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Sometimes we recognize blessings, and sometimes we don't. But it's important to keep looking for them.

■ By Matt Harper



IT IS OUR OBLIGATION TO REMAIN STEWARDS OF THE LAND

Thankfully, our lives seem to be returning to some degree of normalcy.

As I reflect on the past year or so of separation from the normal traffic of life, it occurs to me that life hasn't been all bad, and I hope some aspects where more focus was granted because of the pandemic will continue. One such area is stewardship of the land.

Anyone who has spent hours on a tractor knows that thoughts during such times tend to run deep. I realize that technology continues to make the world faster and offers us more potential assistance in how we conduct our lives, but it also has drawbacks, such as more distractions from what's real. In the past, I have left the field after dark frazzled because I tried to cram too much into one day. That exercise only fuels my anxiety.

So far this year, life seems to be moving back toward normal, and in hindsight,

I realize that the sudden life slowdown forced by the pandemic seems to have adjusted my perspective. I'm now focused on continuing a somewhat slower pace of life.

Working the land teaches patience and is truly rewarding. It's that first smell of freshly turned dirt that seems to further connect me with Mother Earth. Food plotting and caring for the wildlife God blesses all of us with is excellent therapy. You do the work that's required and then wait for Mother Nature to do her part. You always hope for favorable conditions, and some years are better than others. I must keep in mind, though, that things don't happen overnight.

Working the soil is good for the soul, and I have resolved to maintain a slower pace of life, plan ahead, manage my expectations and enjoy the process. It's

a blessing. I have also resolved to properly use the time food plotting gives me for reflection, while I'm in the cab of the tractor or walking the farm observing the growth of my food plots. I've always been committed to good stewardship of the land. I'm just its current protector. The arrowheads I find after rain hits a newly tilled field remind me the land belonged to others before me. I'm just a temporary guardian, and it's my obligation to make sure I leave it in the best shape possible for those who are to follow.

William



PHOTO BY MATT HARPER

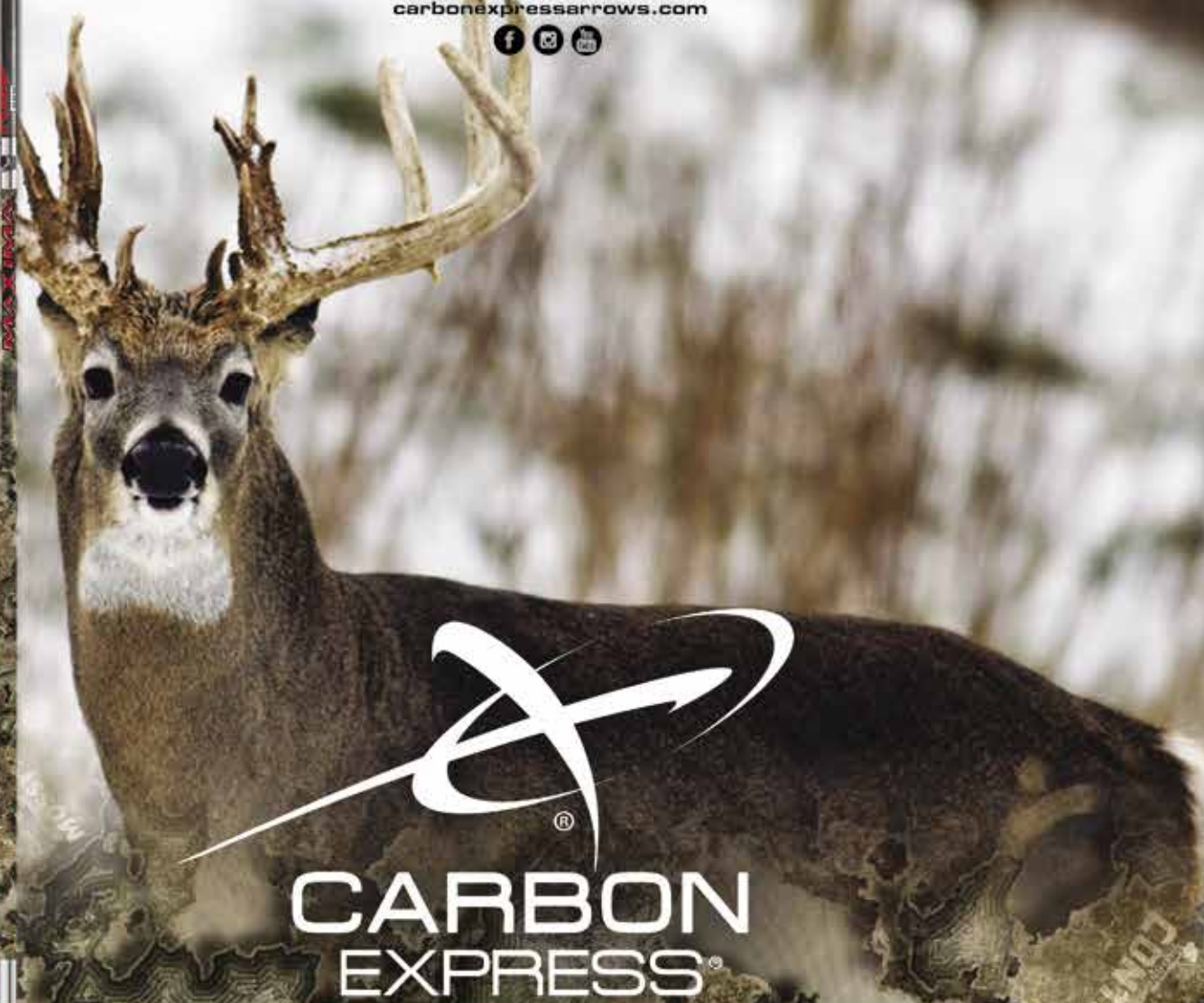
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PHOTO BY MARK OLIS

The author's daughter, Ella Cate, helps Dad drag out his monster buck.

■ by Mark Olis

THE SIX- YEAR BUCK

The author and two of his friends started a hunting club in east-central Alabama in 2013. Their hard work has paid dividends.

“The capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble or suffering without getting angry or upset.” That’s the definition of patience. But who has time for patience these days? Looking around, it’s not that easy to find anymore, either. It’s not on social media. It can’t be found during rush-hour traffic. It’s not listed as an ingredient on a bag of microwave popcorn. So, where is it?

It lives closer to the soil. It’s in the dirty hands of land managers and food plotters — those willing to suffer under the hot sun planting for wildlife only to have to wait weeks or months later to return for a chance at a trophy, not to mention the endless hours of sitting in a cold tree stand and enjoying it. Though land managers might be patient, few can avoid anger or becoming upset. Just let the tractor or implement break down while planting or a forecasted rain dry up before watering freshly planted seeds into the soil — plug your ears, youngins’. If you’re inclined to toil in the soil to improve the hunting and wildlife on your piece of earth, I suggest you start practicing patience now.

In 2013, my brother, two friends and I decided to start a hunting club in east-central Alabama. This isn’t a section of the state known for producing

the biggest bucks or even a county where you hear of guys leasing land to hunt. However, one of the club member’s family owned 200 acres we had the freedom to manage how we wanted. It consisted of mature pines with oak bottoms and ridges, three ponds, two creeks and a 4-acre pasture in the middle. There were no food plots, and the terrain was rugged and hilly. However, it was the perfect place to begin a transformation. And long before the first hunt, we agreed to only shoot 4.5-year-old bucks or better. We wanted to create something special. So began the suffering.

FREEDOM

With freedom to roam, the first thing we did was work to create food plots. We didn’t have heavy machinery to clear ground, but we had a tractor and a willingness to labor in the jungle-like humidity and heat of Alabama that summer. We worked the edges of old logging roads, strategically cutting down trees with chainsaws to reveal sunlight to our meager fall food plots. With cinder blocks and a set of old discs, we turned that red clay under for the first time in years. There’s something about cutting soil that begins an obsession with micronutrients, soil health and crop growth.

With the first plots planted, we blan-

keted the property with Moultrie trail cameras and shelled corn to take inventory. We soon found there were numerous does and three bucks still in velvet that were at least 3.5 years old or better. Our confidence soared, so we created a hit list from pictures of nocturnal bucks we’d probably never see in daylight. Only one buck actually made it onto the hit list that inaugural season.

HUMILITY

That first year taught us a lot. Actually, it kicked our butt. It wasn’t uncommon to hunt two consecutive weekends with only one doe sighting, if we were lucky. I took a doe with my bow and one with a rifle that season, and another member shot a doe. No one saw a shooter buck during legal shooting light that year. In fact, it would take four years before someone got a shooter in their scope.

Four years is a long time to go with nothing to show on the wall, but the education gained by having to work hard and try new things was well worth it. We learned early that if we wanted lush and lasting food plots that would attract and hold deer, we needed to follow our soil tests — every year. We also learned that renting a lime buggy to spread ag lime was far better than spreading it with a hand spreader 40 pounds at a time. Or that you can’t plant soybeans

alone in a ¼-acre plot and expect them to feed the herd. Although we screwed up plenty, we were learning.

GROWING AND LEARNING

After several growing seasons and steady food-plot maintenance, we began to see our labor paying off in better-looking and more attractive food plots each season. We even began to see a few more deer while hunting. Through some Internet digging, I located a phone number and contacted a lawyer who had recently helped sell the property that bordered us to the east. He gave me a number to a timber company that bought it, and we ended up getting the lease to the adjacent 350 acres. We added two more close friends as members to help offset the cost, immediately took soil samples of our new plots and added the lime and fertilizer as recommended.

We also started planting high-protein summer food plots and experimenting with blends to find one that deer wouldn't ravage as soon as it sprouted. One of the best blends we found for our larger plots was Whitetail Institute's PowerPlant. It consists of a variety of vining forage soybeans and peas along with sunflower and sunn hemp for the beans to climb. Our first year of spring planting, we tried PowerPlant and Round-Up Ready soybeans in separate plots. The RR soybeans were hammered as soon as they sprouted and never grew enough to shade out weed competition, even after spraying them a few times. However, the PowerPlant plots sprouted and grew with the deer pressure. Within six weeks, these plots were head-high, and the deer were hammering them.

TRANSFORMATION

From the beginning, our biggest limiting factor was quality habitat. The mature trees made for a beautiful property, but there wasn't any sunlight reaching the ground to sprout early successional growth for food and cover. After talking with the landowner for several years about having the timber cut on the place, he finally decided to pull the trigger. I had state foresters look at the prop-

The author and his crew have taken at least one mature buck off of the property each season for five consecutive years. In our world of instant gratification, there are still things that take time and patience to accomplish.



PHOTO BY MARK OLIS

erty, and they agreed it would be an ideal long-leaf pine habitat, which would allow us to use regular prescribed fire to manage habitat and would also offset the landowner's cost of replanting it because of cost-share programs. We eventually hired a timber consulting firm to conduct the timber harvest. The best part was that I got to drive the property with the consulting forester, who was also a hunter and land manager, and share my thoughts for improving the hunting and have him design it in a way that would benefit wildlife.

The forester left large sections of hardwoods in all the bottoms, and we also designed two new large food plots to add more food on the property. One was on the far northern end of the property and one on the southern end, leaving the 4-acre pasture we had converted to food in the middle. The rest of the trees were clear-cut and replanted in long-leaf pine.

We immediately took soil samples of the new plots, added tons of lime to them and fertilized accordingly. By the second growing season, the plots looked amazing and really started to attract wildlife. We also had many acres of thick cutover for deer to bed in, and within the first growing season, we saw more deer than

we'd ever seen at the place. We were regularly seeing four to six deer per hunt instead of one doe every two weeks. We also had bucks of all age classes roaming the property.

SUCCESS

As mentioned, we hunted four seasons before the first member had a legitimate shooter in his cross-hairs. It was the peak of the Alabama rut in mid-January when a member shot the first buck at the property. It was a heavy-bodied 8-pointer that excited the entire group.

The next season during that magical time, the same member killed another mature 8-pointer. Although some of the other members wanted a chance at one, everyone was still pumped, because we had harvested shooter bucks two consecutive seasons. It seemed as if the hard work and patience were starting to pay off.

We were into our sixth season as a hunt club. Only two mature bucks had been taken to that point, but our members had seen plenty of younger bucks through the years and were patient and disciplined not to be selfish and shoot them. That included a few nice 3½-year-old bucks that were allowed to walk.

In six years, I'd only lifted my binos to

look at bucks. I had yet to pick up my bow or rifle to shoot because none had met our standards. I shot plenty of does during that time and enjoyed success during spring turkey seasons, but no buck for me.

I had an opportunity to hunt one stormy Saturday afternoon during that magical mid-January period. It poured rain until almost 4 p.m. As soon as it stopped, I grabbed my rifle and climbed the steep ridge behind the camp house to a shooting house that looked over the 4-acre pasture plot with the surrounding cutover below. Within minutes, a spike and 6-pointer entered the plot 100 yards below me. As they fed around, I noticed another deer walking from the far side of the plot heading uphill toward the two young bucks. I grabbed my binos to see what it was. Instantly, I recognized it as our top hit-list buck that season. In disbelief, I told myself to put down the glass and pick up my rifle.

The mature buck walked into the plot below and scent-checked both smaller bucks before turning and walking away

from me. He stopped at 145 yards at the edge of the plot, just before a dirt path that split the plot in half and a section of mature chestnut trees and thicket to the left. I put the cross-hairs on his neck, waiting for him to turn. If he turned to the right, I would have plenty of time for a shot. If he turned left, I would have to shoot quickly, or he would be in the tree line and thicket and perhaps out of sight for good. Of course, he turned left. As he turned, I dropped the cross-hairs to his shoulder and squeezed the round just as he disappeared down the bank toward the dirt path.

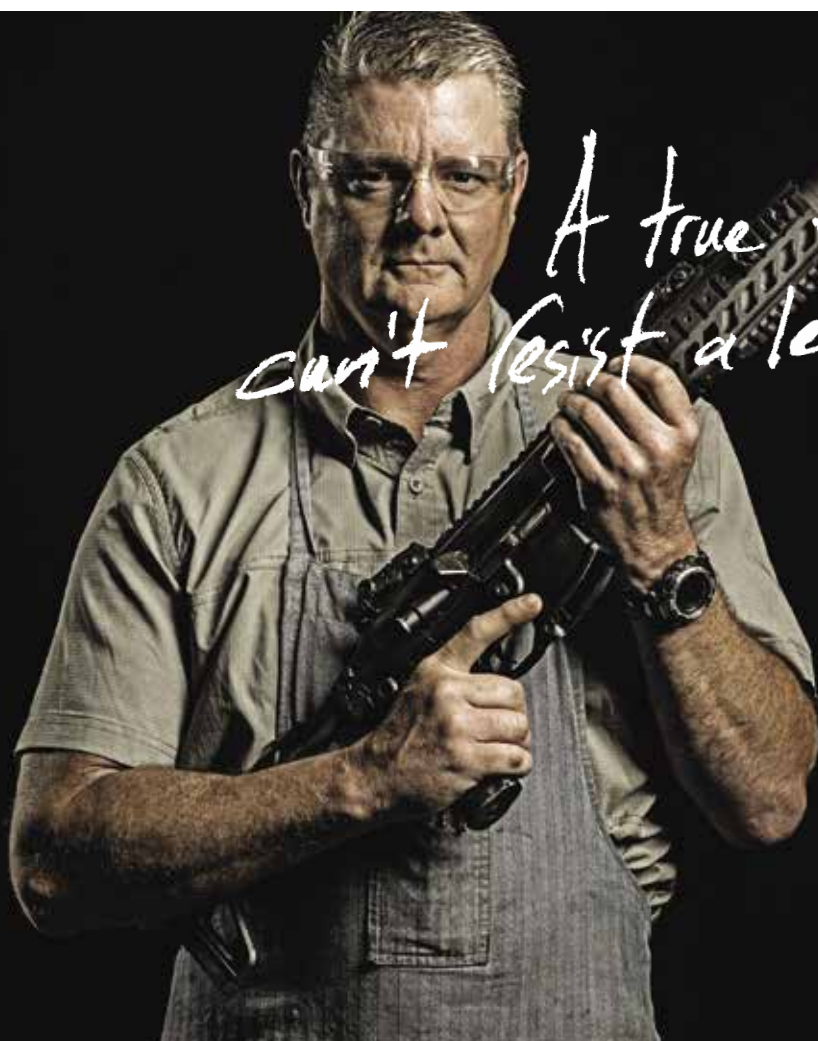
I didn't see him go down, but I didn't see him run through the thicket. I didn't know where he was. As it got dark, I finally eased out of the house and down the back side of the ridge to the house.

I got in the truck and drove toward the pasture plot. As I drove around the corner next to the chestnut trees and thicket, the headlights shined toward the plot and illuminated a beautiful buck lying against the dirt bank below the plot. I couldn't believe what had transpired af-

ter all of the years and hard work. Looking back, I was able to tolerate delay without getting upset — I was patient. I knew something better was coming. I just didn't know when.

The coolest part about getting the buck was that our group put in the time, effort and discipline to have mature bucks at the property. We have taken at least one mature buck off of the property each season for five straight seasons now. In fact, I was hunting with my daughter this past season from the shooting house overlooking the pasture plot and killed a mature 9-pointer in early December before our rut kicked off.

In our world of instant gratification, there are still things that take time and patience to accomplish, especially when we're on Mother Nature's timetable. So enjoy that long, slow ride on the tractor. While each turn of the disc might not seem like much, it will pay dividends in the long run. Good luck.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF

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Early successional habitat helps
make whitetails feel comfortable in
food plots — one stem at a time.

■ by Josh Honeycutt

PHOTO BY REALTREE

Mature whitetails are fickle creatures. Anyone who's spent much time around them understands that. Their jittery nature proves it, but their frequent unwillingness to enter food plots during daylight provides additional support. Which brings me to my main point: Soft edges are critical components of grub hubs.

I rarely plant a food plot that goes directly from hardwoods to ankle-high vegetation. Doing so creates a hard edge. Instead, I use transitions to subtly ease them into the open space. Often, that takes the form of early successional habitat, such as briars, saplings and natural grasses. When not already present, that can be created by a planted crop of Whitetail Oats Plus or a combination of Oats Plus with an adjacent planting of Conceal.

Understanding and implementing soft edges can be complex. Knowing when, where, why and how to have them on the landscape is an in-depth topic, but let's chisel away at it.

THE KING OF EDGE ANIMALS

Many animals benefit from early successional habitat. Large and small game thrive in the edge cover created by

young plant growth, and William Cousins, general manager of the Whitetail Institute, is a staunch proponent of having those soft edges.

Small-game species, such as rabbits and quail, thrive in the security cover it creates. Wild turkeys enjoy the benefits of its nesting cover and bugging areas. But whitetails are dubbed the kings of edge animals. They require it for bedding, food and escape cover.

Soft edges undeniably make animals feel safer — even whitetails. They wouldn't bed in it if that weren't true or spend so much daylight time in and around it. Although edges are more often used for feeding and transitioning, animals still frequent them throughout the day.

Areas with plenty of edges tend to have higher fawn recruitment rates, too. It's more difficult for predators to locate them, which leads to higher deer densities and healthier deer. Generally, areas with underperforming deer herds lack the early successional habitat needed to thrive.

Edges usually fall into two categories: timber-based edges and field-based edges. In the woods, these are areas where two types of timber meet, such

as hardwoods and pines, or hardwoods and cedars. Field-edge habitat is the primary focus here, though.

Properties that have plenty of edges and express them in strategic ways can see better daylight activity along food sources, too. There aren't a lot of studies to prove it, but plenty of anecdotal data suggests that deer feel safer in food plots and ag fields that offer soft edges. These terrain features go by other names, including screens, buffer strips and transition zones. But although the names differ, their purpose remains the same.

Now comes the real question: Does your property have enough soft edges? Most unmanaged lands (for hunting purposes) do not.

If you have some timber — hardwoods or planted pines — you'll have some areas where the woods stop and the fields start. As mentioned, that's a hard edge.

"See what you're dealing with," Cousins said. "If you have a mature pine plantation and you can see throughout it, you don't have any cover. You need to have some. It's super important to give those animals that edge. It's a safe zone. They get out there and feel a little more comfortable."

Quality edge habitat is important for deer, especially around food plots and open areas.

