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WHITETAIL NEWS

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IN THIS ISSUE ■ ISSUE 34-1

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

William Cousins~*VP/GM Whitetail Institute*

UPGRADE YOUR FOOD PLOT WITH PREMIUM COATED SEEDS

If you're going to spend the money and time to plant a food plot, I strongly recommend that you plant a premium-quality coated seed. The benefits are undeniable.

The amount of inaccurate information about seed coating is maddening. I want to take a few minutes to explain the importance of seed coating — short and factual.

Seed coating is an innovative process that adheres materials onto the surface of seeds for the sole purpose of protecting seeds from biotic stress and greatly improving seedling survivability. Coating reduces the number of seeds per pound, but it ultimately ensures that more seeds germinate, grow and create a uniform stand. Simply, more plants survive. In the world of conventional agriculture, coated seed for small-seed forages is the standard.

What's in Whitetail Institute's seed coating:

RainBond: This is a water absorbing material to ensure moisture next to the seedling roots, providing insurance if follow-up rain is scarce. This polymer holds 200 times its weight in water.

Concentrated biological rhizobium bacteria: Legumes need this rhizome to fix nitrogen from the air and flourish. Legume plants exist in a symbiotic relationship with soil bacteria. Rhizobacteria are naturally present in soil but often at insufficient quantities to maximize nitrogen fixation.

Fungicide, for crops such as alfalfa that require this additional protection.

Color coating to assist with visual monitoring of spread seed: There have been many university studies conducted on this topic. Below is one from University of Kentucky, showing a 42.95 percent increase in coated seedling emergence six weeks after planting and a 44.07 percent increase in plant survival after five to six months.

TABLE 1

ESTABLISHMENT OF COATED VERSUS UNCOATED PRE-INOCULATED ALFALFA SEED SIX WEEKS AFTER SEEDING.

	UNCOATED	COATED SEED
NUMBER OF SEED PLANTED PER SQ. FT.	84.5	56.1
NUMBER OF SEEDLINGS PER SQ. FT.	35.4	33.6
PERCENT EMERGENCE OF SEED PLANTED	41.9	59.9

*14 locations in Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee, 1993-2000. * Average seeding rate, uncoated 18.4 lb. /A, Rhizo-Kote XL 18.5 lb. /A. 200,000 seed per pound. ** 280 measurements per treatment. Burns, et al., 2002*

TABLE 2

ESTABLISHMENT OF COATED VERSUS UNCOATED PRE-INOCULATED ALFALFA SEED FIVE TO SIX MONTHS AFTER SEEDING.

	UNCOATED	COATED SEED
NUMBER OF SEED PLANTED PER SQ. FT.	84.5	56.1
NUMBER OF SEEDLINGS PER SQ. FT.**	27.8	26.6
PERCENT EMERGENCE OF SEED PLANTED	32.9	47.4

— William

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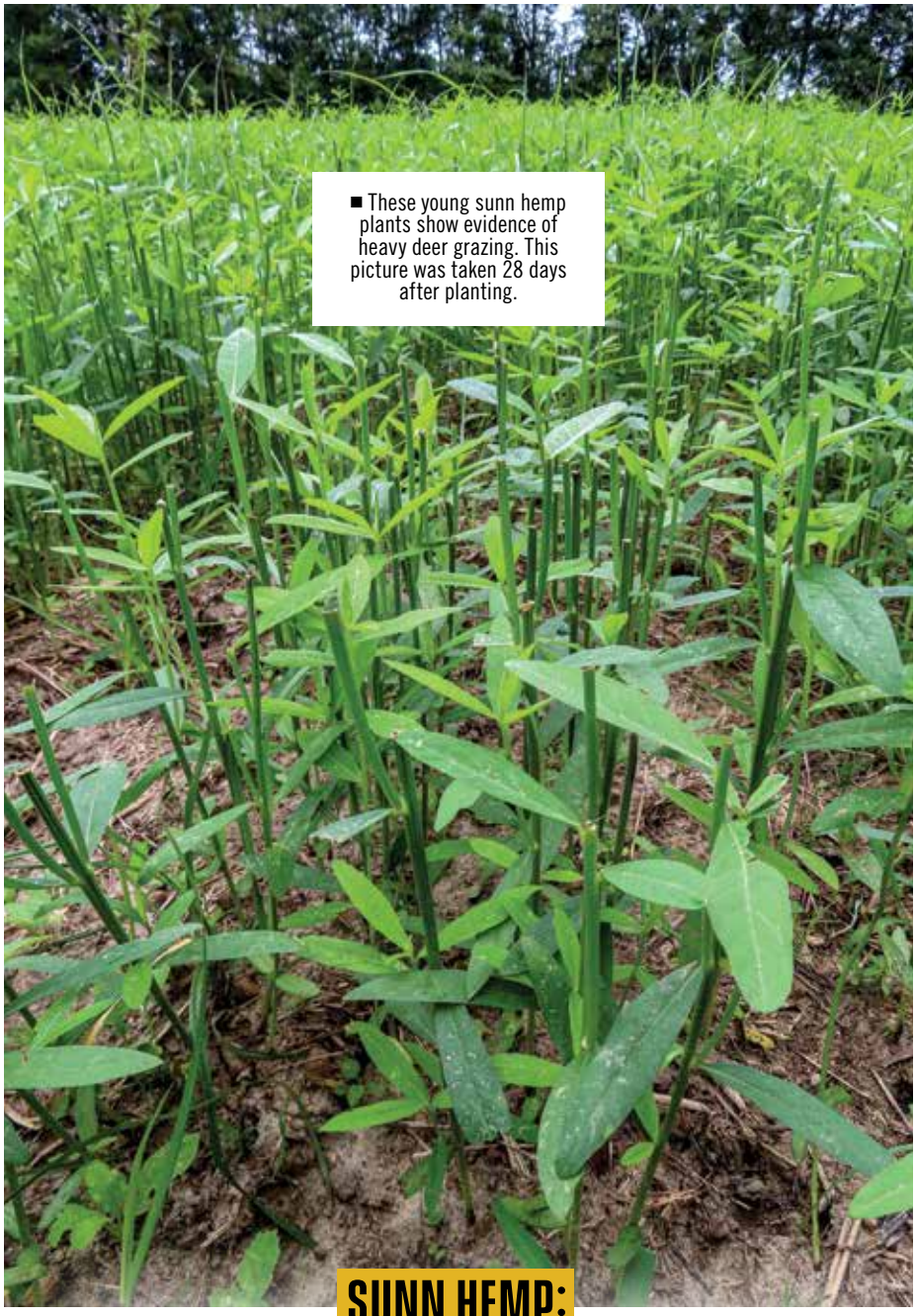
by *W. Carroll Johnson III, Ph.D.* – *Agronomist and Weed Scientist*



These young sunn hemp plants show evidence of heavy deer grazing. This picture was taken 28 days after planting.

