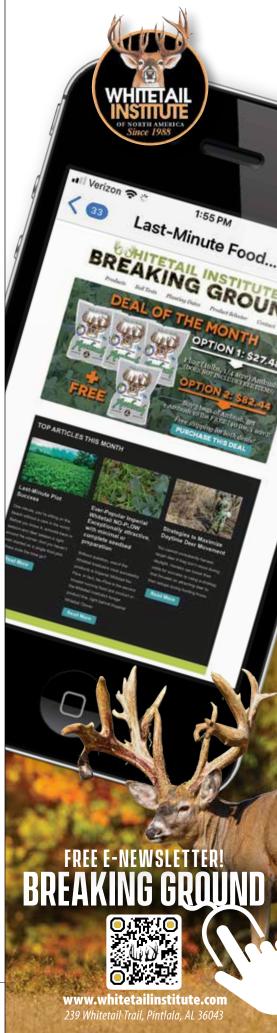


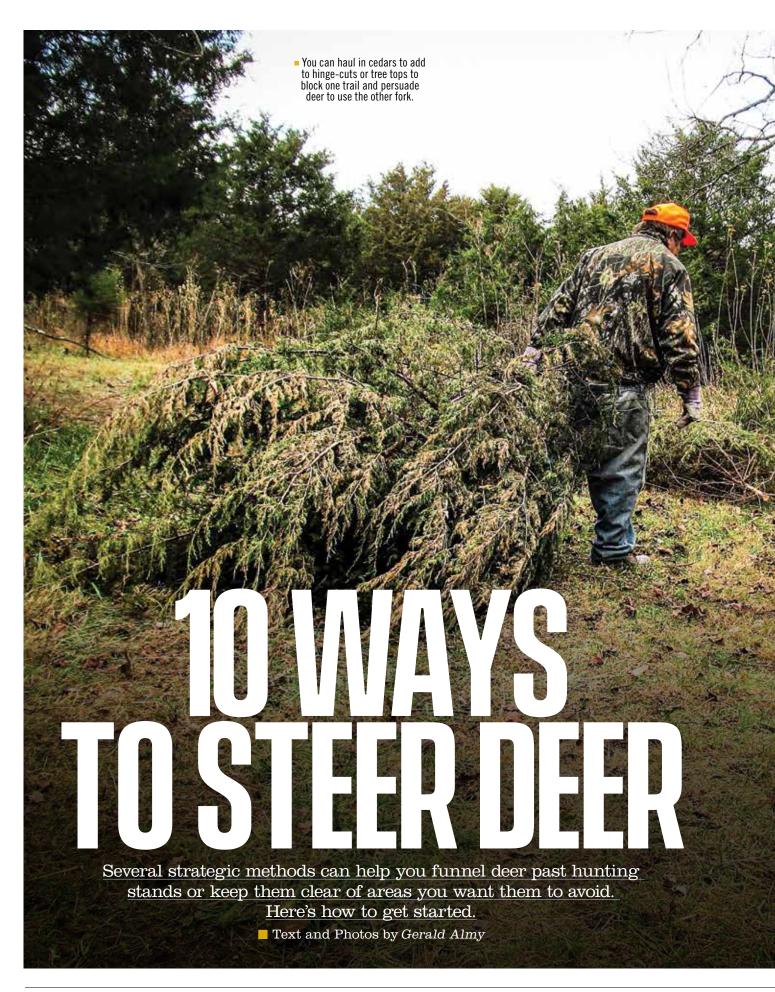
option with panel spacing tight enough that deer cannot reach through it is best.

Generally, a 6- to 12-foot link is ideal. Next, using gloves, create a cylinder out of the panel. Then, place it in a food plot, around an ideal tree sapling or amidst other food sources, and wire it together. Use at least two stakes opposite of each other to secure it in place. Safely wire the panel to the stakes

Through time, you'll see how much deer and other animals are browsing down your crops, food plots and natural vegetation. This will help you determine the severity of the problem and let you take the necessary steps to protect your investments from overbrowsing, better serving the deer hard.









fter purchasing land in western Virginia, one of the first things I did was clear trails through tall grasses and brushy areas so my family could hike without getting scratched and bloody.

It turns out we weren't the only ones who liked easier walking. Deer tracks soon appeared on the trails. As fall approached, a stand at one of the paths yielded the first buck from the new property.

Switch to a more recent scene. Faced with an open fork in a trail and a wall of cut cedars and brush I'd placed to block the other fork, a heavy 8-point chose the unobstructed trail, which led to a nearby food plot. That took him directly in front of my stand. Minutes later, I was field-dressing a 200-pound 5-year-old Virginia buck.

It's not always that easy, but steering deer can be a great tactical aid. Through the years, I've found many ways to alter habitat in a positive way and also steer deer past your hunting stand or for other management purposes.

What does it mean to steer a deer? It's basically manipulating the direction a whitetail travels by altering the habitat. Exactly how you do that can vary. It can be as simple as mowing a path through tall grass. Or it can be as far-reaching as doing timber stand improvement and laying out extensive windrows of treetops to channel deer toward a specific area.

WHY DO IT?

One of the most obvious reasons to steer deer is to make them travel close to your stand. You're creating a funnel to constrict their movement into bow or rifle range.

Narrowing a broad area of travel to a small pinch point is one of the best situations for using the steering tactic. Entice deer to use that route by making the walking easier or blocking other routes.

Another situation might occur where deer move out of bedding cover in a field of warm-season grasses to approach a food plot. They could walk anywhere, making it difficult to set up. But if you mow a trail through the 5- to 7-foot-tall grasses, you'll concentrate their movement.

These are hunting-related reasons for steering deer. There are other motives, though. For example, you might want to protect young bucks. If you're unlucky to have a trigger-happy neighbor who hunts along your property line, steering deer away from where they might stray onto his land is a worthy project. Similarly, if deer sometimes wander close to a road where poaching has been a problem, steering them away from that spot is wise.

DESTINATION AND REWARDS

To fine-tune your steering efforts, it's important to know the general movements of animals on your property. Where are the likely bedding areas, other heavy cover and major feeding destinations? Bucks don't just meander in their travels. When you have established their travel goal — a food plot or bedding area, for example - you can attempt to alter their route. You've probably already steered deer to some extent by creating food plots, which are a destination. If you build water sources, that will also attract deer and channel their

Providing or locating a goal or reward is the first step in steering deer. If you didn't create an attraction or destination, you'll need to learn where it lies in relation to a buck's daytime bedding area. After you know that, you can strategically manipulate part of their route to your benefit.

Use trail cameras, scouting and your knowledge of the property for the first step in the steering effort — determining the broad pattern of where deer are likely heading. It can help to plot this on a satellite image of the land so you get a clear picture of daytime bedding areas and feeding destinations.

The aerial photo will also often give clues as to exactly where strategically altering or tweaking that travel route would likely succeed.

You can steer deer in many ways. Here are a few I've used. Try to make most of these alterations in spring or early summer so deer will have time to get accustomed to the changes and will use the paths when hunting season arrives.

1) CARVE A TRAIL THROUGH DENSE WEEDS AND BRUSH

Depending on the stem thickness and density of vegetation, you can use machetes, chainsaws, pruning shears or weed cutters with blades. Mature bucks like dense-cover areas, but they don't particularly like walking through them. Make it easier.