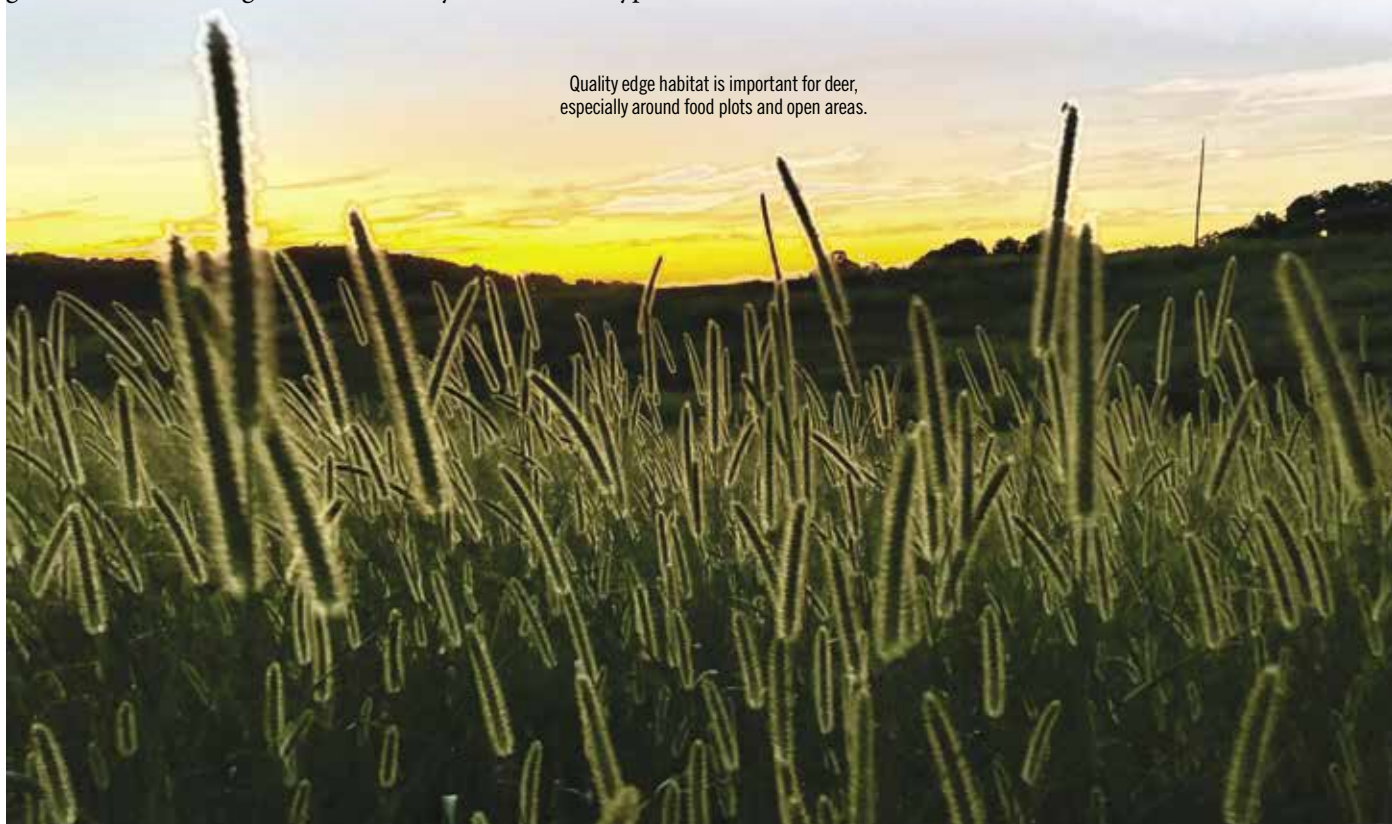


PHOTO BY JOSH HONECUTT

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ON POINT

Managing for early successional habitat requires extensive forethought, especially for those who like to get the job done right the first time. This aspect of land management requires design skills, and when planting soft edges around fields and food plots, measuring is a must.

Those who plant food plots, such as Fusion or Whitetail Oats Plus, should know what area they are planting. The same holds true for those who use Conceal to act as a buffer, edge or screen around open areas. After all, who wants to buy more (or less) seed than what they actually need?

Fortunately, there is an easy way to measure the total area of food plots and edges. Hunting apps, such as HuntStand, have measuring tools that deliver precise acreages. Then, all that's left is reading the seed labels to see how many bags you need. It's that simple.

Cousins prefers to have at least 20 to 30 feet of soft edge around food plots and other open areas. This gives white-tails a lot of brushy habitat and also provides plenty of screening and visual concealment.

SERVING UP SOFT EDGES

Some properties already offer abundant early successional habitat. These are regarded as natural soft edges. Often, such vegetation is mowed down and beaten back. Barring the existence of (most) invasive plant species, that's one of the worst things a land manager can do for deer.

"Some properties will have sage brush, briars or even honeysuckle," Cousins said. "I encourage that, if you have it. When you're spreading fertilizer, be sure you fertilize and lime that soft edge, too."

Essentially, maintain what you have. Don't disturb existing edge cover. Enhance that growth. Nurture it. We want edge cover to be at least waist high and preferably chest- to head high, when possible.

That's a slow process, though, which is why it's so important to leave the bushhog in the shed. When you take the level of succession back to ground level, it often takes at least one to three years before it can reach adequate edge status again. Other species grow more quickly, but others grow more slowly.

Unfortunately, some properties don't offer adequate edge cover. Or perhaps it's recently been removed mistakenly. Don't worry if that's

your reality. Short-term solutions can help remedy a lack of edge around fields and food plots. The Whitetail Institute offers an edge habitat rescue plan. Cousins starts by planting buffer strips, and he prefers a combo approach when manually planting these edges.

"When I plant our Fusion (clover/chicory), I will use our Whitetail Oats Plus as a nurse crop," he said. "That helps create a nice microenvironment while the perennials are getting established. It helps with browsing pressure. The animals will browse the oats and not just wipe out the perennials."

"Then, fast forward. When you get through the fall and winter hunting season, that next spring, when you mow or spray the oats, I'll move about 20 to 30 feet off the edge of the timber and leave that border. This is a soft edge."

That's one of his proven methods for providing great soft edges, which also double as food sources. But the important thing is allowing it to continue standing. That creates the soft edge.

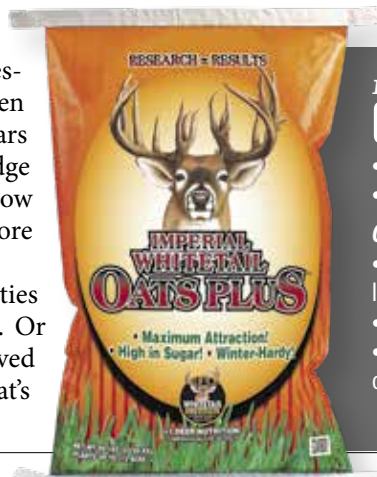
This is an example of a single-layer soft edge, though. When possible, it's

better to create multiple layers. For example, it might go from big timber to small saplings to tall stems (Conceal) to medium stems (Whitetail Oats Plus) to the food plot.

This isn't generally possible with smaller openings, but it's achievable with larger ones. If you have the room, use different layers of edges, and gradually transition them into the food plot. This provides additional edge cover and food sources and might even increase comfort levels.

"If you have room in your fields, plant some Conceal, and let it stand," Cousins said. "It gets really tall. Then, use the Pure Attraction (Whitetail Oats/Winter-Greens) between it and the food plot."

Edge cover can eventually get too big and old, though. Resetting the biological clock before it becomes too mature to serve as a soft edge is part of the process. Managing early successional habitat is delicate, though. Create a plan before making changes to the landscape. Then follow it meticulously.



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FOOD PLOTS FOR

LATE- SEASON SUCCESS

If you don't fill your tag during the early season or the rut, follow these tips to increase your chances during the season's final days.

■ by Darron McDougal



PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Every whitetail hunter is motivated differently, but I think we can agree that most (there are exceptions) deer hunters would choose the rut if given only one week to hunt. If polled on their least favorite time to hunt, most would say the late season (with the exception of a few Southern states, where the rut occurs during the late season.) That's because temperatures are cold and late-season bucks are incredibly difficult to kill. They are more nocturnal and typically shift from early-season food sources to winter groceries for survival. If your hunting property has no such foods, you can expect many unproductive hours on stand while freezing your butt off.

If you have property, though, you can add a late-season food source to keep deer around. Ideally, you'll fill your tag over a lush Imperial Whitetail Clover plot earlier in the season, but when things don't go as planned, having late-season food can put you in the game during the season's home stretch. The additional thought, planning and labor you put in now can pay huge antler and venison dividends during early winter, when most hunters have already succeeded or thrown the white flag. And remember, sometimes the last man standing gets the biggest buck.

Although any food plot designed for late-season whitetail forage can boost your odds, you can address some specifics to optimize your late-season hunting potential. Here are some points to help you cultivate ideal late-season food sources so you have a fighting chance at filling your tag before time runs out.

LOCATIONS AND SIZE

After surviving hunting pressure during the early season and rut, deer require more security cover during the late season than at other times. Because leaves and other foliage have fallen and wilted, look for thickets, fallen evergreens, cedar swamps, pine plantations and other cover-rich areas at your property or an adjoining area. Deer also rely on terrain features that give them the home-field advantage of smelling or seeing danger before it becomes a threat. Knowing where deer bed during the late season will help you best locate your plot.

Christi Self's buck was a regular at the Winter-Greens plot about a week before the Alabama season closed.



PHOTO BY BRANDON SELF

When you identify likely bedding areas deer feel safe using during the late season, map out potential late-season plot locations that will offer hunting opportunities based on prevailing winds. It does no good to put in a late-season food plot you cannot hunt when a cold-front blows in because of poor wind directions. You'll be happy you didn't overlook this step.

Brandon Self, director of operations for the Whitetail Institute, suggested not encroaching too much on a bedding area with your food plot.

"You don't want to go too close to bedding," he said. "If you do, any commotion you make while accessing and exiting the area could bump deer. Give yourself some room from the bedding area, and then try to locate the plot somewhere between a destination perennial food source and that bedding area. This will create discreet access when you hunt, but you'll be close enough to the bedding area so that you'll catch deer moving during daylight."

If that location coincides with an early-season annual food plot, supplement the early-season forage with a late-season annual to keep deer returning to that location all season.

As far as size, it's obvious that a large plot will likely attract and hold more deer, but not everyone has enough acreage or equipment to make that happen. That's OK. Do the best you can with what you have.

"Late-season plots can be micro-sized, but if you can provide half an acre or more, that will work really well," Self said.

"Whitetail Institute's fall annuals have high tonnage and can provide a lot of food."

PLANTINGS

In most regions, corn and soybeans are very attractive food sources because of their high carbohydrate content. These plantings are ideal for larger fields, but so are brassicas such as the Whitetail Institute's Imperial Whitetail Winter-Greens. Ravish Radish and Tall Tine Tubers are other great plantings for larger fields and will attract and hold deer during the late season.

"Any of our products that have tubers underground are very popular with deer during the late season," Self said. "Tall Tine Tubers, Beets & Greens and Ravish Radish are all very effective. Once other crops are gone, deer will start digging those tubers from the ground and eating them. Those products provide the carbohydrates deer seek when it's really cold."

If you want to plant a remote plot you cannot access with big equipment, or if you simply have a small property and minimal equipment, look to BowStand or Secret Spot, which are fall annuals tailored for smaller plots and minimal soil preparation. I've written about these products before, and they simplify the food-plotting picture. Plus, they provide vital forages for late-season hunting.

TIMING

Planting dates for late-season food plots vary by region. In cold climates, frost is a

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GETTING IN AND OUT OF LATE-SEASON PLOTS

■ Accessing food plots during the late season is tricky business. December and January deer are edgier than at any other point in the season. If a plot is somewhat near a bedding area, one false move can wreck your hunt and even the remainder of the season. When planning your late-season plots, always consider access options. Do everything you can to make entry and exit as seamless and quiet as possible.

Also, your method of entry and exit are equally important. If your plot is remote, hiking in on foot is likely your only option. When hunting along farm-field edges, being dropped off and picked up by someone in a truck or tractor works well. You're far better in most cases to bump deer off a food source with a vehicle or tractor rather than trying to sneak in or out on foot.

central factor. Of course, we don't know the exact date frost will arrive, but based on historical averages, you have a decent idea. The goal is plant well in advance.

"For the best results, you'll want the plots to get 60 to 90 days of growth before frost hits," Self said. "In the South, planting could happen as late as September or October. In the North, planting is usually best done late in July or the beginning of August. Again, shoot for 60 to 90 days before frost, and your plot will hold up just fine."

RESERVE IT FOR LATER

If you have enough property and multiple food plots throughout, you might consider saving one or two specifically for the late season, hunting them sparingly or saving them until the last few weeks of the season. Of course, that's if you don't run trail cameras. You'd be foolish not to hunt a plot if a shooter buck frequents it during daylight. But the goal is to keep a plot or two nearly pressure-free.

"You obviously don't want to overhunt any of your food plots," Self said. "I don't think you necessarily need to avoid hunting one until the late season, but I believe there's merit to hunting it less than your other plots. What you plant will complement that strategy. If you plant tubers, deer most often won't hit them hard until after frost hits. Naturally, this allows you to hunt your other early-season plots throughout the fall and then transition to your Winter-Greens and Tall Tine Tubers as deer begin hitting them really hard after frost."

THE END GOAL

When planning and planting a late-season food plot, the goal is to attract and

hold deer on your property so you have a great chance at filling your tag before the buzzer.

Self's wife, Christi, recently experienced the benefits of a late-season plot when she took her first deer.

"The hunt unfolded about a week before the 2020-2021 Alabama season closed on a clover field mixed with Winter-Greens," Self said. "All season, the deer had been eating the Imperial Whitetail Clover, but when the frost came later in the season, they started hammering the brassicas. The buck Christi took had been frequenting the field — I'd seen him on my Moultrie trail camera. He'd been coming in with a doe and two yearlings just about every morning.

We'd left that field alone and went in on a Saturday morning. Sure enough, the doe came out with her two yearlings first, and then the buck came out last and gave her a shot opportunity. Again, it was those Winter-Greens that kept the deer coming to that field so late in the season."

REFLECTIONS

With the onslaught of cold weather and the obvious need to feed, even giant bucks can be susceptible to a killer late-season food plot. Plus, after rut-related hunting pressure fizzles, major cold fronts will put deer on their feet, often during daylight. The question is, will they be munching carbohydrate-rich forages in your well-conceived late-season plot, or will they leave your property to find those carb-high foods on someone else's property? The answer depends on the planning, preparation and effort you invest two to three months before the frost hits.



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A photograph of a mature buck with large, velvet-covered antlers grazing in a field of green plants. The buck is the central focus, with its head lowered to the ground. The background is a dense field of green vegetation with some yellow flowers.

A 3-STEP PROGRAM

FOR HUNTING FOOD PLOTS

Using these adaptive seasonal approaches can put you
in the right place to score a mature buck.

■ by Scott Bestul

PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

It made no sense for the buck to show up. Two hours before sunset during the Minnesota archery season opener, the temperature was 91. I've spent a good share of my life studying and writing about the behavior of mature bucks, and in that time, I've often said ambient air temperature has more to do with buck movement than any other factor.

In short, if it's really hot, big bucks generally don't move. Especially in the upper Midwest, where the difference between 70 degrees and 90 is like opposite sides of the sun.

Still, my buddy Alan was determined to hunt the Whitetail Institute Imperial Clover food plot. In the 10 days preceding the archery opener, a buck we called "The Flyer" had been a frequent visitor to the plot.

"I have almost zero free time, and I'm just going to have to hunt that buck whenever I can and wherever the wind is right," Alan said.

So I dropped him off at the stand we'd hung there, and with almost 45 minutes until dark, The Flyer appeared in the clover and fed within bow range of my friend. Only a few steps separated the mature buck from Alan taking a perfect shot when another buck appeared and walked up to The Flyer for a sparring session. The two duked it out for several minutes and, just when a shot seemed certain, the pair separated, and The Flyer walked straight away presenting no lethal opportunity.

HUNTING FOOD PLOTS EFFECTIVELY: A THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

I'd love to tell you this crazy early-season hunting story ended with a monster buck tagged by one of my best friends. I can't testify to that, but it proves the attraction of food plots to mature whitetails to the point that even when conditions are far from ideal, they can get a buck on his feet to feed.

But don't make the mistake of thinking access to easy, quality food makes a buck stupid. In fact, of the many potential ways to tag a mature whitetail, sitting over a food plot can be one of the toughest. And I say that having tak-

en my biggest archery whitetail by doing that. But deer are vulnerable when they feed, and being a prey species, they know feeding is risky business. To make matters worse, many hunters are more attracted to food plots than the deer they're trying to feed, so they habitually overhunt them. This double-whammy makes food plot hunting something that has to be done carefully and thoughtfully. Here's the three-step process we've come to use.

EARLY-SEASON SNIPING

Other than the post-rut/early-winter time frame, the first weeks of the early archery season are perhaps the best time to kill a buck over food. Still on their summer feeding patterns in most areas, whitetails are pretty much slaves to their stomachs and are reasonably predictable. To further sweeten the pot, bucks haven't been hunted for months, so they're as relaxed as they'll be for months.

But the window on that time frame closes by the day for three reasons. First, natural foods — acorns, soft mast and others — will be ripening and distracting the attention of deer from food plots and farm fields. Second, bucks are losing (or have lost) velvet, and bachelor groups are breaking up as bucks disperse, making previous train-track predictable deer seemingly disappear. And finally, human pressure starts to increase as hunting seasons open and other fall activities ramp up. Suddenly, deer that haven't been bothered by people might see, smell and hear them frequently. I'm convinced that although you might be the only person hunting a property, deer notice the uptick in human activity in the general neighborhood and — especially mature animals — respond by moving more cautiously and more after dark.

The key to responding to that is to put as little pressure on food plots as possible, paying special attention to proper wind direction, entry and exit. And unless trail cams prove otherwise, I limit my hunts to evening sits, as the odds of bumping deer heading back to bed during a morning hunt soar in the

early season. I also try to arrange for someone to pick me up in a vehicle or ATV at the end of an evening sit whenever possible. If you start bumping deer feeding in or hanging nearby a food plot by climbing out of a stand or blind, they will shift to other food sources or only come at night. Finally, do your best to time early-season hunts to approaching cold fronts or weather systems. Bucks that skulk back in cover during an extended warm spell will often run into a food plot an hour before dark if the temp drops 20 degrees or a gentle rain suddenly breaks a drought.

RE-ROUTE FOR THE RUT

The annual whitetail rut, every deer hunter's favorite phase of fall, represents one of the toughest periods to kill a buck over a food plot, in my experience. For starters, bucks with does on the brain just don't eat much, so waiting on food for a hungry whopper to show up on his own can involve a lot of waiting and not much killing. Second, hunting seasons have been in full swing for several months, and bucks — mature deer, anyway — are increasingly reluctant to poke their nose into open areas where they know they're vulnerable.

I know what you're thinking. "What about does that are eager to feed that drag a buck right into your (food plot) lap?" Yup. That happens, and it's happened to me. But when I look back at the good bucks I've tagged through the years, I've shot only a handful directly on a food plot during the rut.

But here's the kicker. The area just off a food source can be dynamite during the breeding season, and here's why: Does are, of course, totally tuned into and familiar with every food plot in their home range. And they will continue to revisit those spots throughout fall. Bucks, especially mature deer, are tuned in to where does are active and will always check those areas, including food plots, on a constant basis as the rut unfolds. The trick is, most of that checking is done just off and typically downwind of those feeding spots.

So, if you want to shoot a big whitetail orienting toward food plots, you

need to mimic their behavior. Rather than plopping right on the plot, scout off away from the edge. You're looking for perimeter trails that parallel the edge of the plot. These are trails used most by mature bucks so they can scent-check the plot for does without walking in the plot. I've actually watched mature bucks tending a hot doe, and even when his girlfriend walked into the plot

to grab a bite, the buck would hang back and keep track of her by watching from a perimeter trail or adjoining thick cover. In many of those examples, I'd have never seen or certainly not had a lethal shot at those bucks if my view had been limited to the food plot.

Although perimeter or skirting trails are rarely as easy to spot as an entry trail, rubs and scrapes usually indicate their presence, and after I figure out a stand tree, I create one or more mock scrapes to spice up the setup. It can be tough to pull away from sitting directly on a food plot, especially when it's a safe bet you won't see as many deer. But if the deer you see is the right one, it's worth the move.

LATE-SEASON GREATNESS

Every year when we're knocking out the season's food plots — applying lime and fertilizer, working dirt and seeding, mowing and spraying — we do so with the realization that hunting that plot might involve a handful of days during our late bow and blackpowder seasons. But that tiny window of time is worth every ounce of our efforts, as some of the best bucks killed by our group have come during that period.

In many ways, this is a perfect example of the season coming full circle. In the first weeks of our early archery season, effective hunting means knowing what deer eat. Late season is all that and then some. All whitetails are hungry in the post-rut, and bucks are particularly ravenous — to the point where we annually have encounters with bucks we've never seen during three months of hunting. And although plenty of hunters dismiss the importance of the secondary

rut, I've seen enough breeding behavior in December to know it's a significant motivator for daylight buck movement. In fact, just two winters ago, I watched a buck we called "Cheetos" barge into a food plot an hour before dusk following a hungry yearling doe. We had not captured a daylight picture of Cheetos on that plot, though he was a regular visitor. The doe was the trigger-tripper for that buck.