SUNN HEMP: A USEFUL AND VERSATILE WARM-SEASON DEER FORAGE

This legume has received lots of press recently, but many land managers remain unfamiliar with its benefits. Here's how to manage sunn hemp for deer forage.

In my previous agricultural research career, I was part of a regional team that studied organic vegetable crop production strategies. The protocol called for a summer cover crop of sunn hemp before planting cool-season vegetable crops.

At that point, I had never heard of sunn hemp. The theory was that sunn hemp would suppress weed emergence and provide supplemental nitrogen for future vegetable crop plantings. I planted sunn hemp as directed and was astonished by the results. Sunn hemp emerged quickly, and rapid early season growth produced a jungle of tall, leafy plants. Fast forward almost 20 years. In my current career, Whitetail Institute markets sunn hemp seed as a component of Power Plant and Conceal, along with pure sunn hemp as a stand-alone product.

In wildlife habitat management, sunn hemp serves three roles: a seclusion crop, as deer forage and as a cover crop in similar fashion to the research study I mentioned. For cover crop use and seclusion, maximum growth is the primary goal. For forage use, sunn hemp needs to be managed so the crop produces abundant nutritious and palatable leaves for deer. Managing sunn hemp for deer forage is the focus of this article.

SUNN HEMP: THE PLANT

Despite what the hemp name suggests, sunn hemp is not in the well-known Cannabis group of plants that are collectively called hemp. Sunn hemp is a species of Crotalaria; a legume botanically related to clover, alfalfa, pea and soybean. Sunn hemp is a tropical plant originating in India, and for food plot use, it logically grows best in warm regions. Sunn hemp thrives in many soil types but prefers well-drained sandy soils. Wet-natured soils should be avoided. Soil temperatures need to be at least 68 before planting sunn hemp. With warmer temperatures and longer day length, sun hemp grown in Southern regions quickly grows very tall — often taller than 6 feet. In contrast, sunn hemp grown in Northern latitudes will not be as tall because of cooler

temperatures, shorter summers and less intense sunlight.

By being a tall leafy plant, sunn hemp produces large amounts of dry matter, which can help increase soil organic matter through time, making this crop an ideal tool to improve soil health. With a 60- to 90-day growing season, sunn hemp can produce dry matter from 2 to 5 tons per acre, and 13 tons per acre has been reported. Of course, those yield values are affected by growing conditions and location, with dry matter production greater in Southern regions, where robust sunn hemp growth is expected compared to Northern regions. An additional benefit of sunn hemp as a cover crop is the large amount of nitrogen returned to the soil by degrading sunn hemp plants — often as much as 100 to 200 pounds of nitrogen per acre. This attribute benefits food plots by providing a large portion of the supplemental nitrogen needed for future plantings of forages such as cereal grains and brassicas. In the regional research trial I mentioned, the robust sunn hemp cover crop grown the previous summer provided a significant amount of nitrogen required for a fall planting of organic turnip green and broccoli — a significant cost savings.

In alternative agricultural systems, such as organic crop production, sunn hemp has a solid reputation as a warm-season annual cover crop for pest management. Robust sunn hemp growth suppresses weed emergence and plant parasitic nematodes, including the troublesome rootknot nematode. In alternative agricultural systems, these pest-suppressive benefits are invaluable because management options are limited.

MANAGING SUNN HEMP AS A FORAGE CROP

Sunn hemp planted for deer forage will need to be clipped to keep the plant from growing too tall (beyond the reach of deer) and stimulate the growth of new palatable leaves. When managing sunn hemp for deer forage, it's important to remember that leaves are the nutritious component of the plant, containing 25 to 30 percent protein. Mowing removes unpalatable tough stems and tricks sunn hemp plants into producing new leaves.

■ This field demonstration was in southern Georgia. Sunn hemp was planted July 1, 2023, and mowed Aug. 25 — 56 days of growth. Sunn hemp was higher than 6 feet when mowed to a height of 20 inches.

Sunn hemp must be regularly monitored, because the crop grows rapidly. A general rule is to mow ideally no later than 60 days after planting. After mowing sunn hemp to a height of 20 inches, new leaves are formed at nodes on the severed mainstem below the cut. Mowed sunn hemp will not resume normal upright growth after mowing, and individual plants will be somewhat bushy. The number of new sunn hemp leaves produced by the shorter plants after mowing will be only 20 percent of the original amount. However, the availability of palatable new leaves extends the forage value of sunn hemp until the crop is later terminated by tillage to plant a cool-season forage or freezing temperatures later in autumn.

A sunn hemp demonstration trial was planted July 1, 2023, where I live in southern Georgia. It grew rapidly and ended up being much taller than intended (higher than 6 feet) when mowed Aug. 25 (56 days after planting). A tractor-mounted rotary mower was used to cut sunn hemp to a height of 20 inches. In the pictures in this article, notice the new leaves emerging from below the cut mainstem 21 days after mowing. The young leaves from the regrowth attracted deer for several weeks and extended the benefits of sunn hemp at my location in southern Georgia until mid-November, when the crop was eventually killed by the first frost.

In Northern latitudes, sunn hemp growth might be easier to monitor and properly mow because plant growth will be slower compared to growth in Southern locations. In Southern locations, sunn hemp growth can be fast and excessive, which is what happened in my demonstration during Summer 2023. In Northern regions, mowing strategies should be altered to lightly clip the plant — not the harsh mowing I was forced to use on overgrown sunn hemp in the demonstration trial.