Cut the trail through thick cover connecting bedding cover and a feeding area or doe hangout during the rut. Don't clear a wide path through the brush. If it's too open, deer might be wary of it. Make it just wide enough for one person or a buck with a wide rack to walk through.

2) CREATE A FOOD TRAIL

Logging roads would seem to be great for deer travel. But on my property, they only see limited use. I changed that by adding an enticement: food. I steer deer to use those trails with No-Plow, Bow Stand and Secret Spot. The clovers, brassicas and cereal grains in those blends grow with just a few hours of sunlight

per day. The food trails winding through the open, mostly foodless woods have created great afternoon and morning stand locations. Deer will typically walk them and nibble as they move toward larger evening feeding areas or back to bedding cover in the morning.

Sometimes, you might have to daylight the logging roads by cutting back a few trees that are shading them. You need at least three or four hours of sunlight per day. Rough-up the topsoil with a hand rake or disk behind an ATV, and then add a 19-19-19 or similar fertilizer. and a bit of lime. Sow the seed before a rain, and disk or rake it in lightly.

You'll steer deer to use food trails where you can set up an ambush rather than watching them travel through broad areas of woods.

3) LOWER A FENCE WIRE

This is a quick, easy tactic for channeling deer movement. Whitetails can jump over 9-foot-high fences, as the late Leonard Lee Rue documented. But they don't like to. Locate a spot with fresh

sign where deer might want to cross or have jumped the fence at nearby spots. Then push the top strand down and attach it to the one below with soft wire.

Deer will soon gravitate to this easy crossing point. Be sure to select a good tree for a stand before choosing the spot to lower the fence.

4) CREATE CORRIDORS CONNECTING DOE FAMILY GROUPS

When the rut starts, bucks tend to ramble almost haphazardly as they travel from one doe family group to another, searching for the first females coming into estrus. To predict their travel routes, create trails of cover connecting doe bedding areas. The quickest and easiest way to do that is to plant a corridor of Conceal.

This mixture of proprietary Whitetail Institute sorghums and sunn hemp offers bucks thick cover to use when moving between doe groups. Swing the strip of cover past several tree stand or blind sites that will work in various wind conditions. Plant a strip 20 to 30 feet wide.





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5) BUILD A BRUSH BARRIER

their movement. This is a useful steering tactic when you have just a few spots where deer might veer off the route you want them to take. It's also a good way to steer deer away from a road or property boundary where they might be vulnerable to poachers.

Hinge-cut or sever a few low-value trees and place them across locations where deer might veer off. You'll also be improving the habitat with this step. Deer will nibble on the newly available twigs and leaves, and the partially cut trees will continue to offer additional food for several years. You can also drag a few scrub cedars to the spot to make sure deer don't use the route you want to block.

6) MOW A SWATH THROUGH A TALL GRASS FIELD

Native warm-season grasses — such as switchgrass, Indiangrass and bluestem — offer great cover for whitetails. But if you have a large stand of these grasses, knowing where a deer might exit from them to approach a feeding area can be difficult. They can step out anvwhere.

Mow a few paths through grass fields so deer will emerge exactly where you have a good stand setup or blind location. You can use a brush hog or handcut trails with a machete or strong weed cutter. Deer can walk right through the grasses. But often, they'll take the easier route you've provided. I've also cut paths through Power Plant to channel deer movement.

7) PLANT CONCEAL TO CREATE A COVER TRAIL

Sometimes the best food plot sites might have mostly open terrain surrounding them. Does and young bucks will visit them, but without ground cover, mature bucks won't travel to these sites until dark. Attract them earlier by planting a path of Conceal from the nearest woods or staging area to the feeding location.

The 5- to 8-foot-tall forage will provide cover that will entice mature bucks to feel comfortable approaching the food source during shooting light. For a longer-term cover strip, use a mixture of switchgrass, bluestem and Indiangrass. Strips 20 to 30 feet wide are all you need.

8) LAY DOWN A DOE-IN-HEAT **SCENT TRAIL**

This is a time-tested strategy for the rut. Soak a clean rag tied to a string in high-quality estrous-doe scent, and lay a trail from several potential buck approach routes or staging areas toward good shooting locations for a shot upwind from your stand. Will it always work? No. But it's worth a try almost any time in November. For the best results, combine it with a mock scrape and licking branch setup.

9) ROUNDUP A TRAIL

This is an alternative I sometimes use instead of clearing a trail with implements. Use a backpack sprayer or hand-held tank filled with Roundup or glyphosate. Spray the vegetation to kill

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it and create a travel route for deer. If necessary, repeat in two weeks. After the vegetation dies, walk over it, and stomp it down with clean rubber boots, or drive over it with an ATV. Bucks will walk this trail instead of busting through thickets or dense brush.

10) TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT TRAILS

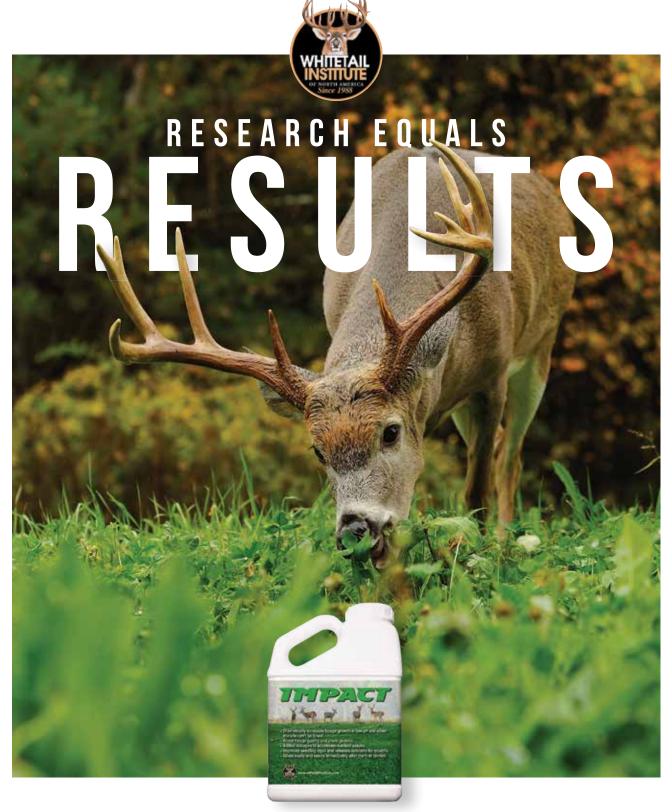
If you plan to conduct a timber stand improvement cut on your land, ask the logger to push treetops and slash into windrows at specific areas to make a trail or block certain routes you don't want bucks to take. Discuss this with the logger before you agree to have him make the cut. If you're skilled with a chainsaw and follow all safety rules, you can do these yourself by laying out long trails that will channel deer toward areas you want them to go to or stay away from.

Place some larger trees parallel and some smaller tops at 90-degree angles. Be sure to allow some exit points where a buck can veer off so he doesn't feel totally trapped.

CONCLUSION

With a careful approach, using these strategies will let you channel deer where you want them to go for hunting and steer them away from spots you don't want them to travel. I've done some horseback hunting and never could steer my mount very well. But I have learned a thing or two about steering whitetails.