Of course, this is no slam dunk. First, you must have enough plots planted in the right mixes to be the most effective. Quantity of plots is important because having several lets you spread out hunting efforts and hopefully adjust to varying wind directions. Quality food is critical, because if something tastier and more abundant is growing in the neighborhood, that's where the bucks will be. I've always had great luck with Winter-Greens, but Beets & Greens, Tall Tine Tubers and, this past year, Ravish Radish have also sucked deer.

Spreading out effort is critical because there is no other time of the season when whitetails are so spooky. After several months of archery, an intense firearms hunt and, in most states, a muzzleloader season, local deer have been through the wringer. There is no curiosity in them, and the slightest sound, sight or scent that hints at humans will catch their attention. And I've become convinced that no matter how careful you are during this time, each hunt leaves an impression on a plot. Whether it's the sound of your exit at dusk, some residual scent from boot tracks or the sight of your silhouette disappearing over a ridge as you depart, you're being noticed, and the chances of deer hitting that plot during

shooting hours dim by the day. Rotating hunts between several plots keeps them as fresh as possible.

Also, as with the early season, I hunt directly on the food source. We usually have one blind close to the middle of the food plot, assuming the prevailing wind direction allows such placement. But because we've had funkier and weirder winds lately, I've learned to place tree stands on entry trails. I'll be honest: I'm totally aware how deadly an elevated blind in a food plot can be, but I really don't like hunting them that much. I think I'm getting a little claustrophobic in my old age? Whatever the reason, I tend to like stands better. I might miss some shot opportunities I would have had in a blind, but I like my stands.

On a final note, we've learned through hard experience that temperatures during this time are critical, and the colder the better. For example, if it's been 30 degrees but it suddenly cools to 15, drop everything you're doing and hunt. However, if it's been minus 5 and it suddenly climbs to 15 degrees, whitetails feel like they're on a beach sipping umbrella drinks and move accordingly. So, pay attention to fronts and systems, and get out there to take advantage of any forecasted big snow or Alberta Clipper. Dressing in every layer you have and waddling to a food plot can seem soul-crushing until that whopper buck steps out and makes you forget everything else.



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FARM IT OR HUNT IT?

How do you manage land for farming and deer?
That carries many considerations, but the answers aren't that difficult.
And you can often do both.

■ by *Matt Harper*



PHOTO BY MATT HARPER

One beautiful fall morning, I hunted a steep hardwood ridge rimmed with huge acorn-laden white oaks. Every old man at the coffee shop said that if the white oaks had produced acorns that year, that was where you needed to be to kill deer — especially big bucks. They were partially right. I could have killed a lot of deer that morning, but apparently the old bucks didn't get the memo from the old coffee drinkers, because they didn't show up. After a few hours, I climbed down, determined to head to the coffee shop for more — and hopefully better — advice.

When I got to the truck, I heard a big diesel motor at the neighbor's property. Upon investigation, I discovered that a D8 dozer was crawling toward a small creek lined with young trees about 10 yards wide on both banks. I immediately deduced that the dozer was going to clear the creek bank of trees to add a few extra feet of crop land for next year's corn. I flew down the hill, slid the truck next to the machine operator and told him he needed to hold off because I was negotiating with the landowner to buy the farm and add it to the 70 acres I already owned. He reluctantly stopped, but I didn't end up buying the property, and the dozer did its work. The result was some great wildlife habitat lost, and within a couple of years and several hard rains, the creek bank had eroded to about the same spot the trees had once stopped.

You might think I'm a bit of a tree hugger, and I guess you'd be right in a sense. As a hunter, avid outdoorsman and lover of wildlife, I find the needless destruction of habitat frustrating and sometimes

downright maddening. But I grew up on a cattle and crop farm, and today raise cattle and hay on my farm. I understand the value of productive farmland and the need to be efficient to get the most out of a farm. After all, a farm is a business, and you must manage profit and loss, because if you're actively farming a property, you need the income. No profit eventually results in no farm.

There are two sides of the street for opinions on management focused solely on farming and those who think a farm or property should be converted for strictly wildlife management. I meander around the middle of that street, typically favoring wildlife but always understanding that bills need to be paid. I'm guessing most people reading this would also favor managing for wildlife, but you might be in a situation where the land that you own, lease or have permission to hunt is also an active farm. If you're in that situation and think more about managing deer than producing crops or livestock, what can you do when considering both? The good news is you can accomplish both in most cases in a way that will produce good results for each.

USING THE 'BAD' GROUND

When managing for farming and wildlife management, the first thing to consider is the quality of land with which you're working. Productive, quality farm ground should be used for farming practices, and lesser-quality ground should be used for non-farming practices — in other words, wildlife. That doesn't mean you can't use quality ground for wildlife, but if you have dual management goals,

productive soil will produce the best financial returns, and poorer-quality areas, when properly managed, can greatly improve wildlife habitat. Of course, there are farms where almost every acre is highly productive, and on the other end of the pendulum, some farms are — in the eyes of a farmer — mostly crap. But most farms have some of both, so you must determine the good from the not-as-good and manage accordingly.

Let's say there's an 80-cattle pasture with a mix of open grassland laced with steep, brushy or tree choked ravines. You can conduct pasture improvement practices in the open areas by fertilizing, mowing and spraying to maximize forage production for cattle. These open areas also get full sunlight, which is optimal for most cattle forages, and they do not compete with woody plants for moisture. The ravines, however, cannot be mowed, fertilized or sprayed, and the grass is typically shaded and competes with woody vegetation. The result is that food production per acre for the cattle herd in the ravines is poor at best and does little for the productivity of the cattle operation.

Conversely, those ravines provide many benefits for deer and other wildlife. First, they supply bedding areas, cover and food sources. Cattle are large ruminants and classified as grazers, which means that grasses are a main food supply. Deer, however, are concentrate selectors and browsers, which means they feed on forbs, viny vegetation and woody browse, which are typical plant species growing in ravines. Can cattle get something out of those ravines? Sure, but the efficiency of food supply for cattle in the ravines is far less than in the open pasture land.

Further, deer get more total benefit from the habitat in the ravines than they do the open pasture land. Even if you mechanically cleared the ravines, the result would be poor-quality grass production and prolific soil erosion. If you're aiming for managing for deer and cattle, the best solution is to let the cattle use the open grassland and leave the ravines for wildlife, thus optimizing the microhabitat to match the targeted management species. The best way to accomplish that is to fence off the areas targeted for wildlife.

That can be done via a permanent

THE FENCE ROW

Fence row is a term used in many applications. I've been told to check the fence row to make sure there are no holes or gaps before striving to keep cattle where they should be. But they're also the places I'd walk for hours as a child with Dad's old shotgun in search of pheasants, quail, rabbits or whatever. Fence rows create strips that cannot be mowed or grazed closely, so they grow up with weeds, tall grass and brush, creating wonderful wildlife habitat.

These are not big areas — at most 5 yards wide. But to the wildlife that use them, they are priceless. Fence rows used to be a common part of all farms, but through the years, they have been disappearing to create more crop ground and clean up fields to make them easier for field work. A half-mile fence line is likely no more than 1 or 2 acres but can support an incredible amount of wildlife. I've witnessed the dramatic decrease in wildlife as fence rows disappear. Everyone has to make decisions about how they manage the land, but I think it's important to understand it doesn't take much to cause a major effect, good or bad. Something as small as an old fence row can affect more than you would expect.

fence or electric fence. Permanent fencing is more expensive but typically lasts for many years. Plus, the maintenance for electric fencing is greater. Deer can knock down electric fences (this has happened to me a lot), requiring constant vigilance and repair expenses. Don't think you will have to put in miles of fencing to show results, as even smaller areas that are fenced off can show dramatic results. An area 200 yards long by 80 yards wide will give you more than 3 acres of deer and wildlife cover and feeding habitat. That might not sound like much, but that area can help to support more deer than you might expect. As a cattle owner, I would rather keep the cattle out of those steep ravines anyway. Cattle — especially calves — can get stuck in the bottom of a nasty, deep gully and cannot free themselves. Through the years, I have lost several calves and a few cows to that. It doesn't take many of those incidents to figure out that, comparatively, the cost of fencing isn't that bad.

Ravines and gullies are not the only examples of poor ground that can be used

for wildlife management. Another good example is swampy land that tends to stay wet and hold moisture. These areas, when left ungrazed by cattle, will normally produce excellent bedding and escape cover, as well as natural browse and a water supply. As mentioned, swampy land can often be more of a headache to cattle management and provide subpar grazing.

One additional thought pertaining to cattle/livestock grazing and deer habitat management is whether the species co-habitate well together. I have heard many times that, "Deer don't mind cattle at all." I have found that's true to an extent. Deer will not necessarily be absent from areas with cattle, but I often see that deer will avoid close proximity to the bovines. Several times, I've set up trail cameras in various pastures, and I usually find that deer move to a pasture with no cows or at least spend most of their time in those spots. When I move cows to where I was getting pictures of deer, the deer soon switch to the pasture the cows have vacated. I'm not sure why that happens, but my best guess is deer want to avoid the

alarm sounds of crashes in the brush or the cracking of branches as cows noisily tromp through bedding and escape cover. I think it has far less to do with feeding areas and more to do with feeling comfortable in their core area. Deer might not be scared of the cows, but they don't like the intrusion into their safe zone. So if you create areas within a pasture where cattle and other livestock cannot trespass, deer will be less likely to vacate an area.

USING THE 'GOOD' LAND

Is there a situation that would justify taking good ground out of production and using it for wildlife? Likely, your answer will be determined by where you stand on the wildlife versus farming scale. The more you value deer management and hunting, the easier it is to justify converting productive land from livestock and crops to using it for deer and other wildlife management. Notice that I used the word value. That can be defined in many ways, but let's look at it from a monetary perspective. If you took an acre of crop ground and converted it to a food

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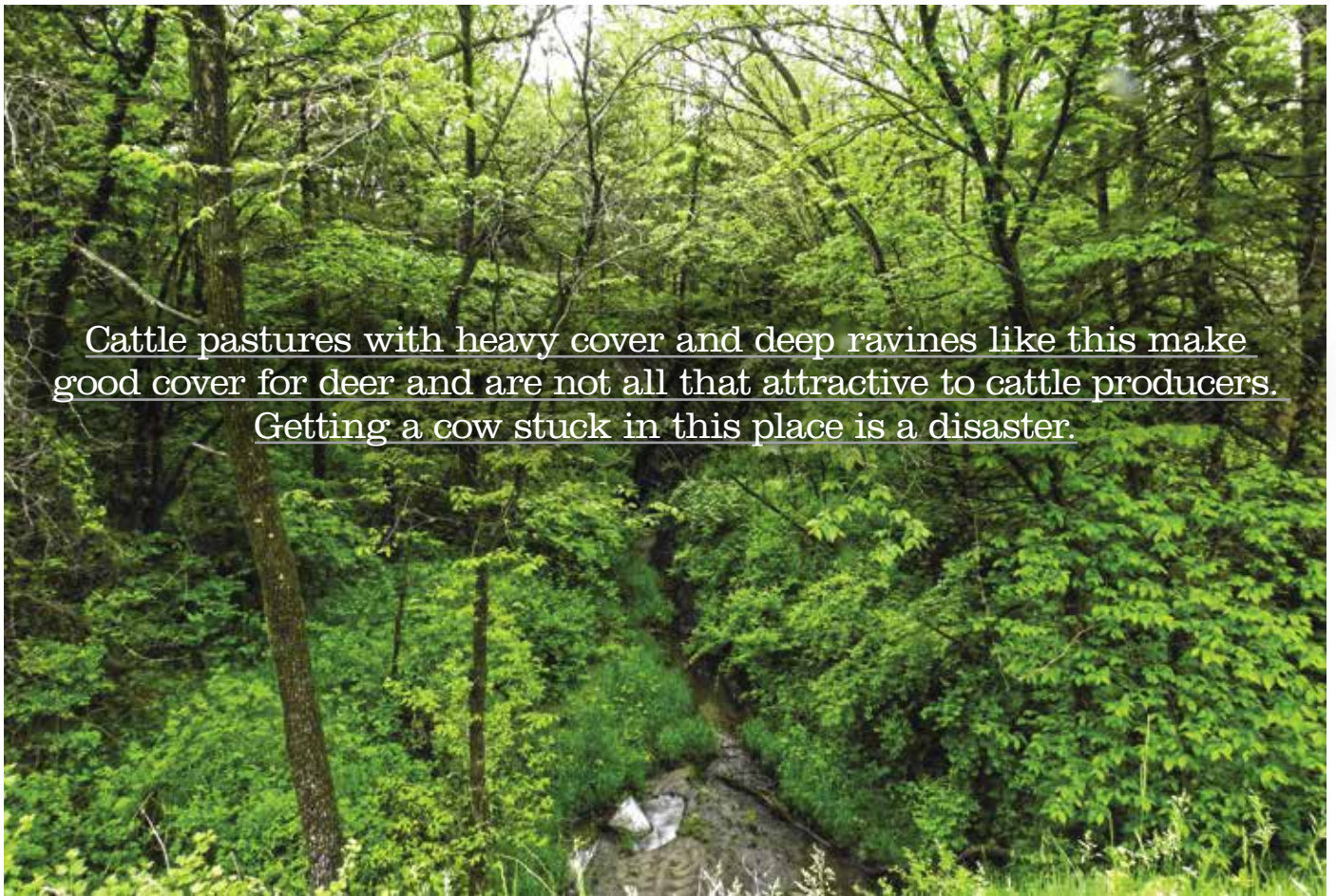


PHOTO BY MATT HARPER

Cattle pastures with heavy cover and deep ravines like this make good cover for deer and are not all that attractive to cattle producers. Getting a cow stuck in this place is a disaster.

plot for deer, what would you give up in terms of profit? The number varies based on input costs, yield and the crop's market price, but we can talk in generalities.

Market prices and yields for crops can fluctuate, but a soil's ability to grow crops is a bit more consistent. Obviously, weather plays a major role, but some soils simply produce less yield than others even within a crop field. Modern combines provide a real-time yield as they harvest a field, and it's not uncommon to have varying yields in various parts of a field. Sometimes, those yield numbers can be fairly dramatic. If there's a specific part of a field that consistently produces less yield, that's a good place to look at converting it to a food plot.

It actually doesn't cost as much as you might think to pull ground out of production — and perhaps spend far less — if you pick specific parts of a field. Is it worth paying a farmer \$300 or, if you farm yourself, have a potential loss of \$300 to get a really good food plot for hunting? With everything else you spend on hunting, that's really not that much.

The outside rows are another example

where I've seen good results in converting crop ground to food plots. When those rows constitute the border between a crop field and woodlands, brush or tall grasses, it creates an edge. Whitetails and other critters love edges, as they provide food near escape and bedding cover. In those areas, crop yields are typically lower because of heavy consumption by deer and other wildlife. If you plant a food plot — especially an attractive perennial such as Imperial Whitetail Clover — where end rows would typically go, you can sometimes decrease the total amount of crop degradation because deer feed in the plots before moving to the crop — if they move there at all. Additionally, when the cover-to-feed edge habitat is a food plot, deer tend to linger longer in the food plot than in the crops.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

I would be remiss if I didn't mention there are many government programs that help financially support wildlife conservation programs. One is the Conservation Reserve Program, which consists of federal payments for taking cropland

out of production and seeding it with specific plants to create wildlife habitat. The subject of using government programs is large enough for several articles, but it's important to mention the availability, as most land-use conversion from ag to wildlife involves monetary choices.

CONCLUSION

Life is full of choices, and it seems that most take us down different paths. But sometimes, you have the opportunity to widen the path and enjoy more of the journey. Whether you farm, lease hunting ground or simply have permission to hunt a farm, there's one resource that cannot be multiplied — the land. I believe God's design of the land was purposeful to support people and the wild things that He created. But you must also understand the perspective of others. If you can do both, you'll typically find that the land can easily meet the needs and desires of all.





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SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

by W. Carroll Johnson, III, PhD. — Agronomist and Weed Scientist

SOIL SAMPLING: A FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICE TO IMPROVE SOIL HEALTH

The procedure by which you sample soil in a food plot is a critical step to accurately assess the health of your dirt.



A soil testing probe is the ideal tool to collect soil for laboratory analysis. Marking the probe to the desired depth of sampling will help ensure consistency and quality. For annual forages or newly established perennials, samples should be collected from a depth of 6 inches. In established perennial forages, such as clover, soil samples should be collected from a depth of 3 inches.

In the context of food plot management, when I mention foundational, I'm referring to a crop management practice that is simple and instrumental to ensure success. Improving soil health is a long-term goal when managing food plots, with fertility and pH maintained at optimum levels for a healthy soil by regular testing. The foundational practice by which this is done is soil sampling, and there is a correct way to collect a soil sample to maximize the benefit of this task. A guiding principle is to remember that the quality of the laboratory analysis report is only as good as the soil sampling technique.

Think about the noun sample and the classical definition — a small part or portion that accurately represents the whole. A soil sample collected from a food plot and submitted for laboratory analysis represents a tiny fraction of the total soil from the food plot. Assume that a soil sample submitted to a laboratory weighs 1 pound. By weight, that 1-pound sample represents 0.00005 percent of the soil from a 1-acre food plot. (This is not a random

value dramatically pulled out of the air but a calculated percentage.) The procedure by which the soil in a food plot is sampled is an important step to accurately assess the soil health of a food plot.

COLLECTING SOIL SAMPLES

Soils are highly variable despite visual appearance. That's why soil sampling is based on a composite of several sub-samples collected from a food plot. Although there are many ways to sample a field or food plot, the most widely accepted method is to collect 10 to 20 sub-samples of soil (also called cores) from random locations across the food plot. These sub-samples are mixed in a bucket, and a portion from the bucket mixture is submitted for laboratory analysis. Random collection of sub-samples from the food plot compensates for the natural variation in the soil. To achieve randomness, a serpentine pattern of sub-sample collection is used.

Sometimes, a food plot was previously divided into distinctly different management zones where different forages were

planted. If that's the case, it would be prudent to treat the zones as distinct sampling areas, submitting separate samples for analysis from each area. Similarly, if the food plot is located where there are obvious differences in soil features or topography, sample those areas separately. All of this is intuitive — basic common sense.

The standard device to collect soil samples is a soil testing probe, which is essentially a piece of 1-inch pipe with one side missing, which allows for a core of loosely packed soil to be collected and removed from the soil surface down to the desired depth of sampling. In the absence of a soil testing probe, you can use a small hand-trowel or shovel to collect sub-samples using the same random sampling pattern. Regardless of the tool, it's important to collect all sub-samples using the same technique to ensure consistency.

Nutrient levels and acidity vary according to depth in the soil, which makes consistent depth of soil sampling important for an accurate and representative soil sample. For annual forages or newly established perennials, the standard depth of collection is 6 inches, which loosely correlates with the depth of tillage for seedbed preparation. For established perennial food plots, the depth of soil sampling is 3 inches, since soil tillage in perennial forages is not possible after establishment. When collecting soil sample cores, mark the probe with a marker indicating the depth of sampling or wrap a piece of duct tape around the probe at the desired depth. These simple methods add consistency to the depth of soil sampling.

When is the best time to take a soil sample? For basic soil fertility and pH management, there is not one ideal time. If you have established perennial forages, soil sampling at the same time of the year is a worthwhile goal, with my preference being autumn or spring. Soil nutrient and acidity levels naturally fluctuate throughout the year, and sampling at the same time of year will create a consistent database that will allow soil health comparisons among years. If annual forages are part of your food plot management system, soil sampling a year before planting annual forages is good practice. This will allow ample time for nutrient deficiencies or soil acidity to be identified and corrected before planting the next annual forage product.

SAMPLE HANDLING

Soil testing laboratories have their own sample preparation guidelines before analysis. However, it's prudent to remove any vegetation or rocks from the sample before submission. Removing these contaminants before submission might not be necessary, but it's a small step I do to help ensure that the best prepared sample is sent to the laboratory. This extra effort further reduces any confounding factor that might alter the analysis. I use an inexpensive plastic kitchen colander to screen the soil and remove the contaminants. If the soil is wet or at least moist when collected, I spread the pooled sample on a piece of newspaper and allow the soil to air-dry for a few days before shipping it to the laboratory.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Soil sampling is a useful diagnostic tool to help identify reasons for forage growth problems. Sometimes, soil fertility issues might be suspected. To definitively answer that question, simply collect a representative soil sample from a normal-growth area and another representative soil sample from the poor-growth area to create a good-versus-bad comparison. Submit the samples for analysis, ensuring that the samples are clearly identified as good and bad. Compare the results for pH, phosphorous, potassium, calcium and magnesium.