CONCLUSION

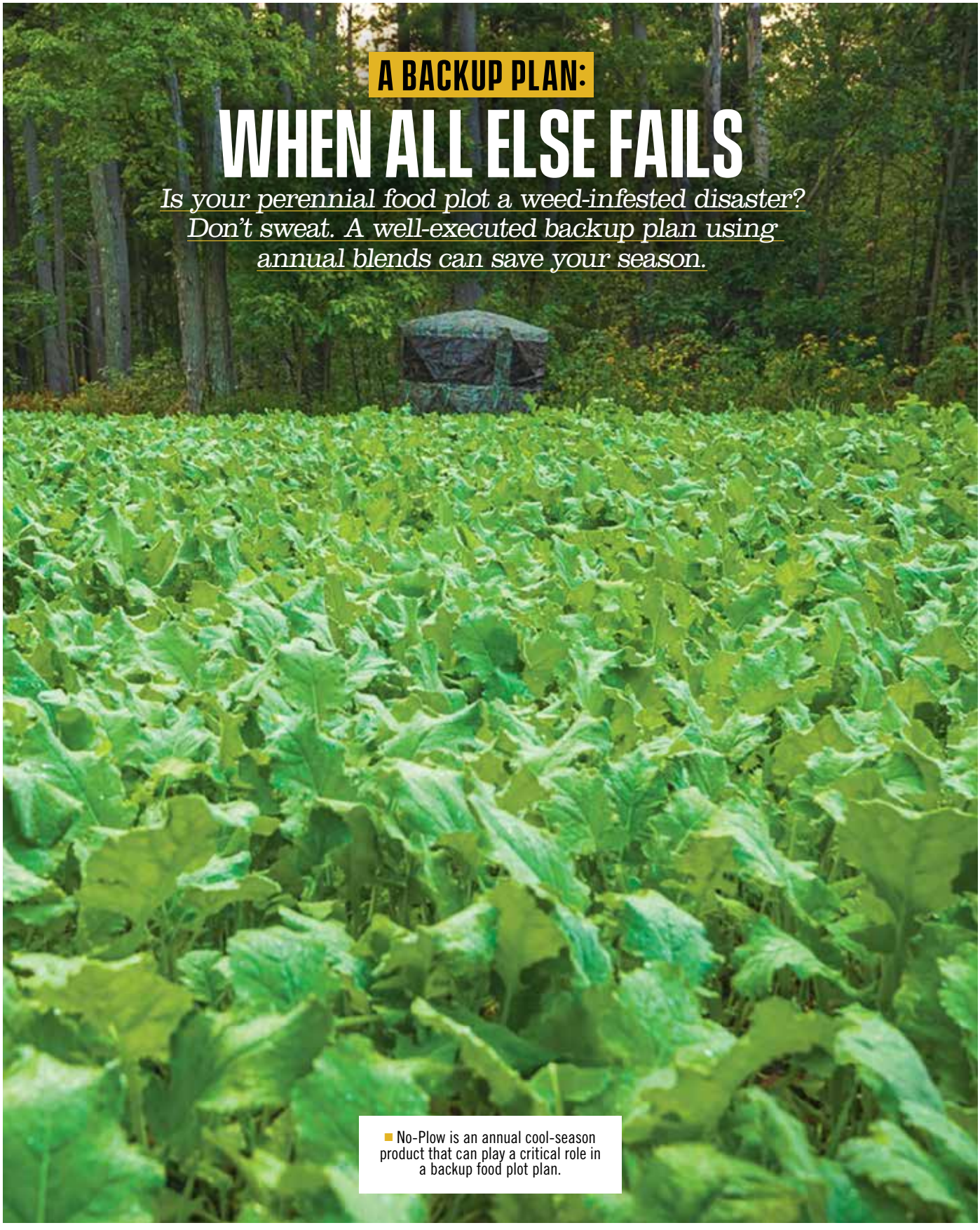
Sunn hemp is a niche forage that provides many benefits to food plotters. It thrives in hot humid regions and sandy soils — conditions that often limit planting intentions and food plot productivity. Like any other legume, sunn hemp also improves soil health by increasing soil organic matter and providing supplemental nitrogen for future crops. To help sunn hemp achieve the maximum benefit as a food plot forage, be prepared to manage its growth by strategically mowing. With a little managerial effort, sunn hemp might fill a valuable niche in your food plot system.

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

A BACKUP PLAN:

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

Is your perennial food plot a weed-infested disaster? Don't sweat. A well-executed backup plan using annual blends can save your season.



No-Plow is an annual cool-season product that can play a critical role in a backup food plot plan.

Unfortunately, we must sometimes deal with the reality that many things don't go the way we have planned, whether that's with our hunting hopes for the weekend or food plots we have planted.

For example, the weed identification requests forwarded to my co-worker and me by the Whitetail Institute tend to be difficult and challenging — if not impossible — scenarios for the customer. Because of limited herbicide control options, weeds are not controlled or are too large to control. Other than mowing, the food plot must be abandoned, and I must break the unpleasant news to the customer that the food plot must be replanted. Fortunately, those situations are rare and normally occur in mid- to late summer, with hunting season and cool weather quickly approaching.

An emergency plan is needed — a backup plan.

WHAT TO USE

When situations arise that require landowners to quickly re-establish a food plot, we need reasonable and achievable goals. Usually, those goals must be achieved quickly, which often means three months or fewer. In most cases, there isn't enough time for new plantings of perennial forages to establish and provide adequate growth before winter, although that varies among the wide growing conditions in North America. For that reason, I recommend backup plans using annual food plot blends, such as No-Plow, Winter-Greens, Beets & Greens or Pure Attraction. These products contain blends of proven annual forages that are easily established, grow rapidly and have the track record of being extremely attractive to deer.

In the backup plan context, the food plot products mentioned have wide ranges of acceptable planting dates and strong seedling vigor, and they tend to be adaptable to variable degrees of seedbed preparation. Although planting errors can occur, these species are among the most forgiving forages for food plots. It's impossible to state specific planting dates for a backup plan for food plots because of individual circumstances and locations. These annual blends can be planted across North America with plenty of time for establishment and ample forage growth by hunting season or before cooler weather. When implementing a backup plan, it's worth remembering that the effort is an attempt to make the best of what appears to be an impossible situation. Backup plan planting dates might coincide with the normal recommended planting dates for your location, or they might differ. Thus, a backup plan needs realistic expectations for success.

TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS

When you've chosen a backup plan forage blend and set the planting date goal, seedbed preparation needs to be just as thorough and comprehensive as if you were establishing food plots during normal circumstances. Implementing a backup plan often involves a hectic time crunch. If that's the case, try to avoid cutting seedbed preparation corners. Remember, maximum food plot productivity is set the moment forage seeds are placed in the soil. Careless or grossly abbreviated seedbed preparation will reduce food plot productivity and increase chances for repeated failure. Similarly, avoid the temptation to be a penny-pincher on pre-plant fertilizer applications.

Based on my troubleshooting experiences, most food plots terminated because of uncontrollable weeds were planted to perennial legumes. Perennial legumes do not need supplemental nitrogen fertilizer — a distinct advantage to perennials. However, the annual forages best suited to backup plan plantings will need sufficient nitrogen from fertilizer to fully capture the benefits of those species. Therefore, if possible, soil test in advance of a backup plan seedbed preparation, and follow the recommendations for the forage product with particular attention to the nitrogen requirement. That will greatly increase the odds of quick, healthy growth of the backup forage.

The premise of the conditions that led to a backup plan was an impossible weed infestation and no reasonable option other than to replant. That should not be forgotten, because history will likely repeat itself unless you take intensive measures to address the weed infestation. Consider it certain that troublesome weeds will return soon. It's highly recommended to aggressively control the infesting weeds with tillage and nonselective herbicides before implementing the backup plan. At a minimum, the tactical goals are to prevent weed seed production and kill the propagating structures of perennial weeds.

It's much easier to control weeds and reduce the weed seed bank when no crop is present. It's especially important for perennial weed control in perennial food plots when few to no herbicides can be used throughout the growing season. This fallow period is very effective for annual weeds where repetitive tillage can prevent annual weed emergence. However, the fallow period also represents a valuable opportunity to use repeated aggressive tillage to chop perennial weed rootstock and spray systemic nonselective herbicides (such as glyphosate plus 2,4-D or triclopyr) without worrying about forage crop injury. An integrated program of tillage and herbicides controls weeds — especially perennial weeds — better than either used alone.