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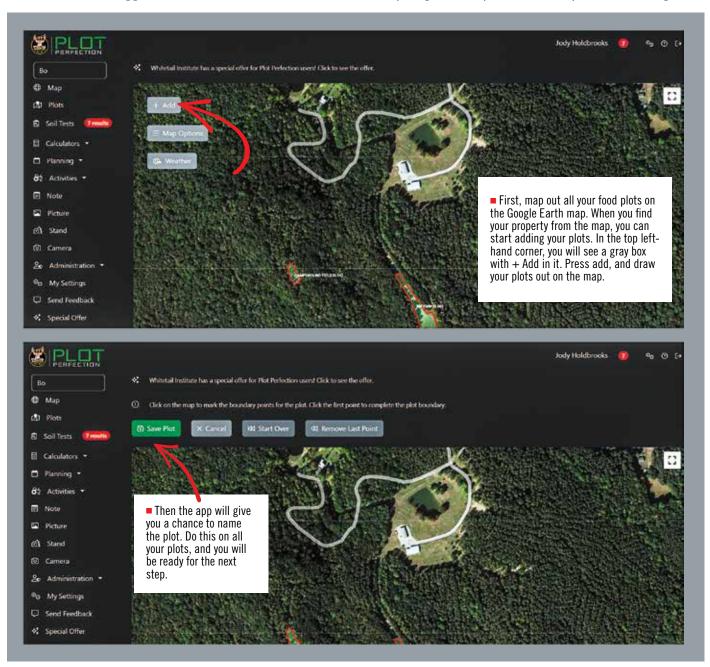
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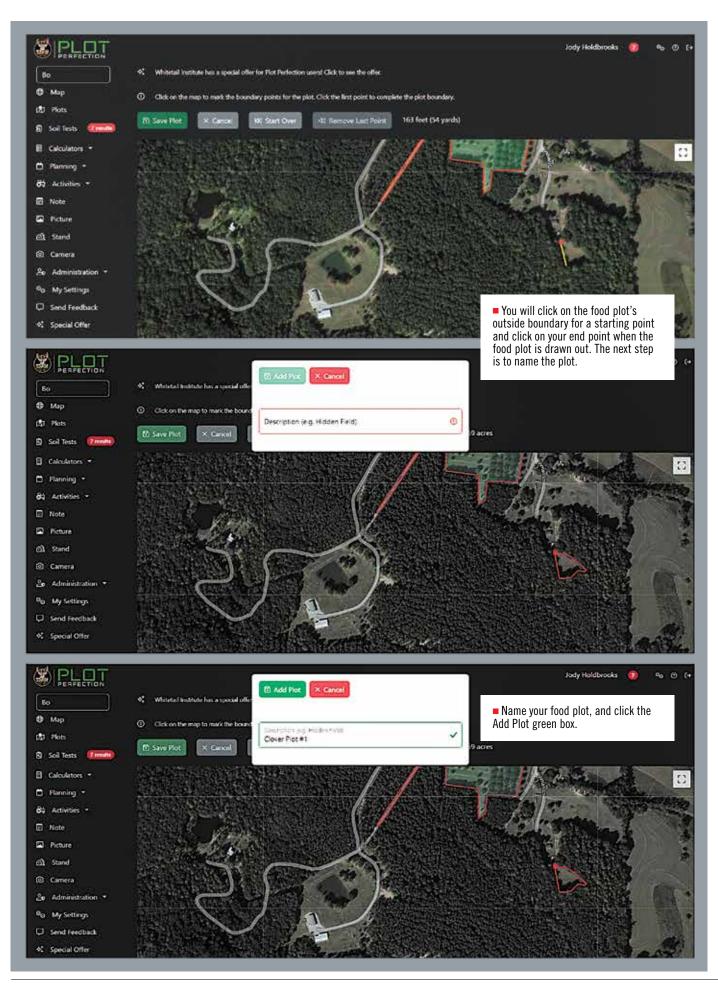
Yes. If you're using an Android phone, go to the Google Play Store, and search for Plot Perfection. Then click the install button to install the app.

If you're using an Apple device, use the Safari web browser (it comes loaded by default onto any Apple device) to access https://plotperfection.com, and then click the Share button. Then scroll down until you find the Add to Home Screen item, and click it. A page that shows you what will be added to your home screen will appear. Click the Add button, and the app will be added.

MAP

The first thing you will do is map out all your food plots on the Google Earth map on your screen. On the map, you will see + Add on the top left-hand side in a gray box. When you find your property from the Google Earth map, you can start adding your plots. In the top left-hand corner, you will see a gray box with + Add in it. Press add and draw your plots out on the map. Then it will give you a chance to name it. Do this on all your plots, and you will be ready for the next step.







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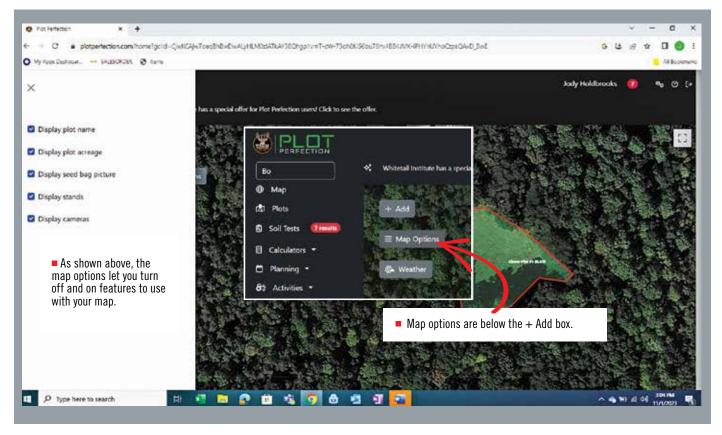
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Land managers want to maximize their properties. Next Level Consulting can provide the answers and save you money, too.

by Jody Holdbrooks

ince it started the food plot industry in the late 1980s, Whitetail Institute has always been the go-to source for fast, accurate information and answers to customer questions about food plots. In this way, Next Level Food Plot Consulting is an extension of Whitetail Institute's general consulting to specific customer scenarios.

You won't find a more knowledgeable and eager consulting team than the one Whitetail Institute has assembled. Whitetail Institute's staff includes two Ph.D. holders with decades of real-world experience in agronomy and weed science: Dr. Carroll Johnson III and Dr. Joyce Tredaway. They are available to support the efforts of Next Level Food Plot Consulting on soil testing, lime and fertilizer, and even selecting the optimum seed for conditions at a plot site.

We also have Matt Harper, one of the world's most highly qualified deer nutritionists, on our staff. He's instrumental in working with our mineral and nutritional supplement products to make sure we give deer what they need at specific times of year, with an eye toward animal safety and results. He can also provide insight to help us develop an optimum feeding program for a specific property (if legal in your area).

As director of Whitetail Institute Next Level Consulting, I have worked with some amazing properties. One of the most rewarding and enjoyable things about consulting is that hunters work toward the same goals, and there are often multiple ways to accomplish them.

Some clients already have their systems in great working order, having worked hard for years and put in the sweat and time to maximize the productivity of their properties. Remember, soil testing is the most important thing a land manager can do to ensure a plot has had all the lime and fertilizer requirements needed. Often, soil tests at properties indicate that soil pH and fertility have already been effectively addressed through time. This, of course, is a huge benefit.

Food plots can be an easy addition to most habitats and can even help affect deer travel patterns relative to hunting locations.