If the forage growth issue is related to soil fertility, the answer should be evident when comparing the good versus the bad soil analysis report. This might sound elementary, but this is where I start when diagnosing a forage productivity problem.

THE PAPERWORK

Regardless of the laboratory conducting the soil analysis, the intended crop or crops need to be identified on the submission form. Nutrient requirements vary among crops, with some crops having higher requirements for certain elements than other crops. Consider the high potassium requirements for alfalfa and clover compared to other forages. Similarly, the ideal soil pH value might vary among crops. These overall differences among crops will change the corrective fertilizer and limestone recommendations provided in the soil analysis report.

When you're considering multi-species forage blends, soil fertility requirements and fertilizer recommendations become tricky to determine. For example, consider No-Plow, which contains forage crops from three botanical families: ryegrass, rape and three species of annual clover. Each have different soil fertility requirements. Obviously, fertilizer recommendations for No-Plow need to consider the diverse nutrient requirements of each forage species, correcting all deficiencies. University soil testing laboratories provide quality analysis and recommendations for any of the individual forage species in No-Plow. However, they are not set up to make fertilizer recommendations for the combination of crops in this product. The Whitetail Institute's soil testing laboratory provides fertilizer and limestone recommendations for each named forage product we sell, including the multi-species blends such as No-Plow. This eliminates guesswork when planning for fertilizer and limestone applications.

This might be obvious, but the importance of quality written records is critical. This begins with the soil samples being clearly identified when submitted for analysis. Using a logical naming system will be

helpful now and several years later when studying the archived data. The naming system needs to be intuitive and consistent — something you can remember and that makes sense to you and others managing the food plot. If a food plot has a commonly recognized name, keep it simple and use that name when identifying the soil sample. Similarly, if separate samples are submitted for analysis from a named food plot, add an additional qualifier to the name for analysis, such as Creekstand-North or Creekstand-South.

Whether you use the Whitetail Institute soil testing laboratory or a university laboratory, the results of the analysis will be emailed to you. These reports can be printed and filed in a notebook for future use or saved to a special directory on a computer. Some might choose to create a spreadsheet and compile soil analysis data to monitor soil health through time. It really does not matter how this is done, but the data is valuable for long-term improvement of soil health in your food plots.

Many years ago, when I was a young and largely ignorant sportsman, a wise old-time gunsmith in southern Georgia took me under his wing and educated me on factors that improve hunting rifle accuracy: a tuned trigger and a rifle action glass-bedded in the stock for a perfect fit. The tuned trigger allows for greater precision in shot placement, particularly at long-range. The glass-bedded action, with uniform fit between the rifle action and stock, provides consistency among successive shots and many environmental conditions. The analogy between soil sampling technique and rifle accuracy illustrates the importance of consistency. As much as anything else I described in this article, a consistent soil sampling technique is crucial to maximize the benefits of soil testing. Develop your own soil sampling technique, and stick with it to achieve consistency. This will let you accurately monitor long-term soil health and improve food plot productivity.





Destination and Fusion food plots attracted monster bucks for Dave Jones and his friend Rod McKelvey.

LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE IN IOWA

Despite an EHD outbreak, a hot stand produced great bucks during consecutive years.

■ by Gordy J. Krahn

Epizootic hemorrhagic disease can be a season killer for whitetail hunters, wreaking havoc on local deer herds by taking a surgical slice of all age classes, including — and sometimes especially — mature bucks. EHD is spread by biting midges, commonly known as no-see-ums, spread from deer to deer when the midges take a blood meal from an infected animal and transmit it when they bite another. Those contracting the disease become weak and often die soon after transmission. An infected deer's head and tongue swell, and its internal organs hemorrhage. The animal typically runs a high fever and becomes weak and disoriented.

EHD struck parts of Iowa with a vengeance in 2019. So when the 2020 bow season rolled around, Iowa bowhunter and taxidermist Dave Jones was feeling glum about his chances of tying a tag to a big buck — even though he'd connected on a 167-inch behemoth during the EHD epidemic a year earlier. Still, above all, deer hunters are born optimists, and he wasn't about to let the season pass without giving it the old college try.

The author's friend Rod McKelvey shot this handsome 159-4/8-inch buck on a food plot planted in Destination — an attractive annual forage blend — in 2020.



Typically, when EHD infects an area, it causes a sharp decline in harvested mature bucks because that demographic often takes the brunt of the disease. But what Jones and his fellow local taxidermists saw in 2019 and 2020 ran counter-intuitive to reason.

"We got hit hard by EHD last year, but I still had a lot of nice bucks come into the shop," he said. "And it's not just me. I've got a lot of friends in the taxidermy business, and they're seeing one buck after another. I've got just about 80 deer in now, and it's been an amazing run."

NEVER SAY NEVER

"My buddy Rod McKelvey, who owns the farm where I hunt, didn't even hunt his property last year [2019] because of the EHD outbreak," Jones said. "He let me hunt there, though, and I shot a great buck — a 167-incher. He hunted on a buddy's land instead and shot a 155-inch buck the first night in his stand. We were pretty sure we didn't have any trail cam pictures of my buck, but after I shot him, we went back through the cameras and actually found two pictures of him."

The pictures were taken at a Whitetail Institute 30-06 mineral site.

Even with his success in 2019, Jones admits that he and McKelvey weren't expecting much action in the way of mature bucks when the 2020 bow season rolled around, because of the EHD outbreak.

"Actually, we were reluctant to hunt this year because we had only two shooters on camera," he said.

Jones would again hunt the plot where he shot the buck in 2019 to see if lightning would strike the same place twice. The only difference was that he and McKelvey had rotated it from Winter-Greens to Fusion, a perennial blend of clover and chicory that provides up to 44 percent antler-building protein and is extremely attractive to deer.

Jones said they had pretty much decided to stay out of the area until they started getting trail cam evidence of buck movement. And that's just what they got when a cold front moved through toward the end of October. The bigger bucks were starting to move — including couple of good shooters.



The food plot where the author shot his bucks is between a bedding area and large agricultural fields, which provides a staging area.

"We were able to pattern these bucks pretty easily because we were getting trail cam pictures of them coming to this food plot," he said. "And then toward the end of October, we started getting daylight pictures of them. A buddy in the area shot a big buck, and that's when I decided to get out there and hunt. And on one of my first sits, I had a big 9-pointer come walking into the plot."

Unfortunately, Jones had an issue with his crossbow and wasn't able to get a shot off.

"I had this guy at 20 yards in the Fusion field, and I mean he was a brute," he said, "but the crossbow wouldn't go off."

PRIMO PROPERTY

McKelvey's property where Jones hunts is just south of Des Moines and just 30 minutes from his house.

"When Rod bought this farm, he asked me to help him with the food plots," Jones said. "We started with two small food plots, and we've been adding to them ever since. He's killed multiple deer over 160 inches off this property, and I know a lot of it has to do with the food plots."

"We hunt between a bedding area and agricultural fields, and use the food plots to stop deer that are coming from that bedding area to browse on these small food plots before continuing on to the big fields," Jones said. "We've got one that's 2 acres, one that's 1 acre and one that's one-half acre, and we just planted a brand new half-acre plot this year where Rod shot a nice 160-inch buck."

The new plot was planted half in Imperial Whitetail Destination — one of Whitetail Institute's top-selling annuals — and the other in Whitetail Oats

Plus. Destination is a highly palatable fall annual planting that combines early- and late-season forages with kale to keep deer in the plot from germination time until the end of hunting season. The blend is a favorite with deer hunters — cold tolerant and easy to plant. Whitetail Oats Plus has a high sugar content and is very winter-hardy.

“The deer just go crazy over those sugar oats,” Jones said. “We had multiple trail cam pictures of that 160-inch buck Rod shot in that new plot, so he was pretty easy to pattern.”

WILL LIGHTNING STRIKE TWICE?

The stand that Jones hunts from is a homemade tower blind positioned on the southwestern corner of a 2-acre food plot that takes advantage of the area’s prevailing northwest wind.

“It’s basically on a gas line cut that goes through this property,” he said. “Normally, northwest is the prevailing wind here, and I pretty much wait until we get a good wind during the last part of October to the first part of November when the bucks are really starting to cruise before I go out and hunt this property.”

This was Jones’ second season hunting with a crossbow, because like a lot of driven-hard-and-put-away-wet hunters, he’s dealing with shoulder issues.

“I had surgery on my left shoulder two-and-a-half years ago,” he said. “I think it had a lot to do with all of the softball I played. I threw the ball a lot and ended up with a torn meniscus and torn rotator cuff. My right one is just as bad, but I haven’t had surgery on it yet. It took me more than a year just to recover from the left one, and I’m still having problems with it. I just can’t pull a bow back and hold it anymore. Last year, my shoulder was still bothering me, so I went to my doctor and he gave me a written letter so I was able to get a crossbow permit. I thought my shoulder would be better this year, but it wasn’t, so I got another permit for this year, but I’m probably going to go back and get a permanent one.

“It’s amazing how accurate these

things [crossbows] are, but it’s still a challenge to hunt with one because they can be hard to maneuver in a stand. But it’s still bowhunting as far as I’m concerned. For me, it’s been instrumental in getting me back out there and hunting. If I wasn’t able to use a crossbow, I would not have been able to bowhunt these past two years.”

So after the unfortunate mishap with the 9-pointer, Jones went back to give his tower stand another shot, knowing there was an even bigger buck frequenting the food plot.

“It was cool and sunny, and we had a northwest wind that day,” Jones said. “We normally hunt just afternoons so we can catch the bucks coming from the bedding area going to the big fields, but once the hardcore rut is on, we switch to hunting all day. But this particular afternoon, I just hunted the afternoon. I was sitting in the blind, and all of a sudden, I saw this big buck. There’s a small river that runs through the property, and he was walking on the edge of it heading right toward me, feeding along the way on that Fusion plot.”

The buck slowly worked toward the waiting hunter but didn’t offer a shot opportunity until it finally turned broadside at 15 yards. This time, there were no issues with the crossbow, and Jones was able to get an arrow off and made a perfect shot.

“He ran about 50 yards, and I watched him fall over,” Jones said.

DEATH OF A PRIZE FIGHTER

Looking back, Jones said that for him, the biggest thrill about tying his tag to this buck is that the deer is older, and they were targeting him.

“We had pictures of him, and it’s al-

ways nice to be able to target a mature buck and then go out and match wits with him,” he said. “Everybody knows how hard older bucks are to kill.”

Jones said the buck reminded him of an old, weathered prizefighter.

“One of his ears looks like cauliflower,” he said. “His body wasn’t as big as some of the younger bucks that were running the fields, so you could tell he was on the decline. For me, it’s always an accomplishment to kill an older buck.”

Jones shot the buck on Oct. 30, 2020, and the old veteran taped out at 148 inches. He figured the deer to be at least 6.5 years old.

“We’ve got a trail cam pictures of him, and he looks really, really old,” he said. “And we’ve got trail cam pictures of him two years ago with that same tine sticking out when he was probably 4.5 years old.”

There were, no doubt, Iowa hunters who sat out the 2020 whitetail season. The impact of an EHD outbreak can make even locating and targeting mature bucks difficult at best — almost impossible at worst. But sometimes, the best approach is to push logic and negative thoughts aside and take a never-say-never mindset when hunting during adverse conditions. By doing so, Jones learned that success often comes when you least expect it — and that, indeed, lightning can strike twice in the same place.



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A man wearing a yellow safety vest, an orange cap, and camouflage clothing is kneeling in a grassy field next to a dead deer with large antlers. He is holding a rifle. The background shows a line of trees under a cloudy sky.

by Gerald Almy

FLUBBUPS

TO AVOID

The author has decades of trial-and-error experience in growing top-quality food plots. Here, he details several critical errors he made during his journey — and how you can avoid them.

PHOTO BY GERALD ALMY

When I became interested in growing food plots years ago, there was little information on equipment, soil preparation, fertilizer needs, what plants would be best for deer, the taste preferences of deer and the best place to locate plots — basically everything.

That was long ago. Things have changed — dramatically. Food plotters now have so much information in books, online and in magazines such as *Whitetail News* that any question, whether beginner's issues or more in-depth problems, has an answer. Soil analysis questions, top crop rotation strategies, the best tools for breaking ground, which plants deer digest best — the answers are there, free. Even with that near-overload of information, though, it's not uncommon for food plotters to encounter problems and

make mistakes as they delve deeper into this activity, which soon becomes an all-encompassing passion for many.

It's natural to make wrong turns, flub things up and experience failures, often many times, before you become a pro at growing consistently top-notch food plots. In a way, that might be good, because lessons learned from dirt-in-the-fingernails experience — failing, realizing your mistake and then improving the next time — are indelibly etched in our minds.

I know that from experience. If there's a food plot mistake, I've been there, done that. Learning was a process of trial and error, and I was particularly proficient at the error part of the equation — sometimes several times over. That's why I feel qualified to write this piece. But gradually, I learned from those mistakes.

Now, unless I'm trying a new project, I can usually get the results I want on the first attempt because of years of trial-and-error learning before the turn of the century.

I remember some of my first years, when I would make three or four mistakes when planning, planting and maintaining a plot. And I'd pay for it — a poor crop, overrun with weeds and barely offering palatable fare for deer. Fortunately, there were so few people growing food plots then that mine still attracted some deer, including a nice buck or two during those early years. And it was a tremendous boost when I learned about Imperial Whitetail Clover soon after it was unveiled.

Besides not killing weeds and grasses properly, guessing about how much lime or fertilizer I needed and planting the wrong type of plant for the type of soil I had, I made other mistakes. Sometimes, I would put the plant in before or after the best window of opportunity. The result was compromised survival of the planting.

To top it off, I put several plots in areas deer would never feel comfortable using except at night. And that's exactly when they did. I knew by the browsed forage and hoof prints. But rarely did I see a deer in daylight at those poorly located early plots.

And if you really want an example of a pointless, hardheaded mistake, I sometimes got a soil test done and then failed to carefully follow the guidelines by adding enough lime and the proper fertilizer. Guess what? Again, I paid for it.

But eventually, the lessons sank in. To save others the wasted money, time and sweat, not to mention the disappointment when a crop fails or is of mediocre quality, here's a guide to avoiding five of the most common food plot mistakes. We'll cover why folks tend to make those mistakes, the consequences and, most important, how to avoid them. Sure, there are others. In drawing up the notes for this article, I came up with more than a dozen. But these five are some of the most common flub-ups and the most crucial to avoid.

1. NOT GETTING A SOIL TEST

It's common for newcomers or people with limited time to want to get to the nitty gritty of tilling the soil, spreading seed and watching plants come up. But it's a huge mistake to jump in without first finding out about your soil. You need to know the

soil's strengths, what nutrients it lacks and its pH. Only after you learn those things can you amend the dirt to ensure it nurtures a quality crop, whether it's clover, brassicas, cereal grains or warm-season annuals.

Sure, it's tempting to throw some 19-19-19 fertilizer and a bit of lime on the soil. But that's not the way to go. Each area where you plan to plant has different soil composition. And almost all plots need some help to grow a high-quality crop of deer forage. A soil test will tell you what nutrients the ground lacks and how acidic or alkaline it is. Be sure to take several samples — eight to 13 — from various areas in the plot, and then mix them together for an accurate sampling of each field.

The pH reading reveals whether lime is required. A reading of less than 6 will require the application of ag lime to increase the pH. Except with a few special-purpose seed mixtures such as Extreme, No-Plow or Secret Spot, the minimum pH you should shoot for is 6.5. The ideal pH for most forage crops is 6.5 to 7.0.

I mention pH for many reasons. First, weeds thrive in acidic soils. With a low pH, crops will grow poorly, and weeds will flourish — a double whammy. A pH that's too low can also cause other problems. It lets nutrients such as phosphorous and potassium become electrochemically bound with other particles in the soil and unavailable to the plants you're growing. That basically means you're pouring money down the drain by adding fertilizer without a balanced pH.

A second crucial piece of information soil tests provide is what type of fertilizers the soil needs. They tell you in simple terms exactly how much nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) your soil needs for the specific type of plant you intend to grow.

Soil tests are available at a low cost from the Whitetail Institute, agriculture universities or farm co-ops.

2. NOT FOLLOWING ADVICE FROM THE TEST

This one seems hard to believe. Why bother getting a soil test if you don't follow the advice? I've seen plenty of food plotters look at the results briefly, put them aside and forget about them. Call it procrastination, forgetfulness or laziness. Don't use those excuses.

First, address the lime issue, because a plot that doesn't have the proper pH can't make use of the fertilizers you add. Local farm co-ops or fertilizer companies can spread it for you. Or you can rent a spreader. For small plots, you can buy bags and spread it by hand. Pelletized lime can be spread with a tractor or ATV spreader. After it's applied, lightly disk it into the top few inches of the soil.

Add the amounts of fertilizer recommended by the tests. Each plot should have a sample sent in for testing, because the soil from various plots is never exactly alike. Finally, don't add more fertilizer than the tests recommend. You're wasting money. You can lightly disk fertilizer and lime into soil at the same time. If possible, though, it's best to disk in your lime several months before planting and wait to add fertilizer until just before planting.

3. NOT MATCHING THE SEED OR PLANT TYPE TO THE SOIL VARIETY

There's no excuse for making this mistake if you study the products offered by the Whitetail Institute. The company has a seed mixture for every scenario — from shaded, deep-woods plots, to areas with poor soil to rich bottomlands and dry uplands.

If you've experienced success with Imperial Whitetail Clover, it might be tempting to put that in all your plots. That's a mistake, unless they're the same in terms of soil type. And that's rarely the case. I made that mistake during my early food plotting years and soon learned that other products, such as Extreme or Chic Magnet, would be better in some poorer-quality soils, or that Alfa-Rack Plus was better for drier upland locations. It's also best to use annual and perennial forages.

Whitetail Institute personnel can help you pick the best forage mix for your property and areas where you plan to put in plots. Whitetail Institute consultants have decades of food plot knowledge, and the advice is free. You can also find plenty of helpful information on the company's website. A local county extension agent can also offer advice. And if you want more specific, in-depth advice about your soil types, you can find it at the NRCS website: websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov.

A forage such as Imperial Whitetail Clover does best in clay-type soils that

hold moisture. Its roots are shallow and don't need to penetrate far, using stolons (above-ground roots) to spread and expand growth in bottomlands. Alfa-Rack Plus, however, grows deeper roots and performs best in well-drained soils, such as hills and rolling slopes.

Some plants thrive in dry uplands, but others need moist bottomland. Find out whether your plot's soil is clay, loam or sandy in consistency. If you have poor-quality sandy soil in one plot, Extreme or Pure Attraction are good options. For woods plots that only get a small amount of daylight, offerings such as Secret Spot and Bow-Stand are the best choices, with plants that can thrive in just three to four hours of sunlight and relatively poor soils. Whether you can get equipment in to work the site is another important consideration. Those mixtures will thrive even if you rake the plot up by hand to reveal bare soil and then use a hand spreader.

These choices are covered in the product selector at the company's website. It guides you on how to choose a product best suited to your plot. Click on it, and it

will lead you through several questions to identify several appropriate choices.

"Each of our forage products is designed for certain conditions and factors," said Jon Cooner, a Whitetail Institute seed expert. "Since the combination of all these factors is unique to each plot site, you need to go through the forage selection process for one site at a time and do it in a step-by-step manner."

"Basically, what you do is consider all our forages, run down a list of questions one at a time and remove forages from the list of options as you go through the questions. When you're at the end of the questions, you'll have one or more forages for that site."

That will help you choose several products based on soil type and location and whether you can get equipment to the site. For example, Chic Magnet and Extreme are good for lighter soils that drain well. Imperial Whitetail Clover is better for high-quality soil and bottomland locations you can till before planting. Alfa-Rack Plus or Chic Magnet are the choices for moderate to well-drained sites and flat to

slightly sloping terrain. Clearly, one size fits all does not work in food plotting.

4. NOT PLANTING DURING THE RIGHT WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Just like the best choices of forage for a plot vary, so can the time you should plant that seed blend. I've made this mistake several times, with Whitetail Institute products and years ago when I occasionally used generics.

One of the most glowing examples involves brassica products such as Winter-Greens, Beets & Greens and Tall Tine Tubers. I knew those plants can grow large in good soil, with the right pH and when fertilized properly. Wanting to give them maximum warm-weather time to grow tall, I fudged and planted them several weeks earlier than recommended.

The result was what you would expect. Some of them went to seed, and others wilted in the hot summer sun. The planting dates on the bag have proven best through many years of testing throughout the country. Each time frame is tailored to a specific region.

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You can make that mistake the other direction, too. Planting brassicas too late will not give the plants time to grow to their potential before cold weather slows the growth.