CONCLUSION

Perennial weeds are a common cause of weed control failure in food plots, and fallow weed control using tillage and systemic herbicides is essential for success. Failure to address the troublesome perennial weeds during the summer fallow period will likely lead to a repeat of food plot loss.

MORE THAN THE HORN

Every deer hunter talks about minerals, and a few well-known names get most of the attention. But minerals do far more than produce big antlers. They're part of a system that provides for the growth, maintenance and overall health of deer — and that includes lesser-known trace minerals.

by *Matt Harper*

The title of this piece might make you believe it's one of those it's-not-all-about-the-antlers articles, in which the author espouses the more subtle rewards of deer hunting instead of heavy bone.

I agree that the joy of deer hunting is comprised of hundreds of little things, not simply the goal of another adornment on the wall. Learning the subtleties and nuances of the hunt, management and preparation, the opportunity to enjoy the daily performance of nature and, of course, filling the freezer with good meat are among the reasons we get excited when fall approaches. But let's be honest: Most of us will not pass a gnarly old buck when he walks down a trail where we're perched. At varying degrees, all deer hunters fixate on antlers and look forward to the moment when a huge buck walks into our lives.

It is no wonder that when the subject of minerals arises, the immediate correlation is to bone on a buck's head. After all, it seems logical that mineral in the diet leads to antler growth, and that logic is accurate. But minerals do far more than simply fuel the development of antlers. They are involved in many complex and vital functions in the metabolic and biologic activities of a deer. Because antlers are somewhat of a gauge of the overall health and condition of a buck, you could say most mineral functions affect antler growth. But they don't do that entirely in the manner you might believe. Rather, they're a part of system that collectively provides for the growth, maintenance and overall health of the animal. Minerals are more than the horn.

TYPES AND INTERACTION

It's difficult to tackle this subject because it quickly gets technical, and truthfully, minerals are involved in so many bodily functions that you could fill a small library with books on the subject. It's not my goal to have your eyes glaze over while reading a thesis paper on minerals, so I'll hit some of the high points of mineral functions, focusing on lesser publicized trace mineral components.

Minerals are divided into two main categories: macro minerals and trace minerals. Macro minerals are those animals need in large quantities in their diet for proper function and health. Examples include calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium and sodium. These elements usually garner most of the limelight in mineral discussions because of the prominence they have in the antler growing process — as they should, as calcium, phosphorus and magnesium make up more than one-third of a hardened antler.

Trace minerals, on the other hand, are those animals need in comparably small amounts. But nonetheless, they're vital for the overall health and well-being of a deer. In fact, when trace minerals and macro minerals are not in balance, interactions between them can negatively affect the functions of macro minerals. Think of the internal workings of a vehicle. You have big pieces, such as the engine and transmission, but there are hundreds of little pieces and parts that must correctly work together for the vehicle to run as it should. A small valve or wire, or some other minute part buried deep within the motor, can malfunction and bring the entire thing to a halt. There's no hierarchy when it comes to mineral nutrition and, more specifically, to this discussion on trace mineral nutrition. Although requirement levels vary by trace minerals, deer need all of them in the correct amounts for the system to work.

COPPER

Copper has been an important element for humans for thousands of years, as our ancestors crafted it into pots, jewelry, weapons and religious artifacts, and it's a conductor of electricity. More recently, copper was found to be an important nutrient for many organisms. It has many functions in the body, one of which is its role as a co-factor in several oxidation-reduction enzyme systems. Copper is also involved in hemoglobin synthesis and the formation of connective tissues, such as tendons, ligaments and bones. It's important in estrus expression as well as gestation maintenance, and is involved in immunity and immune response. A classic copper deficiency symptom is a change in hair color, as copper plays a major role in hair pigmentation. Copper deficiencies can also produce lameness, swelling of joints and a weak bone structure. In mineral supplements, copper can come in many forms, but the most common is copper sulfate. Some copper compounds, such as copper oxide, are extremely low in terms of digestibility.

ZINC

Although still formulated into a mineral at lower levels than macro minerals, zinc supplementation amounts are among the highest in trace minerals. Zinc plays a major role in immunity and immune functions within an animal. Studies with various ruminant and non-ruminant species have shown improvement in mortality and morbidity rates, as zinc-supple-

mented animals seem to have a higher health plane. Zinc is also important in reproduction, affecting the onset of sexual maturity, sperm count and viability, and ovulation and gestation. It also plays a role in several enzyme activities and is involved in bone growth and health. If zinc is deficient in the diet, it can sometimes be recognized by skin or hair coat abnormalities, but many symptoms are not necessarily overt. Zinc-deficient diets can result in reproductive issues, susceptibility to wound and disease problems, and a general decrease in body weight. Supplementing zinc in ruminants and non-ruminants has been shown to increase body weights, and improve conception rates, hoof health and overall wellness. Common forms of zinc in mineral supplements include zinc sulfate and zinc oxide.

MANGANESE

Copper and zinc often overshadow manganese in discussions on trace mineral nutrition, but manganese is critical for many important functions. It's a co-factor in enzyme activity for fat and carbohydrate metabolism, which affects energy production. Manganese is also involved in the formation of bone and connective tissue, as well as having antioxidant activities, which affect immune status and health. Additionally, manganese plays a role in reproduction, as deficiencies have been shown to produce testicle degeneration and defective ovulation. Other manganese deficiency symptoms include decreased growth and body weight, as well as joint and skeletal issues. Sources of manganese typically found in mineral supplements include manganese sulfate and manganous oxide.

IRON

The main role of iron in the body is cellular respiration through hemoglobin production. A lack of iron is commonly associated with anemia, which leads to general weakness and lethargy. Iron deficiencies are often most prevalent in younger animals, but they can also be found in older animals. Although the body needs iron, misformulation of iron leading to oversupplementation can cause problems, as iron tends to bind other minerals. Therefore, it's extremely important to make sure the mineral supplement you're using has been formulated appropriately and at exact levels. The most common iron source is iron sulfate, but iron oxide will often show up on a mineral tag. Iron oxide is essentially undigestible and is typically used for coloration of the product.

COBALT

As a trace mineral, cobalt has one of the lowest requirement levels in the diet, but it's still extremely valuable, especially in ruminants. Cobalt is a component of vitamin B12 and is needed by rumen microorganisms for growth and the production of vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 is essential for energy metabolism, so a deficiency in cobalt equals a deficiency in vitamin B12, which leads to loss of appetite, reduced growth and reduction in overall body weight. If the deficiency is bad enough, it can even cause death. Cobalt in minerals primarily comes from cobalt carbonate but can also be in the form of cobalt sulfate.