Our services include a full range of consultation and advice, including plot location, soil testing, weed control, stand locations for wind direction, and trigger finger control, if your goals include that.





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A STELLAR EXPERIENCE WITH JODY HOLDBROOKS: **NEXT LEVEL FOOD PLOT CONSULTING**

recently had the pleasure of working with Jody Holdbrooks tomized solution designed to maximize the success of our from Next Level Food Plot Consulting, and the experience exceeded my expectations. Jody's expertise and commitment to excellence were evident throughout our collaboration, making him an invaluable asset

to anyone seeking top-notch advice for their whitetail food plot.

Jody's in-depth knowledge of whitetail habitat and food plot strategies was immediately apparent. His insights into soil health, plant selection, and overall land management demonstrated a profound understanding of the intricacies involved in creating an optimal environment for attracting and sustaining whitetail populations.

What truly stood out was Jody's ability to tailor recommendations to our specific needs and challenges. He conducted a thorough analysis of our land, taking into consideration factors like soil composition, local climate, and available resources. The resulting plan was not a generic template, but a cusfood plots.

Communication with Jody was seamless and collaborative. He was responsive to inquiries, patient in address-

ing concerns, and proactive in keeping us informed throughout the process. This open line of communication fostered a sense of trust and confi-

dence in his expertise.

The impact of Jody's recommendations was evident as our food plots flourished. The quality and variety of forage attracted a significant whitetail population, enhancing the overall hunting experience on our property. Jody's guidance undoubtedly contributed to the success of our season.

Jody Holdbrooks has proven himself as a valuable resource for anyone seeking to optimize their whitetail food plot. His professionalism, expertise, and commitment to delivering tailored solutions set him apart in the field of land consulting.

- Kolby Norris, Illinois



Next Level Consulting will consider the situation presented by a property and discuss our recommendations, from major to minor, with you in detail. A great example is Josh Congdon's property in Virginia. I met Josh this past year, and he is a hard-core habitat manager. With his work ethic, I see a giant buck in his future. He has a 103-acre parcel that he called me to come help him with. His wildlife goals include:

- 1. Soil test and get food plots in order.
- **2.** Create the best wildlife habitat possible.
- **3.** Let bucks age and show their genetic potential.
- 4. Maintain the timber in a state that will create habitat preferred by turkeys to roost and keep them on the property.
- **5.** Controlled burning and native browse management.

After walking and looking at the property, I had some critical habitat ideas for Josh to consider.

- Thin pine timber.
- Implement controlled burning when the thinning process is completed.



• Clear out transition areas around established food plots.

• Create a few small cutovers for more open natural growth, bedding and food.

• Add some kill plots for children and guests to shoot does and not disturb the backside of the property, which will be more intensively managed for maximizing quality bucks

We'll talk to Josh in a future White-

tail News article about the management techniques he has started and the results that he has seen in food plots and native habitat management. We will hear about the plans and goals we have set and where he stands on many of them.

Being blessed to travel the country and go to various properties in many states, I've been as far north as Maine and south as Florida. All these properties are different, but each has one thing in common. They have a hunter/land manager who wants to get all he can from the property he is blessed to hunt

and manage. That's where we can step in and save you some money.

Contact me when you're ready to discuss your management goals and how Whitetail Institute Next Level Consulting can help you achieve them. Jody Holdbrooks: (205) 269-5228, or jody@ whitetailinstitute.com.





A CHAT WITH THE EXPERTS:

JOHN W

Whitetail Institute's inside sales manager has dealt with uncountable food plot issues through the years. Here are some of his insights into the company's unmatched customer service and the reasons why helping customers still makes him smile.

with a food plotting question, you know all about the company's unmatched in-house consulting and customer service group. And if you've called with an especially perplexing question, you probably talked with He's brilliant with that. John White.

White, inside sales manager for Whitetail Institute, is the leader of the in-house group and has been with the company longer than any other consultant, having started in 1990. During his 30-plus decades, he's dealt with almost every conceivable food plot dilemma or query, which is where his experience shines through. Recently, Whitetail News sat down with John to discuss his work and learn why he still greatly enjoys helping folks with their food plot ambitions.

Whitetail News: What are the most common questions you receive?

John White: "Any type of planting question. We deal a lot with soil tests, so we get many questions on them. Folks ask what they need to do, when to plant and what to plant, and we get technical questions on fertilizer and lime. It has become a lot more technical with the soil testing."

WN: What are the toughest questions you receive?

JW: "Probably ones that deal with weeds. Normally, when people call with

f you've called Whitetail Institute weed problems, we get them to send in as much info as we can, including pictures, and then we utilize Dr. Carroll

> Iohnson (Whitetail's in-house agronomist and weed scientist). Then we get them the information correct about getting rid of

that weed and help them with what to

Alabama whitetail in 2023.

WN: What are some of your best general tips for helping new food plotters?

JW: "Well, fertilizing is always a key. That and holding off and waiting to plant at the right time. A lot of people want to plant early, and if you can hold off till later, it's probably going to be better. We try to introduce people to products that will truly help them. For example, Impact (Whitetail Institute's soil amendment, which increases soil pH) is great if they can't use lime at a site. And Revive (which refreshes soil, improves soil quality and maximizes nutrient uptake for the next planting) is great if you want to plant brassicas or clover back to back. You can do that now just by using Revive for a couple of months in summer. Customers who plant brassicas love to do it every year, but you'll get toxicity in your soil. Using Revive for a couple of months can let you do it every year."



WN: What are the most satisfying aspects of your job?

JW: "When you can really help someone out and give them answers; when you can pinpoint a reason why their plots might not be doing well and get them on the right track. Then they'll call in and send us pictures of deer they shot, and tell us how much they love the food plotting aspect of everything. That's always nice. They'll tell us that their kid just got their first deer. We get all those good stories."

WN: Now we're going to put you on the spot. What do you plant?

JW: "I don't have a lot of equipment, and I'm on a CRP lease — a soil erosion program — so I cannot disk my ground. So I plant mostly No-Plow and Pure Attraction. I kind of do it the poor man's way and have very good success. I'll just get a site down to the bare dirt, burn it off or mow it down, and plant No-Plow and fertilize it, and I have very good results with that."





WHITETAIL INSTITUTE SUPPLEMENTS

Mineral and vitamin supplementation is vital for maximum antler growth. 30-06 mineral and vitamin supplements are scientifically designed and professionally formulated to provide maximum deer nutrition. 30-06 products are also extremely attractive to whitetails.

(30-06 products might be considered bait in some states. Check your local game regulations before using or hunting over 30-06.)

Still the leader since 1988



WHITETAIL INSTITUTE

Maximizing habitat to benefit hen turkeys will result in more poults in summer and more gobblers in spring. Here's how to create ideal situations on your property.

by Jason Lupardus

ave you heard the phrase, "Happy wife, happy life?" Basically, we must prioritize our significant other for everything to work out for the best. This becomes even more important when we start talking about turkeys, as most people only focus on gobblers during spring. It's time to change the mindset of spring management, because if our momma hen is happy, expect Mr. Tom to provide that full-strut happy dance.

Through the years, this has been the simplest way to explain how to maximize spring opportunities when working with private landowners. You must consider a few things to

keep hens in close proximity as you prioritize management. Remember, we are focused on providing a great home with everything our hen needs to be happy, so having protected roost sites, quality nesting habitat, great brood range and a crime-free neighborhood are musts.