If you plant perennials too late in fall, they won't have time to establish strong roots before heavy frosts. Plant too early and the plants can become stressed from drought and heat. Power Plant needs to go in during a several-week time slot that's early enough to get maximum production but not so early that the soil is cold (colder than 65 degrees), preventing good seed germination.

The Whitetail Institute makes it easy to plant each seed blend during the best time. Follow the directions on the bag, at the company website or in *Whitetail News*, and you won't go wrong. There's usually a two-to-four-week time frame for planting each seed blend for various regions of the country. Just plan a free day during that window of opportunity, and you'll avoid this potentially costly mistake.

5. IGNORING SMALLER POTENTIAL SITES

There's often a tendency to think bigger is better with food plots. A large plot offers

more forage to attract deer and more nutrition to help them grow. And that's a fine philosophy for some plots to make deer like your land and improve their health. It's great for places that are flat and offer easy equipment access, such as meadows or fields not in crop production.

Often, though, small out-of-the-way sites folks overlook can help attract deer to your land and provide superb hunting spots, at the plots themselves or along travel routes leading to them. Study topographical maps and aerial photographs, such as those from Google Earth, and walk every inch of your property with a notebook, pen and map. Jot down potential overlooked areas, and then analyze whether a plot can be grown there. Blends such as No-Plow, Bow-Stand and Secret Spot don't necessarily need to have the soil worked with equipment before planting. Just substitute sweat and some hard hand labor to get those in shape. You won't regret the effort if one of them entices a mature buck to pause within bow or gun range this fall.

Every plot doesn't have to be prize-winning quality. Some of those sites, even if they are just 1/8 or 1/4 acre, can grow reasonably well and are worth planting as

out-of-the-way ambush spots. If you plan to hunt them, consider strategic questions, such as how you can approach the plot, sun and wind direction, and other factors. Consider dirt trails, timbering roads, small natural clearings, small weedy pockets, log landings in woods or corners that have been overlooked.

Of course, you do not want to devote all those to plots. Some thick cover and natural grassy fields are vital to give deer a sense of security.

CONCLUSION

You'll discover many other flub-ups in food plotting. But if you can eliminate these five, you will be off to a good start in growing the most successful plots your land can produce — plots that attract deer to your property, help their nutrition and antler growth, and in some cases provide great hunting sites.



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G3 MODEL



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PENDLEY

Get young and beginning hunters involved in the process of food plotting. They'll enjoy helping out and will likely learn uncountable lessons along the way.

■ by Michael Pendley

Starting young hunters with an understanding of land management and how it benefits the animals we hunt gives them a deeper appreciation of our role in the ecosystem and a greater knowledge of the game they chase.

I'm all for hunter recruitment. Teaching a new hunter about the sport we love might be the most important thing we can do to

keep the tradition alive for future generations. But too often, new hunter introductions start with a quick trip to the range followed by a morning or evening in a stand, blind or shooting house. Sure, a young or beginning hunter will have fun if the game animal steps out. They will get excited and have a hard time catching their breath, and will maybe make a successful shot and go home with a trophy

and meals for their family. But they won't understand what went into making that shot happen.

There's a better way. If you're reading this magazine, odds are good that you put a lot of time, energy and resources into managing and improving your hunting land for wildlife. You understand how food plots benefit deer year-round, how adequate cover protects turkey nests and poults, and how thick

secondary growth from selectively harvesting timber provides does with a safe spot to hide fawns from predators. Allowing young or beginning hunters to be a part of the land management process teaches them about the day-to-day lives of the animals that use the property and will give them a much greater understanding of what it takes for those animals to thrive. Consider these tips to get started.

SAFETY FIRST

Young children and heavy equipment don't mix. While tractors, saws or other equipment are in use, keep children at a safe distance. Don't let them walk near moving equipment or working mowers. Make sure they use hearing, eye and skin protection during applicable situations.

If your new hunter is close to driving age, some time on a tractor seat is great training. Start on flat, open areas, and avoid steep hills and narrow turns. Start with simple tasks such as dragging a disk or drag until the driver is comfortable with the mechanics of operating the tractor.

Supply your help with gloves, protective eyewear, hearing protection if loud equipment is being used and anything else they need to be safe and productive.

PREP WORK

A productive food plot always starts with good soil preparation. Even the youngest hunters can help with tasks such as rock and limb removal. If you have more than one youngster helping, make it a contest to see who can pick up and remove the most debris from the field.

Although heavy equipment might be off limits, hand tools such as rakes and leaf blowers are safe and easy to use. Use them to remove leaf clutter and expose bare ground for planting. If you're taking soil samples, let your young help collect the soil and explain what the test will reveal. Those are good lessons for a lifetime of planting.

SPREAD SOME SEED AND FERTILIZER

Give youngsters a brief lesson on why you're using specific fertilizer blends

and how the soil test they helped with earlier guides the fertilizer choice.

After the soil prep is finished, your plot is ready for seed. Push-type, hand-held or bag-style spreaders are perfect for young food plotters. Even if you do the bulk of the plot with a tractor- or ATV-mounted spreader or no-till drill, there always seem to be small corners or narrow strips that are easier to do by hand.

PUT IN A NO-PLOW PLOT

One of the best ways to get a young hunter involved in food plotting is to teach them how to put in a no-plow plot with a seed blend such as Imperial Whitetail No-Plow or small-seeded brassicas such as Tall Tine Tubers or Imperial Winter-Greens.

Perfect spots for No-Plow plots include logging roads or timber openings that allow sunlight to reach the ground. Find a spot near a thick bedding area or between bedding areas and larger food plots that can serve as a staging area for deer as they make their way to and from the bedding and feeding areas. These little spots can be perfect setups for young hunters, because they are often small, limiting shot distance, and deer use them during daylight more regularly than large plots or crop fields.

To make the perfect food plot, remove existing vegetation by hand or through two or three sprayings of glyphosate. Next, rake or use a leaf blower to expose bare soil. One of the best things about seed blends such as No Plow is you don't have to work the soil deeply. A few young hunters with rakes can scratch out a nice-sized food plot in no time.

After the soil is roughed up, spread the seed blend with a small hand or bag spreader, which is easy for even the youngest food plotters. Follow up with the fertilizer blend. Timing your seed just ahead of a good rain will help ensure good seed-to-soil contact.

MAKE IT A YEAR-ROUND EXPERIENCE

We know that land management isn't just food plots, and new hunters can stay involved with many other aspects throughout the year.

Starting in early spring, shed hunting is a fun way to take inventory of bucks that made it through winter on your hunting land. Bedding areas, fence crossings and the edges of food plots and fields are perfect areas to search for sheds. Spending time in thick bedding areas that might have been off limits during the hunting season can teach new hunters even more about deer behavior. Trails and bedding areas are usually easy to find and see that time of year.

Early spring is also a good time to install and maintain mineral licks with products such as Imperial Whitetail 30-06 Mineral or 30-06 Plus Protein. To create a new mineral lick, use a rake or a shovel to expose bare ground near a well-used trail. Dig a shallow depression and add the correct amount of mineral blend. Use a rake to stir the mineral into the soil.

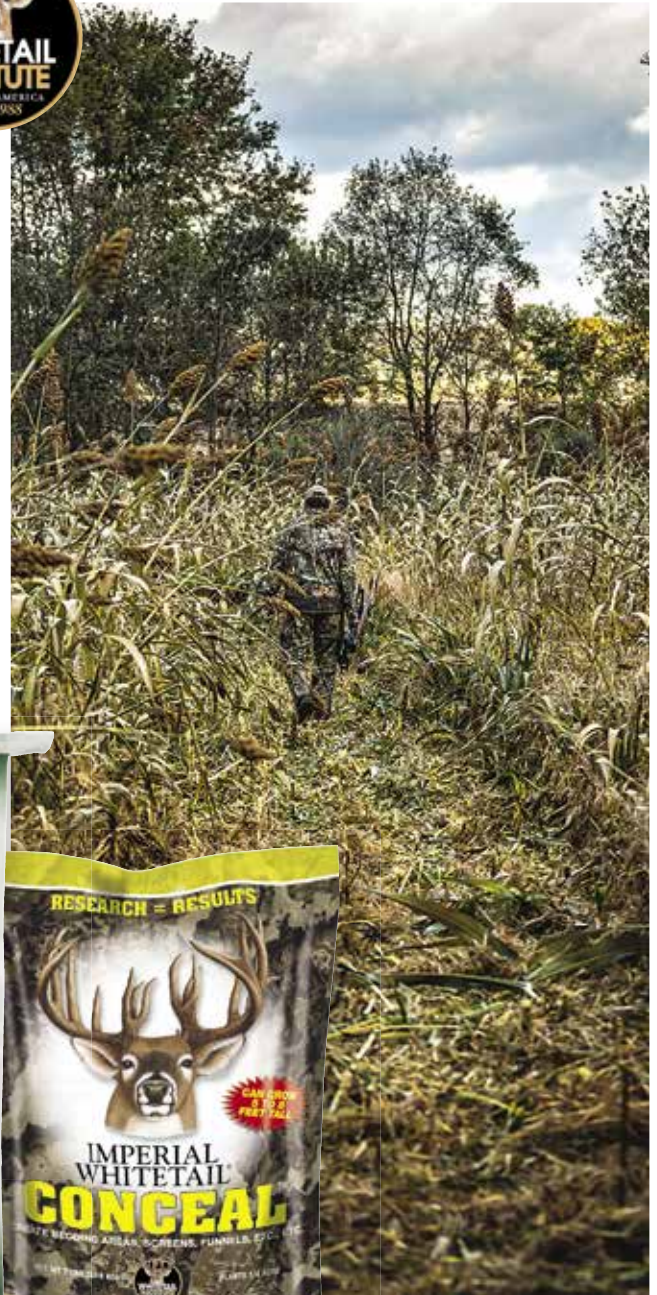
Running trail cameras is a year-round experience that young hunters love. Watching deer from early-spring food plots and mineral licks is a great way for new hunters to get familiar with the bucks in an area and also helps them recognize immature versus mature bucks while they're hunting.

As the season nears, get new hunters to help with projects such as hanging stands, building shooting houses, cutting shooting lanes and clearing paths to allow quiet entry and exit from stand locations. Make sure everyone sprays down with tick repellant to prevent bites and possible illness.

CONCLUSION

Deer hunting is more than pulling the trigger. Getting young and new hunters involved early with the work and preparation that goes into a quality deer herd will teach them more about the game they pursue than countless hours in a deer stand. Knowing how much work goes into land management will make it even more special when that mature buck finally steps into the food plot they helped build and maintain.





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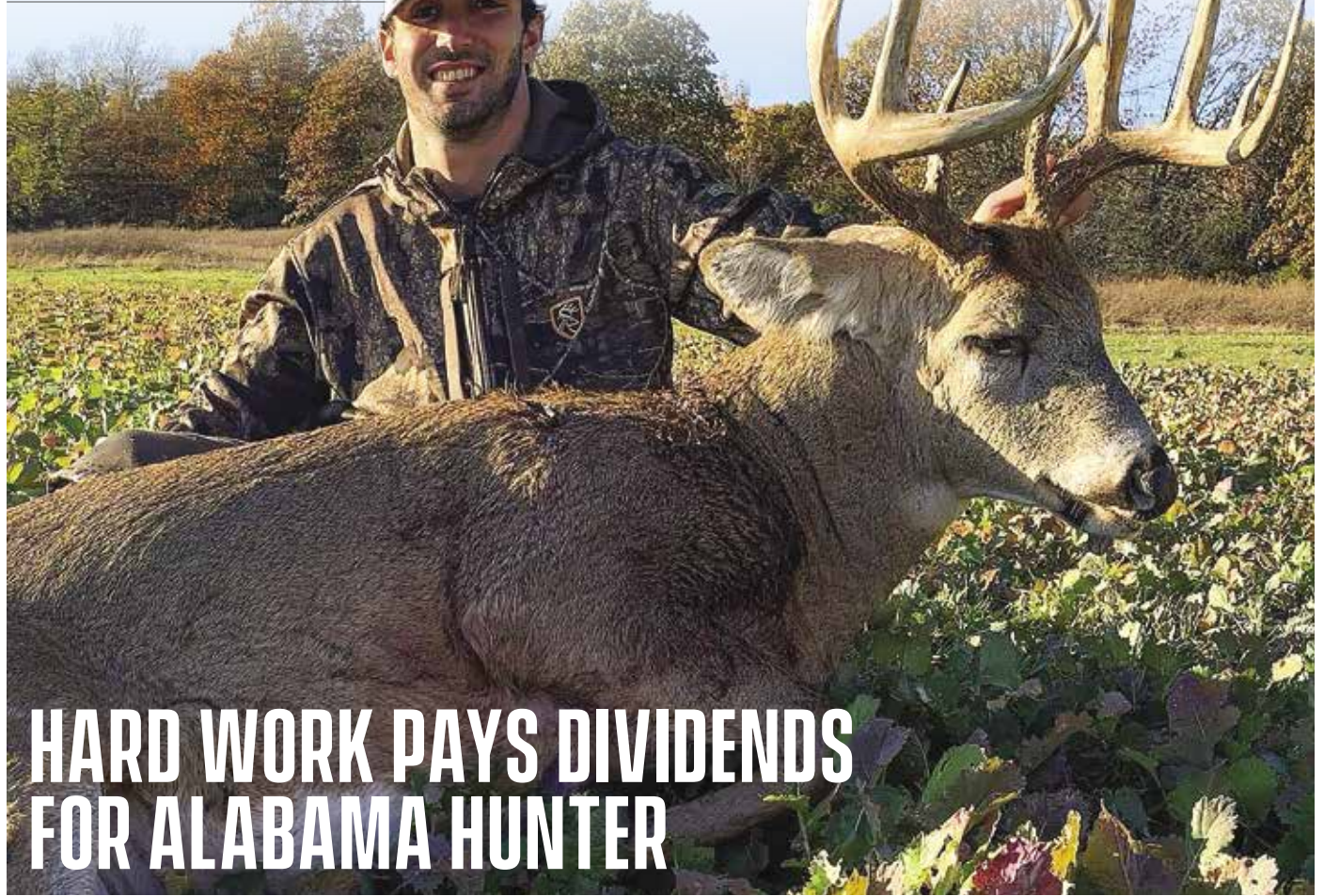
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MY TROPHY WHITE



HARD WORK PAYS DIVIDENDS FOR ALABAMA HUNTER

TYLER FILLINGIM | ALABAMA

■ Three years ago, my friend Kolton Atchley and I began traveling to Easton, Illinois, to hunt with our buddy Gavin Urish. The first two years, we used a week of vacation to hunt. But at the end of the 2019 deer season, we decided it was time to put some work into the farm. Naturally, the first item was to determine how we could plant food plots and provide deer with more groceries.

Gavin had all the equipment we would need for planting. We just had to get there in August to complete our work. We only had three days to travel to Easton from Mobile, Alabama, plant our plots and return home. However, we were determined to increase our odds that fall, so I left home on a Friday, drove 11-1/2 hours to plant Saturday, returned home Sunday and was back to work on Monday.

The products we used were Imperial Winter-Greens, Whitetail Oats Plus and Imperial No-Plow. We planted those to

cover every stage of the season in the Midwest. Each plot was 1/2- to 1 acre to an acre, which provided deer food for the entire season. The theory was that deer would hit the Oats Plus and No-Plow first, and as the season progressed, they'd begin hitting the Winter-Greens. The plan worked perfectly, and deer began to use our food plots heavily early and continued to do so through the season.

Hunting season finally arrived, and it was time for our hard work to hopefully pay off. Kolton and I sneaked away for a three-day hunt during the opening weekend. Deer used our food plots every morning and evening. Kolton and I saw multiple hit-list bucks, but they stayed just out of bow range.

Fast forward to Oct. 30, when we were to head back up to hunt for a week. I received the awful news that Kolton, who had been there every step of the way, could not make the trip. After a long talk,

Kolton convinced me to go without him.

While hunting a food plot we called the Football Field, at the northern end of the property, does and small bucks funneled through all morning. At about 8:30 a.m., I looked to my right and saw a deer emerging out of the CRP. I did not recognize it, but my brain told me the buck was the type of shooter you come to the Midwest to harvest. It worked out well, as he stepped into our food plot at 32 yards. He then ran off two smaller bucks and stopped at 38 yards, and I made a good shot on him. Given the circumstances, we decided to give the buck plenty of time before trying to recover him.

This was the most memorable hunting trip of my life, and I owe it to my good friends Kolton and Gavin. We had not seen such results until we started planting Whitetail Institute food plots.



ADDISON SAY | PENNSYLVANIA



MIA TRAISTER | PENNSYLVANIA

UNCONVENTIONAL APPROACH WORKS IN PENNSYLVANIA *By Jason Say*

■ This past year, northwestern Pennsylvania experienced a brutal drought, with no rain for almost six weeks. Of course, the drought occurred right after we had planted our fall food plots in August through September.

I was faced with a difficult decision: Hope and pray some of my plots still grew, or attempt something I'd never done and re-seed some of them with little time left in the growing season. I had nine plots that weren't doing well during the drought, so I panicked and decided to drag the plots with a harrow and re-seed them. I wasn't sure about the best option for re-seeding something late in Pennsylvania, but Whitetail Institute experts recommended Imperial No-Plow.

And that was the right call. We re-seeded the plots and got some rain, and the

plots turned out great, even with such a late start. Better, the deer loved them, and two young ladies took their best bucks.

My 13-year-old daughter, Addison, got her best buck with her crossbow.

"When that buck stepped out, my heart started beating so hard I thought it was gonna come right out of my chest," she said.

And my good friend Andy Traister's 15-year-old daughter, Mia, took a great 8-pointer during the first day of her first bowhunting season. I hope she doesn't think it's that easy all the time.

"I was so excited," she said. "I have wanted to be able to hunt with a bow for years. I practiced really hard all summer and was finally able to shoot well enough that my dad said I could hunt with my bow. We were just hoping to shoot a doe, but when

that buck came in range, I was so excited I didn't know if I was going to be able to pull my bow back. Then to make a perfect heart shot was awesome. The only bad thing was it was the first day of season, and I was done buck hunting."

"Seeing my daughter, Mia, take her first deer with a bow was one of the most rewarding and proud moments of my life," Andy said. "I grew up hunting, and to see her love it like I do — words can't begin to describe how proud and happy I was."

As a dad and a hunter, it's so rewarding to see hard work pay off, especially for youngsters. I know I panicked this year and re-seeded my plots, but ultimately, I made the right decision, and planting No Plow was definitely the right call.

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL OATS DRAWS IN NEW YORK STATE MONSTER BUCK *By Roger Steinfest*



CODY STEINFEST | NEW YORK

■ Our hunting camp is in upstate New York where we have been using Whitetail Institute's Imperial Whitetail Clover, Alfa-Rack Plus, Imperial Winter-Greens and 30-06 minerals for several years. We have six small 1/8-acre food plots, plus two 2-acre food plots spread on more than 500 acres. We also practice quality deer management on the property with fair results, as our bucks tend to average 120 inches as 8-pointers.

After reading several articles in *Whitetail News*, we decided to plant Whitetail Oats Plus on the small landing that we call our Pine Tree stand. All fall, our trail cameras took pictures of three young bucks, many does and fawns devouring the Oats Plus at all hours of the day.

On the morning of Nov. 21, 2020, we got the surprise of our lives. A small doe fed into the Oats Plus at 8:35 a.m. and slowly moved off, while continually looking back. This awesome 162-inch, 10-point buck, weighing 195 pounds field dressed, followed the doe. My son, Clayton, made a clean kill. Needless to say, we will be planting a lot more Whitetail Oats Plus this season.

ADVANCED FOOD PLOTTING

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

■ by Joyce Allison Tredaway — Agronomist and Weed Scientist

SPRAYER CALIBRATION, PART II

Use this handy checklist to make sure your sprayer is properly calibrated. Your food plots will benefit, and your experience will also be much better.



Nozzle tips and screens come in various materials, designs and sizes. It's important to choose the correct nozzle and screen for spraying your food plots to ensure the herbicide is applied properly.

In Part I of this series, I covered the basic considerations of sprayer calibration. Basically, sprayer calibration lets you accurately spray an area with a known volume to ensure that a herbicide will work as the label states. In this article, I'll cover some tips to help ensure that spraying your food plots is more of a pleasure than a hassle.

Here's a list of things that can be easily changed to make sure your sprayer is calibrated. It's crucial to remember that you should never mix nozzles of different materials, types, spray angles or spray volumes on the same spray boom while calibrating your sprayer. Doing that would produce an uneven spray pattern.