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IODINE

Iodine is another trace mineral needed in very small amounts, but it can have a big impact on the performance of an animal. Iodine is used by the thyroid gland, which produces hormonal activity that affects metabolism and overall growth. Iodine also is involved in the reproductive system, and if it's deficient, that can lead to stillborns or weak animals at birth. An inadequate amount of iodine in the diet can also lead to decreased growth and body weights. Iodine commonly comes in a couple of forms in a mineral supplement: calcium iodate or ethylenediamine dihydroiodide.

SELENIUM

All trace minerals can be toxic if fed to animals at too high of a level, but selenium has an extremely low threshold for toxicity. In other words, there's a very small window between too little selenium and too much, which is why it's regulated by the FDA in supplements and feed. Selenium-deficient soils can be found in many parts of the United States, and selenium supplementation in those areas have shown positive results. Selenium is involved in several enzyme activities. In particular, it's a component of enzymes that inhibit peroxides that cause cell damage. Selenium works with vitamin E to protect cell membranes and cell walls, which is especially important in muscle tissue. A classic deficiency sign of selenium is muscle dystrophy, and it often results in a condition called white muscle disease. Sodium selenite is a common form of selenium in mineral supplements.

SUMMARY

As you read through the functions and deficiency signs of trace minerals, you soon realize that trace minerals play a major role in many functions of a deer's internal workings. A common theme with many trace minerals is the importance they play in immunity, health, metabolism, growth, body weight and reproduction. But the importance of trace minerals is not limited to those areas. Deer naturally get these minerals from the soil, as they are taken up by forages the deer consumes. But minerals are often less than adequate in many parts of the country. In fact, almost all soils are deficient in at least one or more minerals, including trace minerals. It's important to note that it takes a severe deficiency to result in visible symptoms, and even if those symptoms are present, it's difficult to determine the exact cause — such as in the case of lowered immune activity. Deer are simply more susceptible to infections and disease if certain trace minerals are too low in their diet, but most of us just see a sick deer. Also, a deer could have lower-than-optimal body weight caused by a trace mineral deficiency, but it might just look like a skinny deer.

So how do you know if trace mineral supplementation will have a positive effect? The best answer is that domestic ruminants in the same areas and regions are fed supplemental trace minerals, and because those animals can be checked and analyzed for variations in body weight, health status and reproductive efficiency, managers can show that trace mineral supplementation is beneficial. It's only logical that deer would benefit in the same manner. Further, field studies using harvest-weight data in areas using mineral supplementation versus areas with none have shown improved body weights, higher fawn survivability and increased antler growth.

Just like the next guy, I get giddy when I see a big, mature buck sporting an impressive set of antlers. And if there's something I can do to help bucks maximize their antler growing ability, I will do it. But I think it's important to know that using good management practices can improve the nutritional well-being of deer as a whole, which leads to a more vibrant, healthy and productive herd. Of course, that also indirectly leads to bigger bucks.

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THREE FOOD PLOT BUCKS

Small staging area food plots are dynamite hunting spots, and these memorable whitetails prove that.

TEXT AND PHOTOS by Bill Winke

■ The author saw this buck in 2016 and 2018, but the deer had not made an appearance in 2019 before the day he shot it.

Nothing improves your chances for success when bowhunting whitetails more than adding small food plots to the right spots on your property. I call these staging area plots because deer tend to gather in these openings before venturing out to feed in larger ag fields nearby.

Since 1995, I have built more than 20 of these staging area plots on multiple properties. These spots have become the bread and butter of my whitetail bowhunting strategy because of how predictable they are to hunt. I love to keep these plots to an acre or smaller so any deer that comes into the plot will likely be within bow range at some point before it leaves.

You can build small plots the easy way, with heavy equipment, or do them on the cheap using only hand tools. I have done it both ways. In a recent issue of Whitetail News, I wrote an article about that approach: how to create poor-man-style food plots. It's even possible to create these small plots when you're hunting on permission ground, provided the rough openings are already there, requiring very little extra intrusion to open them up.

If that isn't enough to convince you of the effectiveness of staging area plots, I'll double down by offering three hunting stories, profiling the three biggest bucks I've shot over small plots during the almost 30 years I've been hunting them.

These are more than hunting stories. In fact, they are really food plot stories. I will detail how I created each of these plots and what I planted so you can improve your hunting area in the same way.

NOV. 5, 1997: A MASSIVE 8-POINTER

I shot this buck in early November 1997, only two years after I bought my first piece of land. The 2-acre plot began as a cornfield, but it had been abandoned and was overgrown with weeds and small trees. The deer density in that area was too high, and it forced the farmer to quit planting the spot. The deer had cleaned out the field every summer.

History had to factor heavily into my decision of what to plant. Typical farm crops such as corn or beans were obviously not an option. That left three choices: brassicas, cereal grain or clover. I decided on clover because it produces forage through a longer period than the other options.

I first sprayed the field and then drilled Imperial Whitetail Clover into the dying weeds and grasses with a no-till drill. I did that in Spring 1996, so by Summer 1997, the clover had completely taken hold and had become a super lush, highly attractive crop.

What was already a good spot — considering the fringe cover was a great funnel between big woods to the south and distant ag fields to the north — had become a dynamite kill zone. My friends and I killed a lot of nice bucks from the stand I placed on that fringe of cover. To this day, that stand ranks in the top two or three I've ever hunted.

Back to the morning of Nov. 5, 1997. I spotted a massive 8-pointer coming into the plot from the bigger timbered tract to the south. Part of the way across the plot, he picked up a young doe that was feeding. She was obviously very close to full estrus, because the buck chased and followed her around the plot for 30 minutes before they cut across the finger of timber to the north — just out of bow range — and headed west. As the doe fed in the open ridge to the west, the buck laid down and disappeared into the nearby switchgrass. It was soon obvious that he was sleep-

■ The author took this buck when it followed a hot doe into a narrow 1-acre food plot.

ing when the doe drifted off without him.

For the next three hours, I stared at that spot where the buck had disappeared until he finally stood back up, shook himself off and seemed to remember the doe. Thus began a full-scale assault on the nearby cover, as he feverishly looked for that doe like a bird dog on fresh pheasant scent.

Soon he found her, or another one like her, and as they ran circles playing tag, he made the mistake of swinging too close to my tree. I killed him with a 15-yard shot.

That buck remains one of the most massive-antlered and biggest-bodied bucks I have ever shot. It took two men, including me, just to barely slide his dead weight into the back of my truck.

It's that simple. Early in the rut, food plots serve as the meeting place for bucks and does. As the rut progresses, does learn to avoid those places, as they choose to hide in cover, avoiding constant harassment from every buck in the area. But early in the rut, an attractive food plot is a prime place to find a doe. During that time, we all know the formula: Find the does and you find the bucks.