ROOSTS

Roost sites are one of the most overlooked management priorities. Most people have some type of forested stands or trees on their properties to serve as roosts. Research shows turkeys tend to have established roosts where they bounce around within their 1to 4-square mile home range. The key to this is identifying the roosts on your property and then staying away from them. Bumping birds off critical roost sites never yields good results, as birds can abandon them.

If you had someone break into your home frequently, would you want to live there?

NESTING AND BROOD HABITAT

Nesting and brood range habitat go hand in hand. When you have those critical habitat features close together, hens will be happy. Forest and field management is an important aspect, as turkeys like to see without obstructions at their eye level. Forest thinning, prescribed burning, disking and select herbicide treatments are a few of the major tools to consider when managing your property. The perfect nesting and brood range habitat for a turkey is where they can move through the understory, see over vegetation and lift quickly upward for escape, if necessary. A mix of native grasses, legumes and shrub components with adequate bare ground is essential. Blocks of this habitat type provide greater opportunities for nesting success. Disturbance frequency on a twoto four-year basis will maintain understory vegetation in ideal conditions for nesting. A one- to two-year disturbance cycle maintains ideal brood cover where insect abundance, young greens, seedy grasses and legumes, and other flowering plants are maximized.



PHOTO BY TES RANDLE JOLL

GETTING FLOWERY

This is where it comes together, with the presentation of a bouquet of flowers. Have you noticed turkeys target fields of flowers? Many studies examining a turkey's crop have revealed what birds eat. Ideal forest openings of 2 to 5 acres adjacent to quality brood habitat and nesting range help attract and maintain hens on your property. Mixed clover is a favorite planting in these openings or on a corner of a larger hayfield. Various clover types mature at different times of the growing season, so having a mixed variety maximizes effectiveness. Make sure you have crimson clover in that mix, as it's normally the first clover to produce a showy flower that attracts insects and the adoration of a hen. There are many methods for success, ranging from a typical planting to frost seeding, and that depends on location, soil type, pH, the amount of sunlight, hydrology and weeds on those acres. Whitetail Institute can help in this arena with the correct seed mix to keep your hens happy.

TARGETING PREDATORS

Last but not least, we must keep a crimefree neighborhood for hens. After you have a great habitat plan in action, with the correct clover plantings for spring, you can assess some wildlife management techniques that help increase nesting success and the overall survival of poults at their most vulnerable stages. Turkeys for Tomorrow is an advocate for using the best wildlife management tools to help reverse declining turkey populations, and trapping can help remove some predators that create crimes on hens and poults. A plethora of research on quail populations in the Southeast shows how select trapping before next initiation can result in a 10 to 15 percent population increase in one year, and we support a similar approach for turkey populations. Selectively trapping mesopredators — medium-sized carnivorous or omnivorous animals, such as raccoons, foxes or coyotes — during a two- to threeweek period before hens nest could be helpful, so check game laws in your state to see if and when you can remove criminal

predators targeting ladies on their nests.

CONCLUSION

Managing for turkeys is a year-round process, and when you focus on taking care of the lady in the house, you will definitely have plenty of gobblers strutting around in spring. No matter the size of your property, you can take the steps to maximize the habitat on your property. If nothing else, be neighborly, and work on a cooperative approach to manage for turkeys at a scale. Remember that a happy hen will provide more poults today and more turkeys for tomorrow.

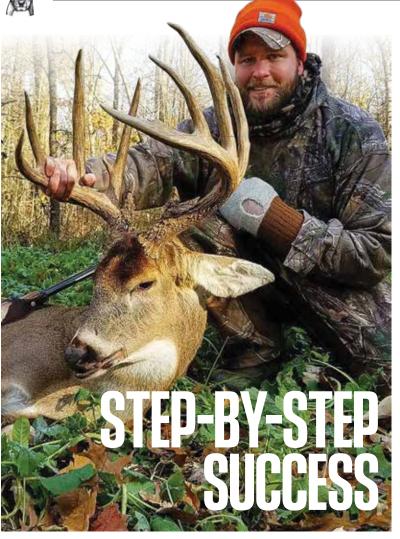
Editor's note: Jason Lupardus is a certified wildlife biologist with 20 years of experience working with private and public lands. He currently serves as the director of partnerships and business operations with Turkeys for Tomorrow. Additionally, he provides technical assistance and private consulting with Wildlife and Land Management Group, LLC.





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JACOB WEATHERHOLT INDIANA

■ I started using Whitetail Institute products in Spring 2012 because I was told they were the best. I had experienced several failed plots with equally priced products, so why not? The instructions and videos on YouTube, with Jason Say explaining everything step by step, helped lead to a successful food plot. It has helped my herd's overall health, judging by the numbers and their weight. I've never been more impressed and satisfied with a product. I wish my garden at home was this successful.

Everyone loves to talk about antler growth, and I'm sure [the food plot] has helped bucks by supplying very palatable tonnage. But what I watch is the weight my does seem to put on every fall. Big, beautiful, healthy girls really seem to bring the big boys in.

Here's a photo from 2017 in my Winter-Greens plot, which had just rotated out of Fusion and Ravish Radish the months before. I had just suffered a serious and crippling hand injury that limited when and how I could hunt, but a buffet like that, with the big girls staying close to the food in late November, kept this big boy cruising by and checking. I got a 25-yard shot. He's my second biggest here in Indiana, with a gross score of 176 inches and a net of 169 inches. He was heavier than 210 pounds dressed, which would put his live weight near 260 pounds.

BRIAN DUNCAN VIRGINIA

■ We haven't put in food plots for years, but this past year, I noticed more crops being grown around us, and we didn't see a lot of deer on our farm, so I decided to put in a couple of plots; one of Whitetail Institute Tall Tine Tubers, and the other with Whitetail Institute clover. The day I filled and seeded was 90 degrees, and we'd been dealing with bad drought all summer. That night, we got a half-inch of rain, and then nothing for another 20 days. I put down zero fertilizer and zero lime because I was short of time. Well, when we finally got rain, it took off and has been helping to keep deer at our place better than in the past. To top it off, I took my 8-year-old son out for his first deer hunt on his birthday, and he shot the biggest buck we've ever taken on our farm. The deer had 14 points and was more than 22 inches wide. I've never seen my son smile so much, and he spent the first day back at school telling his teacher and friends about the big buck he shot.





■ This buck was taken last year with my pop-pop. We planted our 3-acre field with a mix of Tall Tine Tubers and Winter Peas Plus. We planted them in late August and took this buck the last week of October.



■ The 10 years we have used Whitetail Institute products have been a game changer on our 65-acre farm. Before, we would see a shooter buck every three to four years. Now we have multiple shooters calling our farm home. Best of all is the success my daughter has had, harvesting three bucks in the past six seasons.



■ 2022 was a year we will never forget. On Halloween morning, I harvested a 5-year-old 8-point that had grown up on our farm eating Whitetail Institute products. On Nov. 20, my son killed a 5-year-old 159-inch buck we called "Stickers." This buck was frequently on our farm eating Whitetail Institute products through its life. I can't thank your company enough. Whitetail Institute products, in my mind, are second to none.