NOZZLE TIPS

Nozzle tips (orifice size) are easy to change and directly affect the flow rate. For food plots, a 0.2 or 0.3 fan nozzle is

<u>Spray Angle (degrees)</u>	<u>20-inch (spacing)</u>	<u>30-inch (spacing)</u>
65	21-23	32-34
80	17-19	25-27
110	10-12	14-18

normally what you'd choose if spraying 20 gallons per acre and traveling at 3 to 5 miles per hour. You can get an idea of what the general flow rate of an orifice is by looking at the numbers on the nozzle tip. For example, an 8002 nozzle tip will give you an 80 degree angle of the mist coming out of the tip (the first numbers listed on the spray tip) and 0.2 gallons per minute at 40 pounds per square inch.

If a nozzle tip says 03, it's simply giving the flow rate (0.3 gallons per minute) at 40 psi. That does not mean you need to set your spray pressure at 40 psi, but it gives you an idea that if your flow rate is too high, you can change to a smaller tip, and visa versa.

When purchasing nozzles, the old saying, "You get what you pay for," is true. Nozzles are made of various materials. The type of material (plastic, brass or stainless steel brass, for example) will influence how long the nozzle will last because of how easily it wears. Materials that are more resistant to chemicals, such as stainless steel and ceramic, help nozzles maintain a constant flow rate after extended use. Less durable materials, such as plastic, are the cheapest, but they wear out quickly, increasing flow rates

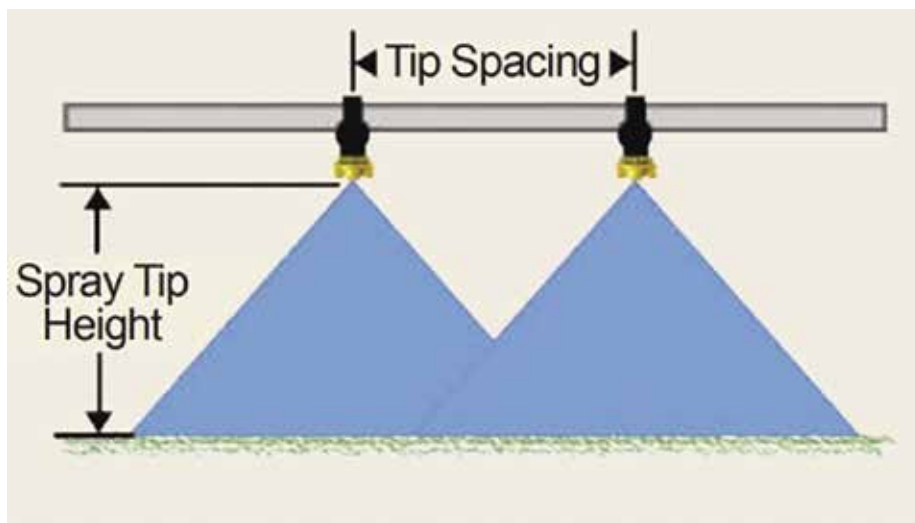
after only a brief period of spraying. Reducing nozzle wear by purchasing a more durable nozzle can easily pay for itself many times by reducing overapplication.

BOOM HEIGHT

The height of your spray boom (or backpack sprayer spray tip) will affect the spray pattern. A uniform spray pattern is essential for a herbicide to work properly. Nozzle tips are designed to be sprayed at an optimum height to give proper overlap between adjacent tips. Too much overlap results in overapplying a herbicide in some areas and underapplying or not applying it in others. Insufficient overlap results in skips with no herbicide being applied, which results in no weed control in the areas that were missed. This chart shows the boom height in inches for flat-fan nozzles for 20- and 30-inch boom spacing for various spray angles. This can be used to check your height and ensure that your overlap is correct.

PRESSURE

Spray pressure is another item that's easy to change and can have a direct affect on flow rate. Depending on the type of spray system you have, you can change



the pressure various ways. A pressure valve lets you turn the pressure up or down. Some spray systems have a screw that must be loosened to change the pressure and tightened after you reach the desired pressure. Pressure also influences the droplet size of the herbicide. Higher pressures result in finer droplets, which spread on the plant more easily but are also more prone to drift off-site. Lower pressures have the opposite effect. They make larger droplets, which tend to dry slower, are quicker to fall to the plant and are less prone to off-target movement. Herbicide labels specify what the pressure range should be to minimize off-target movement and maximize plant uptake. As a reference, reasonable spray pressure can range from 20 to 40 psi.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Calibrate your sprayer early enough so you can correct issues before it's time to start spraying. It's a good idea to calibrate again if you use your sprayer often, just to ensure that your spray pattern, nozzles and equipment are working properly. Your nozzles should be thoroughly cleaned, meaning you should take them apart, clean the screens and ensure that all washers are still in good condition. Never use a pocketknife to clean out the nozzle tips. Use a toothbrush or water to rinse the screens and nozzle tips so they will not be damaged.

The optimum overlap will occur when the spray tip height corresponds with the angle of the orifice that you are using. The spray tip height will vary depending on the spray angle and the nozzle spacing.

After spraying, clean your sprayer by rinsing with clean water at least three times. This will make sure the herbicide residue is out of the sprayer, nozzles and pump. Some herbicides will stick to the sides of the tank or nozzle bodies. If you don't rinse that properly, it will be almost impossible to remove if allowed to stay for long periods. This can be a problem the next time you spray, because the residue can cause unintentional injury to the food plot when you make your next application. You can also add tank cleaners to water to ensure that all residue is removed from the spraying system. Household ammonia mixed with water to make a 1 percent solution is an effective spray tank cleaner. Additionally, household ammonia is a good cleaner of spray tips and screens.

Although this might seem like an exhaustive list, making sure that your sprayer is calibrated, choosing the proper nozzle tips, adjusting the pressure and maintaining your sprayer will help make your herbicides work the way they were intended. With a little time and proper planning, your food plots will benefit from the small things that make a big difference.



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PHOTO BY DAVID HART

HUNT WHAT YOU HAVE

Realistic expectations help you better
enjoy the hunting experience.

■ by *David Hart*

**“SHOOT WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY? IT’S A NOVEL IDEA
THAT HAS BEEN LOST ON MANY OF US CAUGHT UP IN THE EVER-
CHANGING WORLD OF WHITETAIL MANAGEMENT.”**

Has the popularity of hunting-themed television shows made things tough on deer hunting? Chris McClellan thinks so. An outfitter for almost 10 years, the central Virginia resident sometimes reminds clients that his region is unlikely to produce a record-book buck. It might not even surrender a buck that circulates across social media outlets.

“Between social media and all these television shows, there is this notion that every buck we shoot is supposed to be a giant, even here in Virginia,” McClellan said. “A lot of people lose sight of a realistic buck for the area they are hunting.”

That opinion might have merit. In other words, television shows and social media outlets create unrealistic expectations for hunters. Many of us will never see a 180-inch buck where we hunt, even in states known for quality deer. Heck, few of us will even see a 150-incher. No matter how many 120-inchers we pass up, no matter how many food plots we plant and no matter what other efforts we undertake, many other factors play a role in the quality and size of antlers in our region. Some are beyond our control.

The most important? Genetics. Places such as Iowa, Kansas and Illinois produce many giant bucks because they have the genetics to grow monster deer. Other factors we can’t control include generous buck limits that let hunters kill two, three or more bucks in a season. In those areas, there’s little incentive for hunters to be selective about the bucks they shoot. Many don’t pass up any legal deer.

WHAT YOU HAVE

The simple solution? Hunt what you have. Come to terms with reality, and accept that a 140-incher in your woods may be the equivalent of a 170-incher in Iowa. That’s what Alabama resident Newt Norton and his fellow club mem-

bers started doing five years ago. Like many deer hunters, they were caught up in the trophy management web for years, passing up bucks that would make many hunters flush with adrenaline.

“We relaxed our rules on what could be killed, and we also started planting Whitetail Institute food plots,” he said.

By lowering your standards to be more realistic, you take pressure off yourself. That lets you hunt with more focus on what’s really out there and gives you more freedom to experience what deer hunting is really about: having fun in the woods and testing your ability to outwit mature bucks.

McClellan wrestled with that concept when he started outfitting 10 years ago. Would his clients have a good, fun hunt even if they didn’t kill a buck that would rival those of traditional trophy whitetail regions?

“A trophy can be just about anything,” he said. “A lot of my hunters have never shot anything over 100 inches because they don’t have the opportunity to see bigger bucks where they hunt. Most are pretty happy to shoot a 120- or 130-incher.”

Located in south-central Virginia, McClellan’s outfit features 4,500 acres of rolling farmland, pine plantations and mature hardwoods. It’s great habitat that’s loaded with whitetails. He also plants various Whitetail Institute products throughout the property. McClellan briefly toyed with mandatory size limits, but he dropped that idea before he hosted his first clients. He doesn’t impose mandatory standards on the bucks his hunters can shoot, but he suggests they pass up younger and smaller ones. He purposely uses vague terms.

“Basically, I tell them to shoot whatever makes them happy,” he said. “That’s not up to me to decide what the definition of a shooter is. A 17-inch 8-point might be the biggest buck of their lives. I know some outfitters out West have

minimum antler size restrictions, and a few even fine their hunters for shooting undersized bucks. I don’t see any reason to do that here.”

Shoot what makes you happy? It’s a novel idea that has been lost on many of us caught up in the ever-changing world of whitetail management. In some ways, we’ve been bombarded with an unrealistic set of standards most of us will never reach. Sure, there might be a 150-inch buck somewhere in your neighborhood, but the odds that you will see it, no matter how hard or smart you hunt, are likely slim.

A lifelong hunter, even McClellan has undergone a transformation of sorts. It’s not that he expected his region of Virginia to surrender a wall-hanger every season. But he thought he might have been able to move the needle when he started passing up younger and smaller-antlered bucks.

“It probably helped some,” he said. “I don’t think we are seeing bigger bucks on average, but we are certainly seeing more older bucks, which is probably a better standard of quality than antler size around here.”

DO WHAT YOU CAN

That’s doesn’t mean you can’t improve the overall health of your deer herd and even the average antler size of the bucks on your property. Norton’s club started planting Imperial Whitetail Clover five years ago and PowerPlant two years ago.

“We’re not growing Boone & Crockett bucks, but we’ve gone from seeing lots of 110- to 130-inch bucks to seeing lots of 125- to 145-inch bucks,” he said. “My dad killed a 158-inch 13-point buck the season before last and this past season we had an 18-point and a 13-point killed.”

Without question food plots help improve the entire deer herd. So can wide-scale habitat improvements. However, selective harvest — passing up young



- GROW 'EM BIG
Virginia outfitter Chris McClellan plants a variety of food plots in the spring and fall to help improve his deer herd. However, he says allowing young bucks the opportunity to grow is the most important ingredient.

PHOTO BY DAVID HART

ALABAMA'S NEWT NORTON AND HIS FELLOW CLUB MEMBERS HIT THE SWEET SPOT WHEN THEY RELAXED THEIR RULES AND STARTED USING IMPERIAL WHITETAIL PRODUCTS. THEY SHOT 140-INCH BRUISERS INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR THE IMPROBABLE 170-INCH BUCK.

deer in favor of older ones — is unquestionably the most influential thing you can do. Young bucks will never reach their potential if you shoot them. It doesn't take a scientist to figure that out.

Don't pass them all up, though. Or at least don't turn your club or management program into a dictatorship in which everyone lives in fear of shooting the wrong buck. As McClellan said, it's up to you what qualifies as a trophy buck. And you shouldn't push your standards on others, especially those with limited hunting experience. Norton's club began taking more children and beginning hunters on their first hunts about five years ago. They don't impose age or antler size restrictions. It was one of the best things they've done.

"The amount of fun we've been having has increased significantly," he said. "It's hard to describe what it's like to see a kid get his first deer or have buck fever overtake them. We've had the good fortune to have 25 or 30 kids and a few adults kill their first deer with us. Some were pretty nice, and some were spikes or forkhorns, but they didn't care. They were all thrilled."

So was Norton, who acknowledged he and most of his club members have undergone a transformation since they started hunting together more than 20 years ago.

"We still kill some pretty good deer," he added.

"Pretty good" for them might be the buck of a lifetime for you. By under-

standing the limits of your local deer herd, you'll have more fun and will hunt with more focus for the largest bucks in your area. Just be realistic with your expectations.

"Be realistic," McClellan said. "If you've been hunting a property long enough, you already know what the potential is. Do what you can to increase your deer herd's health, but don't pass up 130-inch deer just because you're holding out for a 140 that may not exist."





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The author shows off one of his mature bucks shot using Imperial products.

PHOTO BY KRIS KLEMICK

WHAT SHOULD I PLANT?

The knowledge available through the Whitetail Institute's publications, consultants, weed scientists and agronomists is the best way to achieve masterful food plots.

■ by Kris Klemick

Walking the aisles at your favorite sporting goods store, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and confused by the number of food plot products. Between crazy claims — “Guaranteed to grow the biggest bucks!” — and paid celebrity endorsements, it's almost a roll of the dice whether your hard work and money will pay off at the end of the growing season. That's especially true if

you grab any seed and try to wing it.

With the Whitetail Institute of North America, building a successful food plot portfolio doesn't have to be a high-stakes risk. With the knowledge you'll gain reading *Whitetail News* and the decades of experience available via telephone from the Institute's professional in-house consultants, weed scientists and agronomists, you'll be on your way to masterful

food plots.

The Golden Rule, which has guided everything the Institute has done since Day 1, remains the same: treating others the way you'd want to be treated. Whitetail Institute products and services remain the gold standard by which others are measured. For someone looking to get started in food plots, the Whitetail Institute has you covered.



In the barren landscape of late fall and winter, Whitetail Institute products offer incredible attraction and nutrition.

GETTING STARTED: TWO TYPES OF PLOTS AND PLANTS

Understanding the differences between satellite plots and destination plots, and annual and perennial plants, might sound confusing, but it's simple.

Destination food plots are where deer feed, usually after dark. These often-expansive plots can be several acres or larger and produce substantial tonnage designed to hold deer on a property. Before deciding what to plant in a destination plot, consider the time and money you'll have to invest. There's more soil to maintain, which means more time in the field. Perennial crops can help reduce your workload and allow more time in the woods.

Satellite plots are smaller; usually less than an acre. These are desirable locations where people like to hunt during the first and last hours of daylight, when deer transition to bedding areas in the morning or destination plots at night. If you can place one near abundant cover and deer feel safe, about the only time you'll see a satellite plot without deer is if you've bumped them.

The types of seed you can plant fall into two basic categories: annuals and perennials. Both play important roles, and determining which to use depends on your goals. It's easy to confuse annuals with perennials. Annual picnics or parades happen every year, so you might think annual plants would come back, too. But when an annual event is finished, it's done. The next year is never guaranteed unless someone plans and executes the event — or in this case, plans and plants the field.

Annuals complete their life cycle in one year. The seed germinates, and the plant grows and dies the same year. You can plant annuals early in the growing season (spring or summer) or late (fall). The food plot, however, will not reproduce from the original stem the next year.

Perennials are the opposite. They live for more than two years and grow through much of the year, but when appropriately maintained, perennials can live for several years before dying. Imperial Whitetail Clover is an excellent example of a powerful perennial.

So how do perennial plants survive for several years while annuals must be replanted each year? Perennials use an asexual process called vegetative reproduction, or propagation, to reproduce. Perennials such as Imperial Alfa-Rack Plus have a deep, extensive root structure that lets them thrive and survive during summer droughts and cold winter months.

Perennials typically invest most of their resources during the first growing cycle into establishing roots. The nutrients required for healthy, productive growth are in the soil and cannot be ascertained by the naked eye. Too often, people grab a handful of dirt and think, "Now that's some good-looking soil." The importance of testing your soil to ensure proper nutrient and pH levels cannot be stressed enough. If soil pH isn't within an ideal range, micro- and macronutrients essential to plant health remain trapped at the molecular level. Poor soil conditions will negatively affect your food plot with stunted growth and wasted money on fertilizer. If you have proper soil conditions, though, the

root structure can establish quickly, allowing nutrient uptake and letting the plant flourish the next year versus

struggling to set roots during the second growing season.

Soil is always critical, and testing it is an integral part of food plot success. The Whitetail Institute offers professional laboratory soil testing, with results available quickly. It also provides specific and accurate fertilizer and lime recommendations for maximum performance. It's incredibly easy and probably costs less than your lunch did today.

DIVERSIFY

Now that you understand the differences between the types of plots and plants, how do you decide which seed to use and where to go with it? So many crop options exist, so how do you ensure you don't purchase a square peg meant for a round hole? Again, the Whitetail Institute has you covered. The product selector tool on the top of the page at whitetailinstitute.com is an excellent resource. Simply answer two or three questions about your planting situation, and the tool provides a selection of seeds that will perform best in your scenario.

The Whitetail Institute also offers an industry-leading service that's all but extinct nowadays. Dialing (800) 688-3030 will put you in touch with a professional in-house consultant who lives and breathes white-tailed deer. They devote as much time as required to ensure that your questions are answered. And the call and service are free.

The general rule, assuming you have sufficient acreage, is to plant 60 percent of your food plot acreage in a perennial crop, such as Imperial Whitetail Clover, Fusion or Chic Magnet. That will be your destination food source, where deer can consume high-quality forage for extended periods.

As the growing season wanes, perennial plants will begin slowing their growth in preparation for winter dormancy. That's where the remaining 40 percent of your food plot acreage comes into play. Early- and late-season annuals establish and grow quickly, providing high-quality food that's excellent for white-tailed

deer and hunting.

Annuals planted early in the season (spring and summer), such as PowerPlant, contain forages such as soybeans and peas designed to provide extremely high levels of protein and massive tonnage during the critical antler growing, fawning and lactating period.

Later-season annuals planted in fall — Pure Attraction, Winter Peas Plus or Whitetail Oats Plus — are scientifically designed to provide abundant levels of highly nutritious, high-sugar, drought- and cold-tolerant forage to carry deer through the stresses of the rut and winter.

For folks in the northern reaches of whitetail range, products such as Winter-Greens and Tall Tine Tubers stay true to their names. These unsurpassed annual blends of cool-season brassicas stand above the rest, remaining upright and green throughout the deepest of winter's cold and snow.



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL TALL TINE TUBERS

- Extremely cold tolerant — establishes early, and when the foliage is eaten, the large tubers will provide an additional food source for late winter.
- Exclusive turnip only available in Imperial products.
- Annual: Up to 36% protein.

Optimum Growing Environment:

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- Soil pH: 6.0 to 7.5
- Sunlight: 4 to 6 hours of of broken, filtered or direct sunlight a day



The beauty of brassicas is found beneath their highly attractive leafy tops. If your soil is properly managed and Mother Nature provides rain, you should begin noticing softball-sized turnips or radishes protruding from the ground. With frost-inducing temperatures, the starch in the turnips begins to sweeten, and deer go crazy digging through the snow in search of the sweet treat. They cannot resist the incredible attraction and nutrition in the Institute's brassicas.

GET OUT THERE AND PLANT

Gazing at the packaging on some

seeds, you might believe you've found a silver bullet for a one-size-fits-all food plot. Companies spend loads of money marketing products. Don't let packaging hype influence your buying decision.

The Whitetail Institute knows that every property owner has unique circumstances. That's why it spent years of research and testing on food plot products designed for its most important customer — white-tailed deer. Call on the company you can trust.



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A Deere mini-excavator is shown in the process of clearing a food plot. The excavator's arm, with "DEERE" visible on the boom, is positioned over a dense thicket of green vegetation and brush. The background consists of tall evergreen trees under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is one of land management in a wooded area.

The author often uses a rented mini-excavator to clear small food plots.

FOOD PLOTS PAY DIVIDENDS IN OCTOBER

■ by *Michael Veine*

PHOTO BY MICHAEL VEINE



For three consecutive years, I have been blessed to kill my Michigan limit of two archery bucks during the first week of the season. Why? Smart stands on quality White-tail Institute food plots.

The early part of deer season might be the best time to kill a good buck.

Deer are still using consistent, predictable movement patterns and are often much more relaxed before the escalating pressure of hunting season puts them on edge. In my home state of Michigan, many deer go mostly nocturnal in October instead of moving and feeding during daylight. Also, buck numbers are much higher early in the season.

I have learned to focus on the first week of the archery deer season and in recent years have killed more bucks during that period than at any other time.

COMPETITION AND CROSSBOWS

In the early 1980s, I competed in professional arm wrestling tournaments at a high level, including the World Championships in Petaluma, California. I'm from northern Michigan, but during the early 1980s, I lived out West. When I was growing up, bowhunting was my passion. When I got into arm wrestling, however, I discovered that my bulked-up arms couldn't bend far enough to achieve consistent archery accuracy, so I quit bowhunting for a few years while I lived and competed mostly in the Western states. In the mid-'80s, I moved back to Michigan and had to make a decision: continue arm wrestling or get back into bowhunting. I chose the latter, and for 30 years, I did not think much about arm wrestling.