■ The author took this buck while it was chasing a hot doe on the edge of a remote plot planted in Imperial Whitetail Clover. It was one of the first big bucks he shot on the edge of a food plot.

NOV. 10, 2016: THE STORY OF SKINNY

A buck I nicknamed "Skinny" showed up mid-November 2015 about 300 yards down the hill from our house. He was a nice-looking 4-year-old (I guessed) but not a high-scoring deer. He had an impressive brahma bull look to his body, but he just didn't have the antlers to go with it.

But when he showed up the next summer at a nearby alfalfa field, he had the goods. Skinny (named for his long, thin tines) had become a showstopper. He had gotten a lot bigger and immediately became my No. 1 target.

There was a 1-acre field I had carved into the timber about a quarter-mile from where we had seen Skinny in 2015 and again in Summer 2016. Like the other spots on this list, the plot had come into the world humbly. It started as a rough opening in the timber where cattle had grazed for years. The spot was filled with hedge (Osage orange) trees and a few scattered cedars. With chainsaw in hand, I cut them off at the ground, and a food plot was born.

That plot seemed like a high-odds trap for Skinny, so I worked hard to make it as attractive as possible, fertilizing and liming the clover to the maximum of potential productivity. But alas, the best plans often go awry. I was thwarted by the weather. Summer finished very hot and dry, and the small ridgetop plot baked to a crispy brown, as the roots from nearby trees sucked up what little subsoil moisture remained. I ended up with a dirt plot covered with pods from a couple of nearby locust trees.

Deer didn't have a lot of good forage options on that part of the farm, so the opening and its coarse fare would have to do. What should have been a bright-green carpet of clover was now attractive only because it was an opening in an otherwise thickly covered ridge. Deer didn't use it as much as they would have had there been a better food source there, but they still used it.

I got off to a late start on the morning of Nov. 10, but the soft glow of pre-dawn light let me move fast and quiet. I made up time in transit and was settled soon after legal shooting time. Trail cameras told me that Skinny occasionally used that part of the farm, so the crusty opening was as likely a spot as any. Soon after daybreak, a doe popped out on the other end of the plot and headed my way. Skinny was 20 yards behind her.

What a sight. Those long tines and wide spread immediately took my breath away.

After Skinny followed the doe into the edge cover and back, I got a clean shot at him as he walked past at 30 yards. Here's where the story gets a little weird. When I stopped the buck with a mouth grunt, he turned to look my way. I was certain he would drop to run at the sound of the shot, so I aimed right at his brisket line, straight below the heart.

Instead of dropping, like all the other bucks I had seen in that situation, he just stood there like a statue until the arrow skimmed hair off his brisket. Then, instead of blowing out in a mad dash, he bounded a couple of times and stopped. He was looking up into the tree as I hastily grabbed another arrow and put it on the string. I aimed low again on the second shot, but that time, he dropped a half-foot, and the arrow hit true. The distraction of the rut and proximity of that hot doe surely dulled the buck's normal reaction time.

The shape of that plot was a big reason I killed that buck. It's about 150 yards long by 30 yards wide. Most deer walked the length of it, and as they came past the end where my stand hung, they were always in range. Like the first food plot stand I outlined, that plot also ranks among my all-time favorites and was very productive for bucks and does through the years.

OCT. 23, 2019: THE SURPRISE BUCK

There was an awesome-looking young buck hitting one of my food plots regularly in 2016. Believe it not, he looked to be a 140 inch 2-year-old. I had high hopes for him, but when he didn't show up the next year — while I was hunting that plot or on my trail cameras — I gave up on him. Then in 2018, after leaving the blind overlooking that plot, I spotted a really nice 10-pointer in a nearby field chasing a doe. He looked good, but I didn't recognize him as the same buck. He looked to be about 4 years old, though, which should have been a clue.

I decided in Spring 2019 that I needed to set up that area with plenty of food. That way, if the big 4-year-old was still there, I would have every opportunity to see (and maybe shoot) him.

The plot where I hoped to get my chance was a killer location. In fact, it might be the best setup I've ever hunted. Like the

first plot I discussed, this one started as a crop field, but when that part of the farm went into CRP, the previous owner kept the small 1-acre interior field out of the program so he could use it as a food plot.

I continued the tradition with only one small change: I didn't hunt the same big oak tree he had hunted, right where deer come out of the woods. Instead, I placed a Redneck Blind on the opposite side of the plot. Rather than have the deer come past me to enter plot, leaving me with no safe wind direction or exit option, I set up so they would have to work across the plot to get to me.

That simple change made it easy to keep deer from smelling me, and I only hunted when the wind blew from the plot toward me and then out over the open CRP field behind me. I could easily sneak out of the plot at the end of legal shooting time even with deer around because the blind was in a thick cedar fence line that separated the plot from the big CRP field. It was the perfect setup for undetected hunting, and I sat in that blind many times each season without deer becoming educated.

To make the spot even sweeter, the surrounding cover was thick, and deer bedded in three directions, all but straight behind me. I couldn't have drawn up a better spot.

But one thing was missing: the buck. As the 2019 season arrived and I started hunting, I still had not seen any photos of the big 10-pointer anywhere on the farm. I assumed he had disappeared or maybe had died during the previous gun season.

By late October, I had forgotten completely about him and was just hunting the blind on the evening of Oct. 23 to give my other (presumably better) spots a break. Little did I know the surprise that was in store.

Right at sunset, a giant 10-pointer stepped out along the edge of the plot about 45 yards away and worked a scrape. At first, I didn't recognize him, but after a few seconds, the light bulb flashed on. It was the buck I had hoped to see all along, but he was much bigger now.

After working the scrape, he cut across the plot and stopped for a couple of bites of the brassicas. He seemed bent on heading out on a late-October tour of the farm. As he passed in front of the blind at 25 yards, I stopped him and made a clean shot to the lungs. He fell on the edge of the plot only seconds later.

I was shaking more on that buck than any I had shot in a long time. Not only was he a giant, but the shock value was real. I had given up on seeing him again, but he was lying dead just 120 yards away. What an evening, and what a buck.