DAVID EILERS NEW YORK ■ Since using Whitetail Institute products, the difference of seeing deer on the properties where it was used is striking. One of the biggest differences is that Imperial Whitetail clover comes in early and provides a great source of protein for deer when other sources aren't yet avail-



TROPHY WHITETAILS



■ My family has used Whitetail Institute products for almost a decade. We've seen a significant increase in overall herd health and antler growth since introducing 30-06 Plus Protein and Thrive into our spring, summer and late-winter supplemental feeding, along with the huge increase in protein availability since planting Imperial Whitetail Clover. Some of our Imperial Clover plots are on year No. 5 and still going strong, after we used the appropriate amounts of Slay and Arrest Max each spring.

Nothing compares to the attraction of Whitetail Oats Plus, which I use in most of our fall and winter food plots. We have a healthy herd, and our Oats Plus plots provide a significant food source well into late winter each year. We also strategically plant Ravish Radish, Winter-Greens, Beets and Greens and Winter Peas Plus. We're able to harvest our target deer each year while seeing the entire herd flourish.





■ I use Whitetail Institute products on our larger food plots, and it has always been very effective for holding deer on our property. With proper management and spraying, our food plots usually last three to five years. We have taken some nice eastern Tennessee whitetails through the years. Our goto products are Alpha Rack Plus or Imperial Clover. I took a 10-pointer this past season with a muzzleloader on one of our Imperial Whitetail Clover food plots. We have also used 30-06 products in our salt licks, and they have shown a significant increase in the traffic of deer coming to the area.



■ Well, I got it done last night with my crossbow. I saw 13 does before this buck stepped out into the Whitetail Institute clover field. Forty-five minutes later, he worked to 25 yards and gave me a broadside shot. Thanks again, Rod McKelvey, for letting me hunt on your property and the friendship that has become of it. Lots of good times. Also, thanks to his son, Jack McKelvey, and my son-in-law, Travis Muller, for dragging this thing out for me. If they didn't come, Rod and I would still be dragging it. The deer love that clover. The night before, I had 15 does in the field.





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MAKING MEMORIES

Imperial Whitetail Clover Helps a Family Take a Second First Buck. by Kyle Cafferty

n 2019, my oldest child, Kenzie Cafferty, was featured in Whitetail News Vol. 31-1. At age 9, she had harvested her first whitetail: an 8-point buck.

Four years later, my youngest son, Cooper "Coop-Dog" Cafferty, 10, is on the board, and not for lack of trying.

In 2021, Coop had an amazing encounter with a buck of a lifetime. Unfortunately, it was at last light, and he couldn't locate the buck in his scope. He asked me if I could shoot it for him, but I told him that's not how hunting works. He was disappointed. I was in shock at the size of the buck. It was probably one of the biggest bucks I have seen on the hoof, and it was on our farm.

Fast-forward two years later, to Sept. 30, 2023, the youth weekend at Virginia's Eastern Shore. We were at our family's 100-acre farm, Krazy Acres, sitting in a ground blind we call the Apollo stand, as it resembles the Apollo spacecraft. We had seen a small doe at first light, and then things got quiet, except for squirrels scouring for nuts.

Cooper dozed off because of the early-morning wakeup and our late arrival at the farm the previous night. I took the helm of the Apollo for a minute before I also started to doze off. I took another look with the binos and noticed a few deer in the distance. As I studied the deer through the trees, I saw there was a small buck, some does and a nice buck behind

I whispered to Coop, "We have a nice buck in front of us." He said, "Stop teasing me, Dad." I told him I wasn't. As he got up to look, I realized we had deer to our left and in front of us. We closed the front window so we didn't get caught

moving in the blind.

Cooper grabbed his Savage .243 and pointed it out the window. At that point, there were three does within 10 yards to the left of the blind. As Cooper Cafferty took this Coop tried to locate tall 9-pointer at his family's the buck in his scope, he bumped the gun on the blind, alerting all

the deer. A few seconds later, they spooked off, except for the larger buck. I told Cooper the buck wouldn't stick around long. Coop held his composure and took the shot. I couldn't see what transpired from my position in the blind, so I figured it would be best to wait an hour.

I asked Cooper how he felt about the shot. "Dad, my mind is telling me that I missed, but my heart is telling me I got

We got out of the blind and looked for blood but couldn't find any. Coop showed me where the deer had been standing, and I started to think that he might have missed and hit a tree. Coop was also starting to believe that he might have missed. I decided to look near a ditch, and that's when I noticed the downed buck. A second later, Coop yelled, "Dad, I think I might be on the trail." He said there was no blood, only kicked-up leaves. He headed toward me, and that's when he noticed the deer. Coop took off running toward the buck and yelled, "Dad, it's a hoss." His excitement is the reason why I still do this. The buck was a very nice 9-pointer. Being a competitive child, Cooper said to his sister, "Mine is bigger than the one you got."

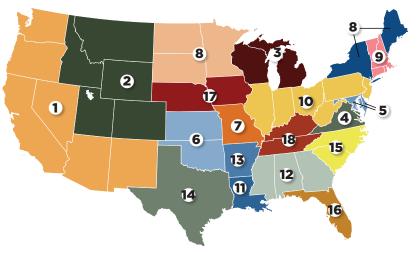
Two of my three children have now taken nice bucks at Krazy Acres. My focus will now be trying to get my middle child, Colt, on the board.

We have been using Whitetail Institute products in our 5-acre food plot since 2018. Our food plot is near the road, so we planted hundreds of eastern red cedars and loblolly pines for coverage in 2017. Planting Conceal gives us the additional coverage needed so passing cars do not scare the deer. It also gives the food plot some height definition between the tree line and crops. We also plant Tall Tines Tubers and Oats Plus before fall to keep deer coming in during winter. Imperial Whitetail Clover is a year-round food source that we refresh every year by frost seeding in January and February. This food plot has produced amazing results and is the go-to place on the farm for late-season





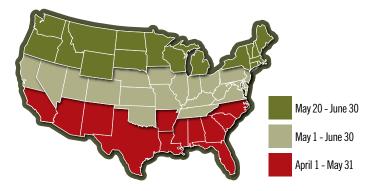
FOOD PLOT PLANTING DATES...





PLANTING DATES FOR WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

Use the map above as a guideline for when to plant Imperial Whitetail Oats Plus in your area. For best results, wait to plant until excessively hot, droughty summer weather has passed. Imperial Whitetail Oats Plus is highly cold-tolerant and designed to provide abundant forage from fall into spring in the southern U.S. and from fall into winter in colder climates.



PLANTING DATES FOR POWERPLANT. REVIVE CONCEAL. SUNN HEMP AND TURKEY SELECT

*Do not plant PowerPlant, Sunn Hemp or Conceal until soil temperatures reach a constant 65 degrees F. Wait as long as necessary for soil temperatures to reach a constant 65 degrees F before planting.