When Michigan passed a law letting all hunters use cross-

bows during the general archery season, I decided to attempt a comeback in arm wrestling. After a year of training, I went to the National Championships. In three years of competing, I have won 10 medals at nationals, which has been fun. I have also changed the way I hunt — with a crossbow.

Three years ago, I decided to build a new stand setup on my Upper Peninsula hunting property. The spot is centrally located between three main food plots. One is my premier destination plot, which is about 5 acres. The other two are about an acre apiece. During May, I cleared the new almost-1/8-acre plot with a chainsaw, removing all the junk but leaving big stumps. I soil-tested it, sprayed it multiple times with glyphosate during spring and summer, and limed it heavily. During August, I cleaned it to the ground with a large rake, and then between the stumps, I planted Imperial No-Plow followed by a generous dose of fertilizer.

As usual, I also spiced it up by creating some mock scrapes and rubs around the perimeter. During May that year, I also built a new blind there. There were not any good trees in the area for a stand, so I constructed a box blind that is half buried into the side of a low ridge. The blind only has one window facing north toward the food plot, with a wide shooting lane that crosses a tiny stream that borders the plot. It is a pretty spot.

The blind is long and skinny, designed for crossbow usage. I can sit back in the shadows of the blind and shoot with a rest out the window. I can accurately shoot a crossbow farther than a compound bow, so this setup was set farther from the food plot than normal, which keeps deer from detecting

me when winds swirl. Being buried in dirt, scent containment is good anyway. Still, I hinge-cut several trees around that blind so deer movement downwind is almost non-existent. A smart entry and exit route to the stand rounded out the setup, and deer never know I'm there, so it's almost perfect.

My hunting area consists of big woods, with no agricultural land within miles. Deer numbers are relatively low there, as lots of wolves, bears and coyotes take a bite out of the deer herd, along with nasty winters. I even got a cougar on a trail cam this year.

We also have heavy hunting pressure in the area and don't have mandatory antler restrictions or much of a voluntary quality deer management ethic, and mature bucks are rare. Does are off limits on my property, even with an archery tag, so if I want venison, I must set my sights on what is available. Antlers grow slowly in my area, with 3-year-old bucks rarely scoring much more than 110. However, at least deer there are big bodied compared to those in the southern parts of the region, so they yield lots of venison.

YEAR 2

I didn't hunt the new blind — which I call The Hole — during the first year, as I killed two bucks (Michigan's limit) at some reliable tree-stand spots during early October.

The following year, though, I replanted most of my 5-acre food plot during May with Imperial Whitetail Clover. It was wet then, and a third of the plot was muddy or under water, so I left that portion for a late-summer planting.

In August, I tilled up the remainder of the plot with my quad-pulled disc and then went over it thoroughly with my homemade drag, which consists of a pallet wrapped with chain-link fence and a couple of sandbags for added weight. My disc leaves lots of clumps, ruts and dirt piles, so the drag levels it out nicely, creating a great seedbed. I then seeded it with Imperial Whitetail Clover, but just for kicks I also broadcasted a few bags of Whitetail Oats Plus as a cover crop. It was the first time I'd tried those oats, so that was experimental.

By September, that plot was lush with forage, and the oats were growing like cra-

zy. To say deer were hammering the plot would be an understatement. We probably have fewer than 15 deer per square mile in my area, but I had at least 50 deer on camera at that plot, with several decent bucks parading around. The Oats Plus and the Imperial Whitetail Clover were attracting deer like never before. My other plots were also getting hammered.

On Oct. 1, I hunted the Hole and saw several deer at midday, but no shooters. About 2 p.m., a big-bodied deer ambled in and started munching about 30 yards in front of me. He had six points and not much of a rack, but his body size indicated he was likely a 3-year-old, so I took aim for a shot. At the loud thump of the crossbow, the deer dashed off like a sprinter on steroids.

Those bolts fly so fast I could not see where it hit, so I waited an hour and then took up the trail. I could not find any blood, but I tracked him from the dirt he'd kicked up. I found my first speck of blood 50 yards away, and the dead deer was about 100 yards from the food plot. He was later confirmed as a 3-year-old that weighed

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179 pounds dressed. I extracted that buck from the area with as little mess and as much stealth as possible, so I did not mess up future hunts. Later that week, I killed another nice 8-pointer from that stand, so it was worth the extra effort.

ANOTHER YEAR. MORE SUCCESS

Last year, I again tried something different. My 5-acre plot of Imperial Whitetail Clover was growing better than ever that summer, so I left that alone to its normal maintenance, which consists of fertilizing in May, spraying in June and mowing later in summer. On three of my micro food plots, which get planted with Imperial No-Plow or Secret Spot, I seeded half of them in Whitetail Oats Plus. The Oats Plus, No-Plow and Secret Spot all grew great there.

On Oct. 2, I hunted The Hole and shot a dandy 10-pointer that dressed 190 pounds. I have killed my Michigan limit of two bucks three consecutive years, all during

early October. That is what I call consistency.

I also duplicated the box blind/food plot setup at another spot close to my cabin for a south wind, so deer are now in double trouble. The real key to opening-week success at these two stands is their location on my property. Specifically, they are close to my cabin. I can enter, exit and hunt those stands without disturbing any deer deeper into my land. Therefore, I hunt those close yet prime stands hard opening week and then move deeper into my property to hunt undisturbed deer later in the week. After about two weeks, I let

my property rest for a week. Telemetry research has shown that pressured deer return to normal movement patterns after about one week, so that rest period resets my property. Throughout the season, I repeat that process, including mixing in hunts elsewhere, which helps keep the deer at ease and my odds maximized. In recent years, though, I have not gotten much past that first week, thanks mostly to finely tuned setups with prime food plots near camp.



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- Soil pH: 6.5-7.5
- Sunlight: As little as 4 hours of broken, filtered or direct sunlight a day
- Can be planted in spring or fall



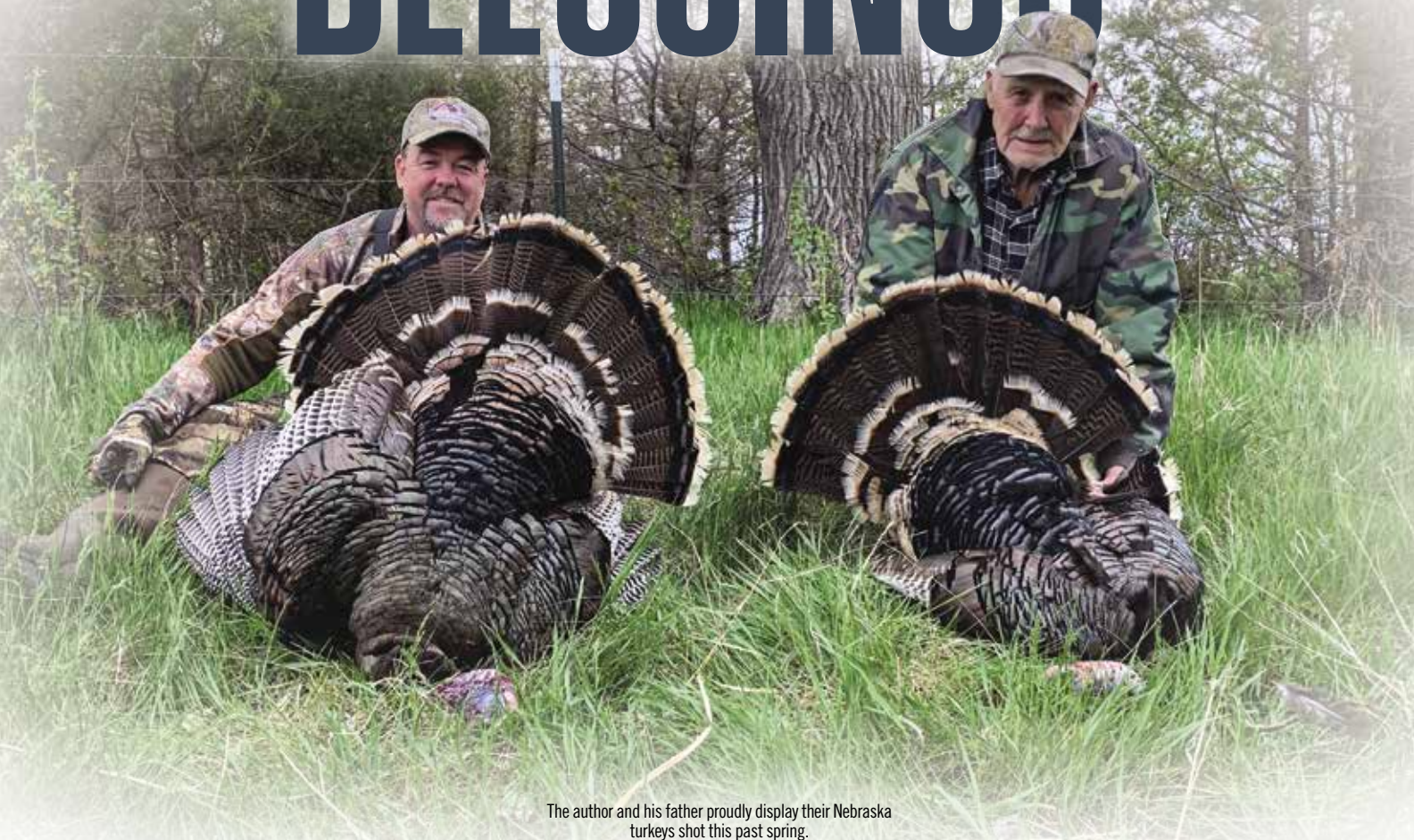
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ANOTHER YEAR OLDER AND DEEPER IN DEBT: UNWARRANTED BLESSINGS



The author and his father proudly display their Nebraska turkeys shot this past spring.

Sometimes we recognize blessings, and sometimes we don't.
But it's important to keep looking for them.

■ by *Matt Harper*
PHOTOS BY MATT HARPER

“I GREW UP ON A FARM, WHICH WAS ALSO A BLESSING
BECAUSE I LEARNED THE VALUE OF HARD WORK AND
THE SWEAT AND PAIN THAT CAME WITH IT, BUT ALSO THE
RESULTS OF THAT EFFORT, WHICH MANIFESTED INTO
THINGS SUCH AS A BEAUTIFULLY GROWING CORN FIELD
OR HEALTHY, STRONG CALVES.”

The Sandhills of Nebraska can appear isolated and lonely, with miles of rolling hills lightly covered with short-growing warm-season grasses that separate neighbors by several miles. But for my dad and I this past spring, the region was the perfect setting to chase turkeys. We found it anything but desolate, with mule deer dwelling in the hills, the creek bottoms teeming with whitetails, waterfowl of all shapes and sizes, and, yes, turkeys.

Dad and I have hunted turkeys together for many years in many states, and this trip ranks among my favorites. We shot great birds but, more important, spent time together laughing and talking (even in the turkey blind, making it surprising we got anything), which is precious in a world where time is your most valued and limited commodity. Dad turns 84 in a few days, and I couldn't help but feel amazingly blessed for that opportunity and the countless moments like those we have experienced through the years.

Growing up, my mom would sing songs to keep me occupied and thus less annoying. I recall many tunes, but one I can still sing verbatim was an old song by Tennessee Ernie Ford called 16 Tons. Part of the chorus says, “... another day older and deeper in debt,” and Ford's deep

baritone voice laments the fact that although he toiled in the mines every day, he somehow seemed to get further indebted to the owners. That might seem like a strange children's song, and I'm pretty sure Mom wasn't trying to teach me about worker suppression, but we enjoyed singing it together. It was probably a far more child-appropriate song than AC/DC's *TNT*, which is what my daughters learned at a young age.

Not long ago, I was driving to western Texas, and as the sun began to sink below the mesquite brush hills, I started to wax nostalgic. I thought of that Tennessee Ernie Ford song, and it made me think about how with every day and each year, I become deeper indebted. I'm not talking financially, although that could be argued, but rather indebted for the many blessings that have been bestowed upon me. I cannot say these blessings are deserved, and I'm not trying to be superficially self-demeaning. I'm simply saying that even though bad things happen, as they inevitably will, I also recognize how God has blessed me, and it's humbling.

LIFE'S BLESSINGS

At this point, you might ask what this has to do with hunting or deer management. I'll get to that in a minute, but contrary to my inner dogma on hunting's

importance, other things in life are of equal and even greater value. For me, this category of blessings starts at my beginning, with being born into a wonderful family. I realize I might be biased, but I don't think there could be a better family to grow up in than the one God gave me.

My parents were — and remain — unconditionally loving people. That doesn't mean they didn't get mad at me, which was unquestionably warranted based on my youthful tendencies, but they loved me through all the turmoil children go through growing up. They taught me valuable lessons about life, not the least of which was faith in a Creator that also has unconditional love for me, which my parents exemplified in raising my brother, sister and me.

I grew up on a farm, which was also a blessing because I learned the value of hard work and the sweat and pain that came with it, but also the results of that effort, which manifested into things such as a beautifully growing cornfield or healthy, strong calves. These are real, undeniable outcomes you can see, which I think produces a level of satisfaction that's far more impactful than any virtual result.

My marriage — more specially the woman I married — is also a tremendous blessing, and not just because she tolerates my chronic hunting obsession.



Abby Harper, the author's youngest daughter, smiles as she displays a big doe.

We have two wonderful girls, both of whom graduated this year, one from college, and the other from high school. When reflecting on the year, it struck me that although COVID-19 created horrible situations for many people, it produced a blessing in at least one way. My schedule is crazy, and I'm away from home far too much. But that changed in 2020, as I spent more days at home than I had for probably two decades. Although

I still had to work, I spent time with my parents, wife and children, because they were also confined to our respective farms. I treasured that time, and it made me realize how indebted I am for the blessing of family and friends.

As you get older, your perspective changes about many things, including hunting. I've not lost any passion for the outdoors. If anything, it has grown, but it has changed. When I return from an

evening hunt after a bruiser buck took a hard right turn 150 yards from my bow stand, I'm not as upset as I would have been in my youth. Sure, I would have loved the chance to sling an arrow at him, but just seeing the deer and the excitement and emotion it created was a great experience — different than killing a buck, but memorable regardless.

I don't even have to see a big buck to have a great morning or evening in the stand. In my extremely busy world, those times let me reflect on the blessing of simply having the opportunity. We live in a wonderful country that, thanks to the vision of people such as Theodore Roosevelt, places value on wildlife and the land in which you find them. This value is not simply for viewing, as in many places in the world, but considers them a resource to be used and conserved for future generations. And that outdoor experience is not just for those who own land but for all citizens, so vast areas have been set aside for people to take advantage of that. These areas exist in every state. That realization hit me a couple of years ago when a conservation group purchased 2,000 acres bordering one of my farms and opened it to public hunting. At first, I was not happy, as I conjured up thoughts of trespassers and groves of people causing havoc. But while I was enjoying a sunrise in my tree stand, my thinking began to change. Watching the woods wake up as the first rays of light began to peek over the eastern horizon is an experience everyone should have the right to enjoy. I knew someone was probably sitting a mile away on that public ground that enjoying the blessing of experiencing it with me.

Having places to hunt is great, but the right and ability to do so in this country is extremely important. That right and freedom, along with our other rights, was paid for through the pain, suffering and lives of countless men and women who, through two-plus centuries, fought to maintain these freedoms. The magnitude of that sacrifice cannot be calculated, but the realization blossoms when you're immersed in the experience you've been

afforded. That evokes profound humbleness and endless gratitude.

A DEEPER LOOK

As mentioned, I spent more time at home this year than I have for most of my adult life. That resulted in many blessings, but there were times when I thought I should pad the walls of my home office, because if I had to sit through one more Zoom call, I was going to come off my rocker. My saving grace was that I live on my farm, and when my calendar finally cleared at the end of the day, I could get outside and clear my mind. I've always appreciated being close to woods, fields and plots, but never was that blessing so clear as during this past year. I was blessed to grow up on a farm and be mentored by a father who also loved to hunt and fish. The treasured days of hunting pheasants and other small game instilled a passion that drove me to pursue hunting as a hobby and a career.

A little more than 20 years ago, I was given the opportunity to work for

Emma Harper holds up a bruiser buck shot in Iowa



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the Whitetail Institute. It was there I found new passions: food plotting, deer nutrition and deer management. During my time with Whitetail Institute, I worked with hunters and deer managers throughout the country, and I found the culture was much like the one in which I grew up. My time with Whitetail Institute was another blessing, and one that did not stop after I moved to another career path. You might think that blessing was based on gaining knowledge and techniques to improve deer quality and the chances of shooting big bucks. If you would have asked me a few years ago, I probably would have said that was true.

Undoubtedly, food plots and other management practices have helped me produce bigger deer, and during the past two decades, I've taken several Boone and Crocket and Pope and Young bucks. But more important, those things helped me introduce my family to hunting and provided a higher chance of success. My

daughters shot their first deer over food plots, as did my dad, who did it at more than 80 years old. Even the successful hunts weren't the greatest blessing. My family, especially my daughters, learned that if you put in hard work and were committed to making things better, good results follow. They learned to grow things in a world infatuated with destruction. They also gained an appreciation for managing wildlife and learned that the need for conservation and the respect of wild things is equally as important as growing corn and raising cattle. My girls grew to understand that a successful hunt did not always end with shooting a deer but rather simply enjoying nature, spending time with one another and the satisfaction they did something to make deer and other wildlife better. Those lessons will stay with them far beyond the last day we sit together in a stand, and hopefully, they'll pass them down.

CONCLUSION

This year, I've seen my daughters graduate; one from college, starting a new exciting life in the workforce, and the other starting an adventure in college. Both are good girls with good heads, and I'm guessing that's mostly because of their mother. My dad and I had a great turkey trip and created lifelong memories. I have two areas picked out for new food plots, and I'm just as excited about working on them as I was years ago when I planted my first. Soon it will be time to get the cameras out and see about the upcoming season's prospects. Yep, some debt is rolling up this year, but blessings don't pay attention to a calendar. They simply show up. Sometimes, we recognize them, and sometimes we don't, but the important thing is that we look diligently for them.



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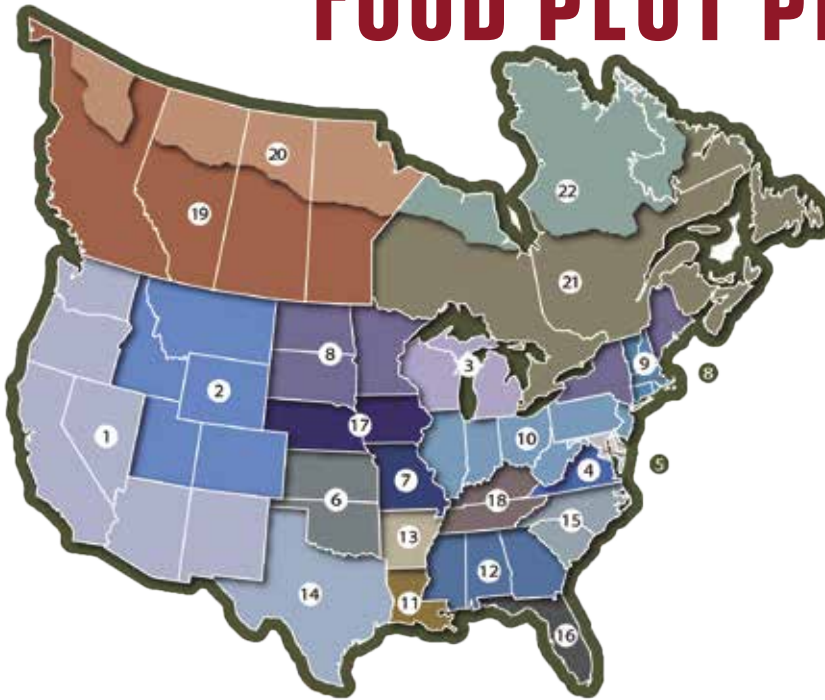
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239 Whitetail Trail, Pintola, AL 36043 • 800-688-3030 • www.whitetailinstitute.com

FOOD PLOT PLANTING DATES...