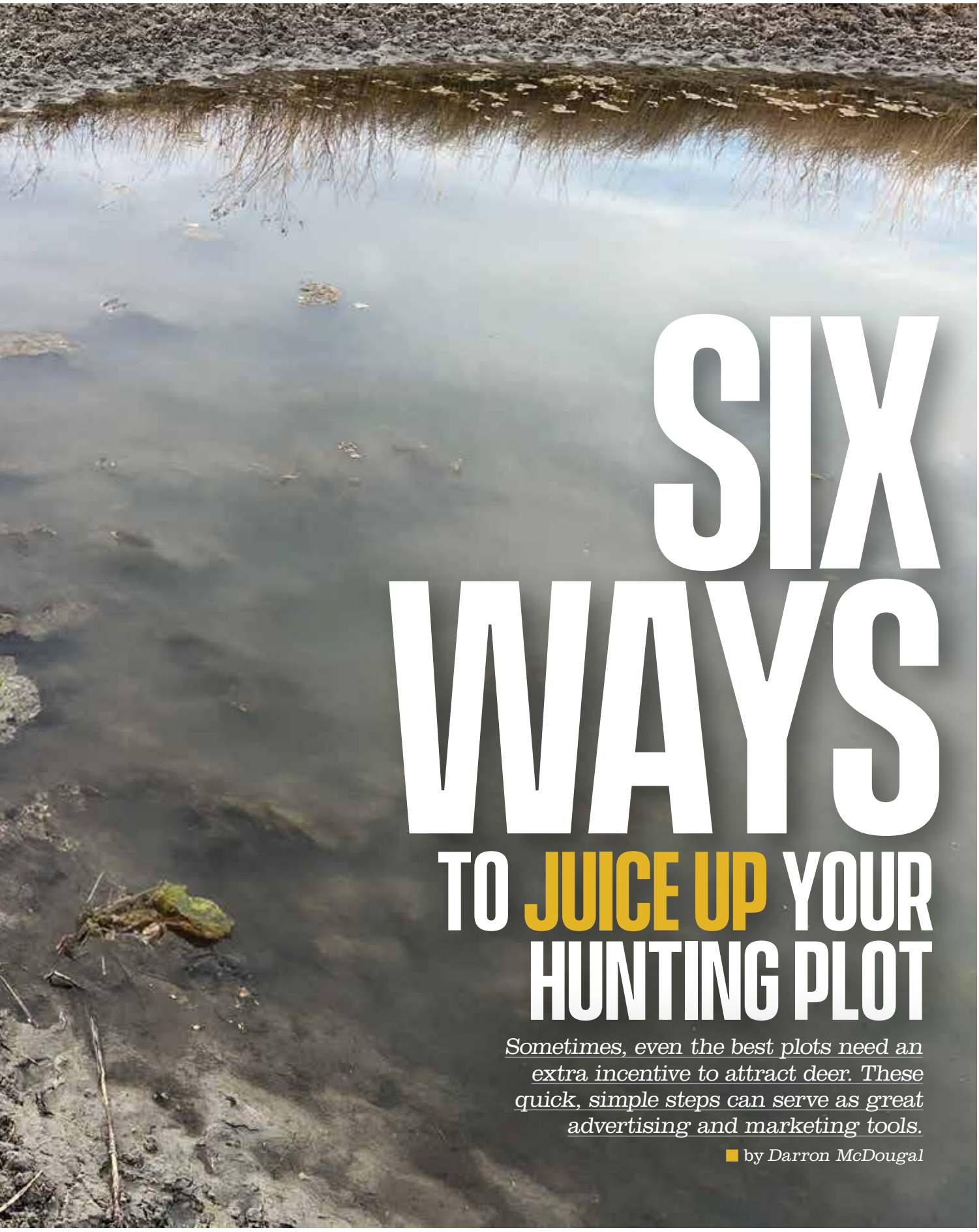
As with the other bucks, that hunt was made possible by the 1-acre food plot I was hunting. I'm not saying I couldn't have killed that buck somewhere else had the plot not been there, but I have my doubts. Small plots such as that bottleneck normal movement and make bowhunting a lot more productive.

PROOF IN TRIPLICATE

Those bucks serve as my proof that these kinds of spots are as good as it gets. I still hunt timber trails and bedding areas every season, but time-tested staging area plots planted to Imperial Whitetail Clover or a brassica blend such as Winter-Greens are hard to beat.

■ Deer must drink, and they'll travel to obscure water sources such as this small water hole if you don't offer a water source in your plot.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOWHUNTING.COM



SIX WAYS TO JUICE UP YOUR HUNTING PLOT

Sometimes, even the best plots need an extra incentive to attract deer. These quick, simple steps can serve as great advertising and marketing tools.

by *Darron McDougal*

What's worse than having no private land to manage and hunt? Of course, it's having land and expending tons of effort and money to create food plots only to find that deer don't use them nearly as much as you hoped.

Maybe your property isn't exactly a deer ghost town, but you're not seeing the results that the food plot articles said you would. Suddenly, you feel like your hard work and money were wasted.

Hold on. Yes, food plots alone should attract whitetails — especially in areas otherwise void of agriculture. But in farm country, deer have lots of feeding options, and your food plots might be a few more fish in a giant sea. So although planting food plots is never a bad move, perhaps you need to soup them up a bit to really attract deer — specifically bucks.

For the sake of this article, think of your food plots as products or services. Without great marketing, products and services don't sell the best they can. Think of these enhancements as advertising and marketing that will sell your plots to deer. The more a consumer is convinced that he needs a product or service, the more likely he'll be to buy it. And the more reasons you give deer to use your food plot, the more they'll likely use it more often. It's that simple.

Are you ready to make your plots into deer magnets? Here are six ways to juice up your hunting plots and make them more attractive to deer.

PHOTO BY MANSEOK KIM FROM PIXABAY

■ Noted deer experts have said that deer prefer chestnuts over acorns, so consider planting some chestnut and even pecan trees to give deer something other than acorns.

NUT TREES

Bucks that are regular daylight visitors to food plots and ag fields during summer and early fall tend to go MIA when archery season opens or slightly thereafter. Their patterns change as their hormones surge and bachelor groups split up and establish dominance. But another reason they disappear is that oak trees begin dropping acorns. Acorns are highly desirable to deer, and they're typically available in the security of timber. In other words, deer can eat very close to where they bed (maybe even in their beds), which decreases daylight movement in fields and plots.

If you have a ton of oaks in your area, you won't compete with them. But you can offer deer other nut species they like. For example, many experts have said that deer love chestnuts even more than acorns.

Planting nut trees isn't too difficult. Clear an area. Dig a hole to the depth specified by the nursery/supplier from which you purchased the tree. Plant the tree, and then backfill around the

PHOTO BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

■ Creating a mock scrape is easy, inexpensive (or free if you don't purchase scents) and extremely effective.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT EDGE COVER

■ Edge cover provides a hedge of security to all types of wildlife. Deer and turkeys can reach cover faster when it hedges your plot's perimeter. Thus, they feel safer and more secure feeding in a plot with edge cover.

Whitetail Institute's Imperial Whitetail Conceal is a great option. It grows up to 8 feet tall and is thick from top to bottom for the ultimate security. This provides one more way to juice up your hunting plot's appeal.

roots, tamping the dirt to minimize settling triggered by watering and rainfall. Speaking of watering, give the tree a good dowsing, and if rainfall ceases, make sure to water the tree daily. Place landscaping cloth and mulch around the tree so weeds and other trees aren't competing with it. You can enhance results by fertilizing the tree. Finally, because trees in a plot are signposts for deer, you'll want to put fencing around them to prevent deer from rubbing and breaking them while the trees are young.