PLANTING DATES FORIMPERIAL CLOVER, ALFA-RACK PLUS, EXTREME, NO-PLOW, FUSION, CHIC MAGNET AND EDGE

1 Call for planting dates

2 Apr 1 - July 1

3 Apr 15 - June 15 Aug 1 - Sept 1

4 Coastal: Feb 1 - Mar 15 Sept 1 - Oct 15

Southern Piedmont: Feb 15 - Apr 1 Aug 15 - Oct 1 Mountain Valleys:

Mar 1 - Apr 15 Aug 1 - Sept 15

5 Feb 1 - Apr 1 Aug 1 - Sept 30

6 Feb 1 - Apr 15 Sept 1 - Nov 1

7 North: Mar 15 - May 1 Aug 1 - Sept 15 South: Mar 1 - Apr 15 Aug 15 - Oct 15 8 Apr 1 - June 15 July 15 - Sept 5

9 Apr 1 - May 15

Aug 1 - Sept 15

Mar 20 - May 15

Aug 1 - Sept 15

11 Sept 15 - Nov 15

Feb 5 - Mar 1 **North:** Sept 5 - Nov 15 **South:** Sept 25 - Nov 15

Feb 15 - Apr 1 Sept 1 - Oct 30

4 North: Sept 15 - Nov 15 South: Sept 25 - Nov 15

15 Feb 1 - Mar 1 Coastal: Sept 25 - Oct 15 Piedmont: Sept 1 - Oct 5 Mountain Valleys: Aug 25 - Oct 15 North: Sept 25 - Nov 25 South: Oct 5 - Nov 30

Mar 1 - May 15 Aug 1 - Sept 15

Feb 1 - Apr 15 Aug 20 - Sept 30

9 Apr 15 - June 15 July 1 - Aug 15

20 May 15 -July 1

21 May 1 - June 15 July 1 - Aug 15

22 May 15 - July 1

PLANTING DATES FORVISION, PURE ATTRACTION, SECRET SPOT, WINTER PEAS, BOWSTAND, AND DESTINATION

1 Call for planting dates

2 Call for planting dates

Aug 1 - Sept 15

Coastal: Sept 1 - Oct 15
Piedmont: Aug 15 - Oct 1
Mountain Valleys:

Aug 1 - Sept 15

5 Aug 1 - Sept 30

6 Aug 15 - Nov 1

7 North: Aug 1 - Sept 30 South: Aug 15 - Oct 15 8 July 15 - Sept 5

9 Aug 1 - Sept 15

10 Aug 1 - Sept 15

Sept 15 - Nov 15North: Sept 5 - Nov 15

13 Sept 1 - Oct 30

North: Sept 15 - Nov 15 South: Sept 25 - Nov 15

South: Sept 25 - Nov 15

Coastal: Sept 15 - Oct 15
Piedmont: Sept 1 - Oct 5

Mountain Valleys: Aug 25 - Oct 15

North: Sept 25 - Nov 25 South: South: Oct 5 - Nov 30

17 Aug 1 - Sept 15

18 Aug 20 - Sept 30

19 July 1 - Aug 15

20 June 15 - July 1521 July 15 - Aug 31

21 July 15 - Aug 51 22 July 1 - Aug 15

PLANTING DATES FORWINTER-GREENS. TALL TINE TUBERS. BEETS & GREENS AND RAVISH RADISH

1 Call for planting dates

2 Call for planting dates

3 July 1 - Sept 1

Coastal: Aug 15 - Sept 30 Southern Piedmont: Aug 1 - Sept 15 Mountain Valleys:

Aug 1 - Sept 15

July 15 - Sept 15Aug 1 - Oct 1

7 North: July 15 - Sept 15 South: Aug 1 - Oct 1

8 July 5 - Aug 20

9 July 1 - Aug 30

0 July 15 - Sept 15

111 Sept 15 - Nov 15

North: Sept 5 - Nov 1 Central: Sept 15 - Nov 15 South: Sept 25 - Nov 15

3 North: Aug 15 - Oct 1 South: Sept 5 - Oct 15

North: Sept 5 - Oct 30 Central: Sept 15 - Nov 15 South: Sept 25 - Nov 15

Coastal: Sept 1 - Oct 1
Piedmont:
Aug 15 - Sept 20
Mountain Valleys:

Aug 5 - Sept 15

North: Sept 15 - Nov 15
Central: Sept 25 - Nov 15
South: Oct 5 - Nov 30

7 July 15 - Sept 1

18 Aug 1 - Sept 30

19 July 1 - Aug 15

20 June 15 - Aug 121 July 15 - Aug 31

22 July 1 - Aug 15

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IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER



36 LBS.-4.5-ACRE PLANTING

\$249.98 + tax

Suggested Retail \$279.96 (36 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Clover **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

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33.6 LBS.-1.5 ACRE PLANTING

\$198.96 + tax

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\$139.96 + tax Suggested Retail \$159.99 (28 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Conceal **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$43.00

IMPERIAL

FUSION



PLANTING

\$246.96 + tax Suggested Retail \$289.96 (27.75 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Fusion **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$5.02

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

POWERPLANT



50 LBS.-1.5-2-ACRE *PLANTING*

\$134.98 + tax Suggested Retail \$140.00

___ (50 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail PowerPlant **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$30.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL



39 LBS.-.75-ACRE *PLANTING*

\$84.96 + tax Suggested Retail \$114.96

___ (39 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Pure Attraction TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$29.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL



24 LBS.-4-ACRE **PLANTING**

\$189.98 + tax

Suggested Retail \$219.96 (24 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Winter-Greens TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$39.95

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL



9 LBS.-3-ACRE **PLANTING**

\$99.99 + tax Suggested Retail \$139.94 ___ (9 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail "Chic" Magnet TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE

IMPERIAL $\overline{WHITETAIL}$



24 LBS.-4-ACRE **PLANTING**

\$164.98 + tax Suggested Retail \$199.96

(24 lb.) guantities of Imperial Whitetail Tall Tine Tubers

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$10.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL



45 LBS.-1/2-ACRE **PLANTING**

\$69.00 + tax Suggested Retail \$79.98

__ (45 lb.) quantities

of Imperial Whitetail OATS Plus

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$42.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL



33LBS.-2.5-ACRE **PLANTING**

\$246.98 + tax

. Suggested Retail \$289.96 (33 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Alfa-Rack Plus **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$30.04

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

NO-PLOW



40 LBS.-2.25-ACRE PLANTING

\$109.92 + tax Suggested Retail \$139.96

___ (40 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail No-Plow **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$20.00 **IMPERIAL** WHITETAIL



44 LBS.-1-ACRE *PLANTING*

\$129.96 + tax Suggested Retail \$149.96 (44 lb.) quantities of nperial Whitetail Winter-Peas Plus **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

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\$**42.96** (4) pak Suggested Retail \$52.99 \$**59.94** (6) pak Suggested Retail \$75.99

+ tax (4) 5lb bags @ \$42.96

___ (6) 5lb bags @ \$59.94 **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

YOU SAVE \$15.00 *IMPERIAL* WHITETAIL



10 LBS.-1-ACRE PLANTING

\$79.96 + tax Suggested Retail \$94.96 _ (10 lb.) guantities of Imperial Whitetail Ravish Radish **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)



\$44.96 (4) pak Suggested Retail \$52.99 \$69.96 (6) pak Suggested Retail \$75.99 + tax

> ___ (4) 5lb bags @ \$44.96 ___ (6) 5lb bags @ \$69.96 **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)





36 LBS.-1-ACRE **PLANTING**

\$129.96 + tax Suggested Retail \$137.02 _ (36 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Destination **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)



• 8.5LBS - .5 ACRES • 25.5LBS - 1.5 ACRES

\$59.98 (8.51bs) Suggested Retail \$80.00 \$149.94 (25.51bs) Suggested Retail \$169.95 (8.51bs) of Impact \$19.94 TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)



\$34.98 (one block) Suggested Retail \$39.95

\$57.98 (two blocks) Suggested Retail \$69.95

+ tax

(2) -Pak blocks @ \$57.98 ___ (1) -Pak blocks @ \$34.98 **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$.