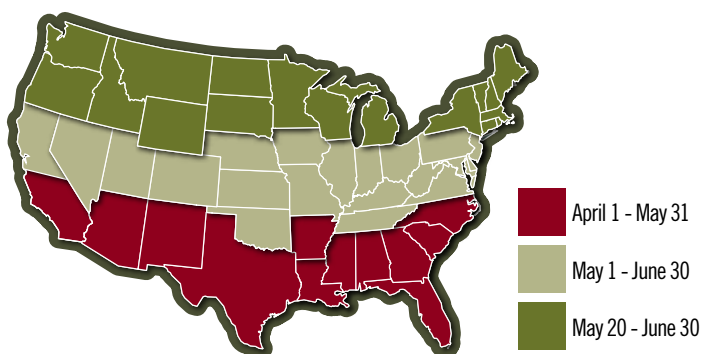
PLANTING DATES FOR IMPERIAL CLOVER, ALFA-RACK PLUS, EXTREME, NO-PLOW, FUSION, CHIC MAGNET AND EDGE

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1 Call for planting dates | 8 Apr 1 - June 15
July 15 - Sept 5 | 16 North: Sept 25 - Nov 25
South: Oct 5 - Nov 30 |
| 2 Apr 1 - July 1 | 9 Apr 1 - May 15
Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 17 Mar 1 - May 15
Aug 1 - Sept 15 |
| 3 Apr 15 - June 15
Aug 1 - Sept 1 | 10 Mar 20 - May 15
Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 18 Feb 1 - Apr 15
Aug 20 - Sept 30 |
| 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 | 11 Sept 15 - Nov 15 | 19 Apr 15 - June 15
July 1 - Aug 15 |
| 5 Feb 1 - Apr 1
Aug 1 - Sept 30 | 12 Feb 5 - Mar 1
North: Sept 5 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15 | 20 May 15 - July 1 |
| 6 Feb 1 - Apr 15
Sept 1 - Nov 1 | 13 Feb 15 - Apr 1
Sept 1 - Oct 30 | 21 May 1 - June 15
July 1 - Aug 15 |
| 7 North: Mar 15 - May 1
Aug 1 - Sept 15
South: Mar 1 - Apr 15
Aug 15 - Oct 15 | 14 North: Sept 15 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15 | 22 May 15 - July 1 |
| | 15 Feb 1 - Mar 1
Coastal: Sept 25 - Oct 15
Piedmont: Sept 1 - Oct 5
Mountain Valleys:
Aug 25 - Oct 15 | |



PLANTING DATES FOR WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

Use the map below 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, 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 FOR VISION, PURE ATTRACTION, SECRET SPOT, WINTER PEAS, BOWSTAND, AMBUSH AND DESTINATION

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1 Call for planting dates | 8 July 15 - Sept 5 | Mountain Valleys:
Aug 25 - Oct 15 |
| 2 Call for planting dates | 9 Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 16 North: Sept 25 - Nov 25
South: Oct 5 - Nov 30 |
| 3 Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 10 Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 17 Aug 1 - Sept 15 |
| 4 Coastal: Sept 1 - Oct 15
Piedmont: Aug 15 - Oct 1
Mountain Valleys:
Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 11 Sept 15 - Nov 15 | 18 Aug 20 - Sept 30 |
| 5 Aug 1 - Sept 30 | 12 North: Sept 5 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15 | 19 July 1 - Aug 15 |
| 6 Aug 15 - Nov 1 | 13 Sept 1 - Oct 30 | 20 June 15 - July 15 |
| 7 North: Aug 1 - Sept 30
South: Aug 15 - Oct 15 | 14 North: Sept 15 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15 | 21 July 15 - Aug 31 |
| | 15 Coastal: Sept 15 - Oct 15
Piedmont: Sept 1 - Oct 5 | 22 July 1 - Aug 15 |

PLANTING DATES FOR WINTER-GREENS, TALL TINE TUBERS, BEETS & GREENS AND RAVISH RADISH

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1 Call for planting dates | 10 July 15 - Sept 15 | Mountain Valleys:
Aug 5 - Sept 15 |
| 2 Call for planting dates | 11 Sept 15 - Nov 15 | 16 North: Sept 15 - Nov 15
Central: Sept 25 - Nov 15
South: Oct 5 - Nov 30 |
| 3 July 1 - Sept 1 | 12 North: Sept 5 - Nov 1
Central: Sept 15 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15 | 17 July 15 - Sept 1 |
| 4 Coastal: Aug 15 - Sept 30
Southern Piedmont:
Aug 1 - Sept 15
Mountain Valleys:
Aug 1 - Sept 15 | 13 North: Aug 15 - Oct 1
South: Sept 5 - Oct 15 | 18 Aug 1 - Sept 30 |
| 5 July 15 - Sept 15 | 14 North: Sept 5 - Oct 30
Central: Sept 15 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15 | 19 July 1 - Aug 15 |
| 6 Aug 1 - Oct 1 | 15 Coastal: Sept 1 - Oct 1
Piedmont:
Aug 15 - Sept 20 | 20 June 15 - Aug 1 |
| 7 North: July 15 - Sept 15
South: Aug 1 - Oct 1 | | 21 July 15 - Aug 31 |
| 8 July 5 - Aug 20 | | 22 July 1 - Aug 15 |
| 9 July 1 - Aug 30 | | |



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FIRST DEER



- OPENING DAY SUCCESS!

Michigan's Leah Wilkerson shows off her first deer. The family uses Imperial Winter-Greens and Imperial Whitetail Clover as their food plot choices.

by Paul Wilkerson

I've been using Whitetail Institute products for more than nine years, and the results have been incredible. When I started, I didn't use enough lime or fertilizer. Then I had a soil test done through Whitetail Institute, and it was easy and inexpensive. After getting my soil to the optimal levels, my food plots have flourished.

By far, my favorite Whitetail Institute product is Imperial Winter-Greens, with Imperial Clover being a close second. I find that Imperial Clover holds deer on my property, and when the weather turns cold, you'd better be in your blind, because deer will be in the Winter-Greens. It isn't uncommon to see 40 deer at one time.

This past season, my children and I had our eyes on this beautiful 9-pointer. We'd seen him since May at the farm. My daughter, Leah, connected with her first deer on opening day, using my .450 at 105 yards. She was so excited I thought she would come out of her skin. She looked at me and said, "When can I do that again?"

Opening day this year in Michigan was windy and rainy, and most people didn't see any deer. However, because of Whitetail Institute products, deer were in our food plots. Thank you so much, Whitetail Institute. I also shot a 7-point buck and a double-brow-tine 10-pointer that weighed 225 pounds field-dressed. My son Logan's velvet 10-pointer (from the youth hunt) and 8-pointer also came from my 50-acre farm. What a great year. My wife, who never wanted to shoot a deer, now sees how much fun we're having and wants to hunt next year.



FIRST TIME SUCCESS

Whitetail Institute Products
Help Girl Take First Buck



DISCOUNT COUPONS

ORDER TODAY!

SAVE A FEW DOLLARS WITH WHITETAIL NEWS

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER

YOU SAVE \$51.98

Coupon Price \$227.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$279.96 (36 lbs.-4.5-acre planting)

Please send _____ 36 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Clover
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 36 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL EXTREME

YOU SAVE \$61.98

Coupon Price \$227.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$289.96 (46 lbs.-2-acre planting)

Please send _____ 46 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail EXTREME
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 46 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CONCEAL

YOU SAVE \$31.03

Coupon Price \$108.96 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$139.99 (28 lbs.-1-acre planting)

Please send _____ 28 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Conceal
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 28 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL FUSION

YOU SAVE \$61.98

Coupon Price \$227.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$289.96 (27.75 lbs.-4.5-acres planting)

Please send _____ 27.75 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Fusion
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 27.75 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL POWERPLANT

YOU SAVE \$24.02

Coupon Price \$95.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$120.00 (50 lbs.-1-acre planting)

SOLD OUT!
Call 1-800-688-3030 opt1 to pre-book for 2022

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 50 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL PURE ATTRACTION

YOU SAVE \$33.98

Coupon Price \$60.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$94.96 (52 lbs.-1-acre planting)

Please send _____ 52 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Pure Attraction
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 52 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



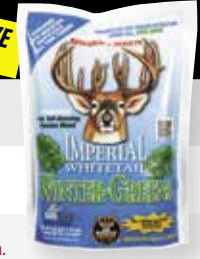
IMPERIAL WHITETAIL WINTER-GREENS

YOU SAVE \$62.98

Coupon Price \$176.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$239.96 (24 lbs.-4-acre planting)

Please send _____ 24 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Winter-Greens
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$13 for shipping and handling for each 24 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL "CHIC" MAGNET

YOU SAVE \$50.95

Coupon Price \$88.99 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$139.94 (9 lbs.-3-acre planting)

Please send _____ 9 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail "Chic" Magnet
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$11 for shipping and handling for each 9 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL TALL TINE TUBERS

YOU SAVE \$52.98

Coupon Price \$146.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$199.96 (24 lbs.-4-acre planting)

Please send _____ 24 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Tall Tine Tubers
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$13 for shipping and handling for each 24 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

YOU SAVE \$8.97

Coupon Price \$40.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$49.95 (45 lbs.-1/2-acre planting)

Please send _____ 45 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail OATS Plus
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 45 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL ALFA-RACK PLUS

YOU SAVE \$61.98

Coupon Price \$227.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$289.96 (33lbs.-2.5-acre planting)

Please send _____ 33 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Alfa-Rack Plus
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 33lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL NO-PLOW

YOU SAVE \$38.98

Coupon Price \$110.98 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$149.96 (50 lbs.-3-acre planting)

Please send _____ 50 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail No-Plow
TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 50 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL WINTER PEAS PLUS

YOU SAVE
\$11.04

Coupon Price \$108.96 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$120 (44 lbs.-1-acre planting)

Please send _____ 44 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Winter-Peas Plus

TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 44 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL RAVISH RADISH

YOU SAVE
\$28.00

Coupon Price \$66.96 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$94.96 (10 lbs.-1-acre planting)

Please send _____ 10 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Ravish Radish

TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$13 for shipping and handling for each 10 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL 30-06 MINERAL/VITAMIN

YOU SAVE
\$31.07

Coupon Price Original 30-06 \$65.96 30-06 plus Protein \$68.96 plus s/h and 7% tax. Suggested Retail \$90.97 & \$99.97

Please send _____ 60 lb quantities of Original 30-06 @ \$65.96 ea

Please send _____ 60 lb quantities of 30-06 Plus Protein @ \$68.96 ea

TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 60 lbs ordered. (Cannot ship to Canada)
Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL KRAZE

YOU SAVE
\$65.03

Coupon Price \$54.96 (6)pak \$29.94 (3)pak and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$119.99 (6) \$69.96 (3)

Please send _____ 6-pak Kraze @ \$54.96

Please send _____ 3-pak Kraze @ \$29.94

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL IMPERIAL DESTINATION

YOU SAVE
\$23.04

Coupon Price \$96.96 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$120.00 (36 lbs.-1-acre planting)

Please send _____ 36 lb. quantities of Imperial Destination

TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 36 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL APPLE OBSESSION

YOU SAVE
\$66.05

Coupon Price \$53.94 (6)pak \$29.94 (3)pak and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$119.99 (6) \$69.96 (3)

Please send _____ 6-pak Apple Obsession @ \$53.94

Please send _____ 3-pak Apple Obsession @ \$29.94

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL 30-06 THRIVE

YOU SAVE
\$25.01

Coupon Price \$65.96 plus s/h and 7% tax.
Suggested Retail \$90.97

Please send _____ 60 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail 30-06 Thrive

TOTAL Including S&H (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

Please add \$19 for shipping and handling for each 60 lbs ordered.
(Cannot ship to Canada) **Please enclose with shipping and payment information.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL IMPACT SOIL AMENDMENT

YOU SAVE
UP TO
\$20.01

Coupon Price \$29.99 (4.25lbs) and \$149.94 (25.5lbs) plus 7% tax. Suggested Retail \$39.99 (4.25lbs - .25 acres) and \$169.95 (25.5lbs - 1.5 acres)

Please send _____ 4.25lbs of Impact \$29.99

Please send _____ 25.5lbs of Impact \$149.94

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL 30-06 BLOCK

YOU SAVE
\$81.92

Coupon Price \$29.99 one block \$57.98, two blocks plus 7% tax. Suggested retail is \$69.96 and \$39.95

Please send _____ 2-Pak blocks @ \$57.98

Please send _____ 1 block @ \$29.99

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



ARREST MAX HERBICIDE

YOU SAVE
UP TO
\$11.98

Coupon Price \$39.99 1 pint \$138.96 1/2 gallon plus 7% tax. Suggested Retail \$49.95 (1 pint-1 acre) \$189.99 (1/2 gallon-4 acres)

Please send _____ pint(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide

Please send _____ 1/2 gallon(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL MAGNET MIX BLOCK

YOU SAVE
UP TO
\$11.98

Coupon Price \$29.99 one block, two blocks \$57.98 plus 7% tax. Suggested retail is \$69.96 and \$39.95

Please send _____ 2-Pak blocks @ \$57.98

Please send _____ 1 block @ \$29.99

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



SLAY HERBICIDE

YOU SAVE
\$20.97

Coupon Price \$49.98 4 oz. \$138.98 1 pint plus 7% tax. Suggested Retail \$59.95 (4 oz.-1 acre) \$159.95 (1 pint-4 acres)

Please send _____ 4 oz. of Slay Herbicide

Please send _____ pint(s) of Slay Herbicide

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

(Cannot ship to Canada) **No Charge for shipping and handling.**



IMPORTANT: SHIPPING & PAYMENT INFORMATION

Please include daytime phone number for UPS Shipments and any questions we may have about your order

SHIP TO: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

(No PO Boxes)

City: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Payment: ☐ Check or Money Order enclosed

Charge to: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Discover ☐ AMEX

Credit Card: _____ Exp. Date: _____ Sec.Code: _____

Signature: _____

Whitetail Institute

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BACK-40 NOTEBOOK

■ **Brian Lovett** ~ Whitetail News Editor



SUMMER'S FOOTSTEPS

Sometimes, the least memorable tracks during a season-long journey turn out to be the most important.

The clover looks different yet familiar in the light fog of a summer morning.

Tall and lush — it needs to be mowed, actually — it betrays my footsteps in a trail of disturbed dew as I skirt the top edge of the plot and head toward the logging trail. I'll walk or drive this path many times during the next few months, sometimes en route to perform necessary maintenance tasks or, later, seeking to enjoy the benefits of that labor. And although it's early in the tale, the story of this season will be written with every footprint.

We never recognize that in hindsight, of course. I think it's human nature to sum up hunts or seasons with a bottom line, such as recalling the year the big 8 ran up and down the creek bottom, or the warm autumn that rut-crazed buck slipped right behind the ladder stand. It's similar to watching football highlights, which show a handful of plays that determined the outcome of the game. Sure, maybe those events were the most memorable of the day and summarized the contest, but they only comprised a fraction of the 135-plus plays during the game, and each of those plays — no matter how insignificant — contributed to the ultimate result.

So at times such as these, with turkey season in the rearview mirror and bow season months away, I avoid looking past summer and try to focus on the small, unheralded paragraphs and chapters that will help constitute the full story. That isn't often exciting. After all, fixing an ATV tire or sweating buckets while

running a chainsaw during a hot day aren't glamorous tasks. Yet without them, there will be no rides to the ridge top to place cameras, cut lanes, hang stands or plant small plots of annuals. And without those, the chances of experiencing highlight-reel-worthy moments — such as a mature buck pausing 20 steps from a set — decrease greatly.

While focusing on these small chapters, memories from the stories of previous years flash past. Lessons learned, I guess. That open oak flat seemed like the perfect place for a hang-on stand, for example, but it never really panned out. Closer inspection revealed a far better site near a hot scrape about 50 yards down the ridge, closer to a major bedding area. Likewise, setting that ground blind near an active late-season creek-bottom travel route appeared to be a no-brainer ... until it became obvious that the wind was never quite right, and it was almost impossible to slip into the blind without busting deer. Those gaffes seem so blatant now, while reviewing the story after its conclusion, but I still committed them. No doubt, I'll experience similar missteps this year, too. That's part of the up-and-down, trial-and-error nature of any season. I won't be afraid to try fresh approaches or consider new ideas, yet hopefully, I'll avoid making the same stupid mistakes.

Halfway up the logging road, I pause to catch a breath and view the valley below. The clover plot is barely visible through the thick summer growth; a stark con-

trast to the gleaming green it presented in mid-April or that it will again display in November. And the road itself differs greatly from the trail I walked so often during spring. Weeds and brush sprout from every angle, and fresh deadfalls block the path. ATV tracks, which glimmered like a lighted runway during late fall and winter, are barely visible through the lush vegetation of a new season.

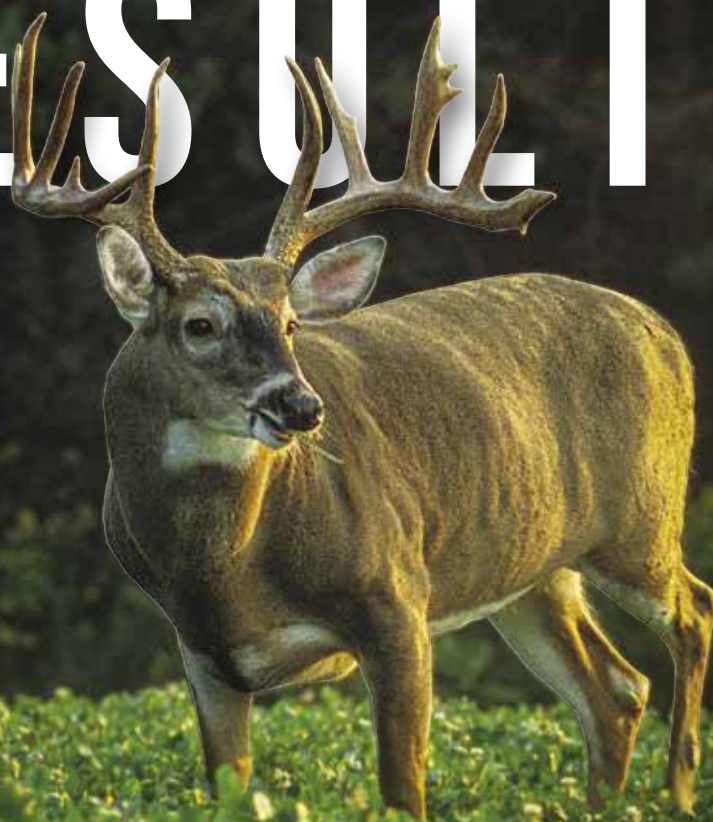
Bottom line? I'm facing a lot of work — tiny yet critical portions of chapters that must be written. But that's the deal I made, and I don't regret any of it.

With that thought, my climb resumes, up the bluff, west toward the old log landing and ultimately over the ridge to the property line. And when whatever tasks I have are complete, I'll slip down the path, past the sandstone outcroppings, north toward the old cattle fence and then into the fresh open air of the clover plot. My tracks from the morning will have disappeared in the sun's heat, but that's OK. Today and many weeks from now, I'll remember their seemingly insignificant role in the larger tale of the day and season. And although other highlight-worthy moments might dominate that story, I won't forget the impact of faded footsteps during a hot June day.





RESEARCH EQUALS RESULTS



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER

Imperial Whitetail Clover provides attraction and up to 35% protein levels.
These proprietary clovers were developed by Whitetail Institute agronomists.

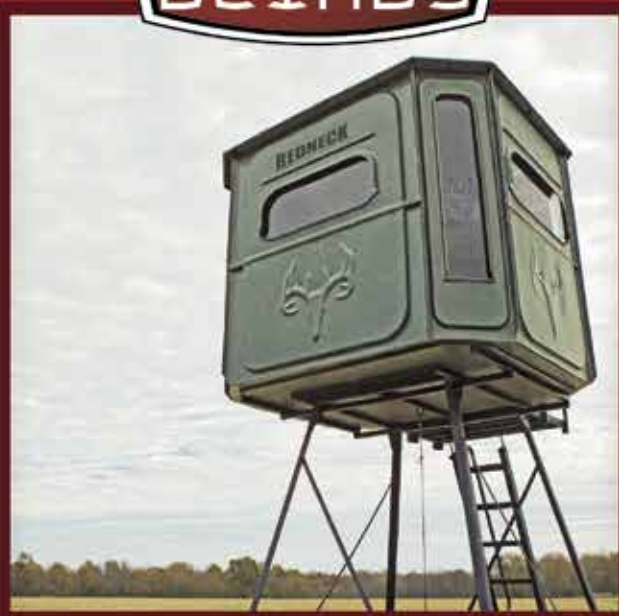
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**THE NEW 6 X 7 BIG COUNTRY 360 BLIND
IS THE KING OF ALL REDNECK BLINDS.**

The Big Country Blind Platinum 360° is perfect for the hunter who needs more leg and arm room or has lots of gear. There is no better blind in the world for two hunters and a camera man. The room, along with the visibility for all hunters is absolutely amazing. Combine the 46" tall vertical windows, with large oversized horizontal windows and roomy interior, and you have the ultimate blind for compound bow, crossbow or gun hunting. This combination of size and window functionality gives you plenty of room, visibility and angles to make a perfect shot when the moment of truth arrives. There is plenty of room for 3-4 adults, a small family or even enough room to sleep in comfortably overnight when you need that extra edge for an early morning hunt.



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