• 1 PINT-1 ACRE • 1/2 GALLON-4 ACRES

\$56.99 (1 pint) Suggested Retail \$69.99

\$159.96 (1/2 gallon) Suggested Retail \$169.00 pint(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide 1/2 gallon(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)



Phone:

\$32.99 (one block) Suggested Retail \$39.95

\$57.98 (two blocks) Suggested Retail \$69.95

+ tax

(2) -Pak blocks @ \$57.98 (1) -Pak blocks @ \$32.99 **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$

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YOU SAVE UP TO \$39.02

• 4 OZ.-1 ACRE • 1 PINT-4 ACRES

\$57.98 (4 oz.-1 acre) Suggested Retail \$72.99

\$129.98 (1 pint-4 acres) Suggested Retail \$169.00 __ 4 oz. of Slay Herbicide __ pint(s) of Slay Herbicide __ **TOTAL** (Add 7% Sales Tax)

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■ Brian Lovett~Whitetail News Senior Editor

STAND AT THE CROSSROADS

It isn't a pretty structure, and it's certainly not modern. But the old wooden gun stand serves as a landmark between hunts of the past and hope for the future.

he stand and I met as strangers; sort of a changing of the guard from a bygone era to a new day.

Actually, it might have been the first notable landmark I saw while chugging up the now-familiar logging road for the first time one gray November afternoon. My wife and I were starting the process of buying a cabin on a small piece of land, and I figured I'd better check out the ground before signing away a good chunk of our checkbook. After hoofing through the bottom field to the northern boundary, I found a trail that wound southwest up the ridge toward the top. And when I finally reached the summit, huffing and puffing, the stand stuck out like a big oak on a barren prairie. Obviously constructed by the property's previous owner, it's all that remains of his deer hunting adventures there.

Immediately, I knew it had stories to tell. The structure doesn't differ much from other DIY deer stands of its day. Posted near the peak of the ridge near a small opening, it allows a good view into two timbered ridges and a big draw. Its construction is solid, with big posts driven into the ground and what appears to be a pretty decent carpentry job throughout. The roof, though leaky, still stops most rain and snow, and the old carpeting on the floor, albeit soiled and matted, still keeps things quiet. The builder even affixed mirrors to the fore and aft of the stand so he could glimpse deer sneaking in from behind.

That first day, I hesitated to investigate the stand. We were in a hurry, after all, and I've heard far too many stories about hunters taking unplanned gravity rides after foolishly trusting rotted steps or platforms. But weeks later, after the snow had cleared. I examined the stand and determined it was still pretty solid. I tentatively climbed the short ladder — grasping the rails tightly — and then ducked under the doorway into the box. Nothing creaked or groaned. And the view seemed pretty good. If things worked out, I planned to spend some time

Months later, after getting to know the land better through turkey hunting and some habitat work, I climbed into the stand long before daylight for the firearms deer opener. I'd hung other ladders and lock-ons along the ridge and in the valley, and many of those were probably better choices that day. Still, it only seemed appropriate to mark the passing of ownership by starting the day in the gun stand.

Sunlight slowly filtered through the cold morning, and I wondered how many similar openers the stand's builder had enjoyed there. I tried to guess about how the landscape looked all those years ago, and figured he'd likely seen quite a few good bucks come and go through the opening and associated woods. Shoot, I knew he'd seen at least a couple, as their racks still adorned the walls of the pole shed in the valley. That alone sparked hope for the day.

Much of the morning passed slowly, with a few sightings of antlerless deer. And as usually happens during lackluster hunts, I began to rethink my decision to sit in the stand, figuring the action was probably better elsewhere.

A soft crunch snapped me out of selfdoubt, and I turned my head north to see a doe at the clearing's edge. She stood at full alert, no doubt having seen me move at the sound. But as she turned her head and sized up the orange blob in the tree fort, white antlers topped the rise behind her, almost in slow motion. Buck. Big buck.

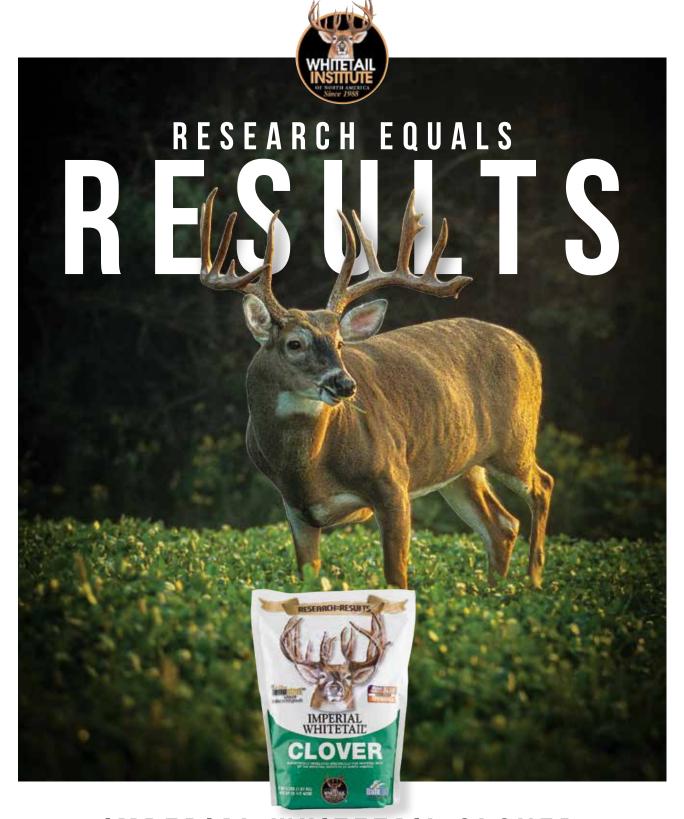
Immediately, I lifted my rifle to the stand's old crossbeam, trying to find the buck in the scope. He'd sensed the doe's caution, however, and wasn't about to step into the open. Instead, he took a hard left and followed the thick timber line southeast along the opening, offering enough glimpses to keep me hopeful but never pausing long enough for a shot. Within seconds, he topped the ridge and continued on, and the encounter was finished.

I leaned my head back, groaning at the missed chance. Taking a nice buck during my initial hunt at the new place would have been poetic, but it wasn't to be. Instead, I was left with a stinging disappointment and the hushed whistle of wind through the stand. Maybe, I thought, that wasn't the first time such a scene had played out

Later that day, I checked out some other spots to see what they offered. But the next morning, I returned to the stand and found a consolation prize in the form of a fat doe at 70 steps. She folded neatly at the shot, and the stand and I officially kicked off our partnership. The next year, we cemented it again.

I don't use the old stand as much nowadays. Having learned a bit more about the land, I typically favor new setups at hopefully — more productive areas. But at least once a year during gun season, I'll sit there for a few hours, soaking in the landscape and trying again to hear some tales from bygone hunts. One day, I'll have to tear the thing down and start anew, but it won't be anytime soon. For now, the stand remains as a landmark to the hunting tradition on that piece of dirt — one that started long before I arrived and will hopefully carry on after the stand and I are gone.





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