MOCK SCRAPE

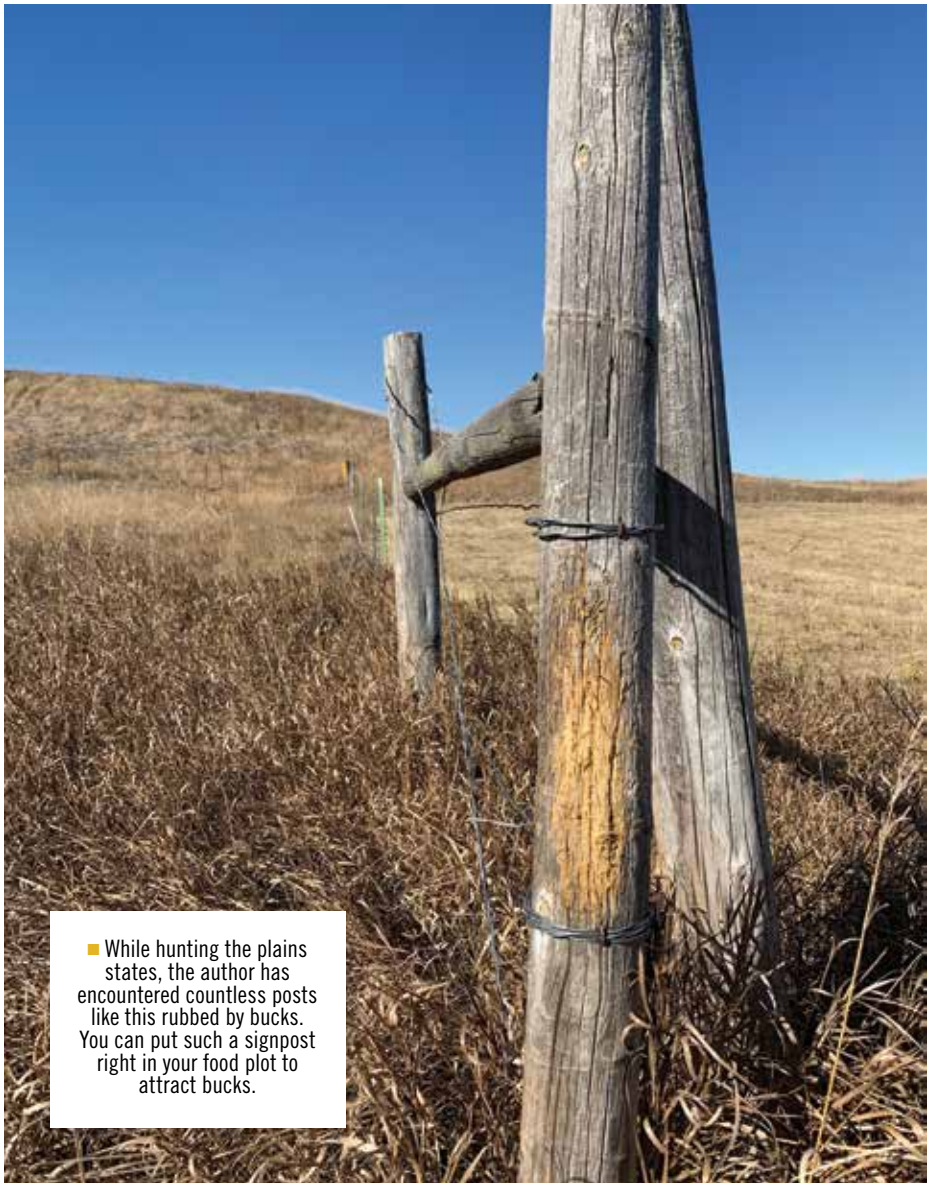
This is the easiest item on the list to encourage buck activity in your food plots. Simply locate a branch hanging over the edge of your food plot and within reach of a buck's antlers, and then expose the soil underneath it, using a big stick to scrape away leaves and flora. If legal, apply natural buck urine to the scrape and the licking branch to get the scrape started. If real scents are illegal, artificial scents could be an option (follow the regulations). I used to be skeptical about this, but I tried urinating in a mock scrape I made, and it didn't spook deer at all. In fact, some bucks began using it almost immediately.

If your plot has no overhanging limbs within reach of a buck's antlers, you might consider options for suspending a hemp rope, vine or stick from a higher limb down to a height a buck can reach. Then, make the mock scrape as outlined in the previous paragraph.

As a side note, some of the hunting community misconceives that bucks only scrape during the pre-rut and rut. This simply isn't true. I've hung trail cameras over scrapes in September and tracked tons of buck activity. I've also seen active scrapes in August, December, January and even in May while turkey hunting. Establish a mock scrape well before the season, and let the bucks keep it open.

■ Fruit and nut trees can spice up a plot. Apples, pears and persimmons are obvious choices, but deer won't pass up plums, either.

PHOTO BY DARRON MCDOUGAL



■ While hunting the plains states, the author has encountered countless posts like this rubbed by bucks. You can put such a signpost right in your food plot to attract bucks.

PHOTO BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

WATER

Whitetails require hydration during daylight. Further, they might choose a food source closer to water and neglect your plot or use it minimally.

Putting in a water source can be a big project with minimal maintenance or a small project with follow-up maintenance. You can dig out a big depression with heavy equipment and then install a pond liner and let rainfall keep it full, or you can bury a kiddie pool and fill it with water whenever the water level is getting low.

Deer consume water through dew and moisture content in the foods they eat and by drinking from water sources. Of course, their need to drink from a pond or waterhole increases during hot, dry conditions. Having a water source in or immediately adjacent to your food plot can make your hunting plot way more attractive.

FRUIT TREES

Like nut trees, fruit trees can spice up your plot. Apples, pears and persimmons are obvious choices deer love, but deer won't likely pass up plums, either. With fruit trees, try to plant a handful of varieties that produce throughout fall so deer will have fruit for most of the hunting season.

Plant fruit trees the same way you do nut trees. Water sufficiently after planting and during dry conditions. Keep competing flora at bay with permeable landscaping cloth and mulch. Fence the trees in so that bucks don't rub them and damage or break them off.

RUBBING POST

This is also fairly easy and inexpensive. Hunters have success with multiple types of wood, but cedar and scotch pine seem to be favorites. A cedar fencepost from a farm supply store is the easiest option. Using post-hole diggers, dig down at least 2 feet and put the post in. As you backfill, tamp the dirt around the post with a board or other tamping tool, and position the post so it's straight before you finish backfilling, adjusting as you go until the backfilling and tamping are complete.

If you can obtain a post that's sufficiently tall (when buried) for a licking branch, you can drill a hole large enough for a branch near the top. In-

PHOTO BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

Baiting and feeding isn't legal everywhere, but where it is, it can amplify your food plot's appeal.

"YOU MIGHT NEED TO SOUP UP YOUR PLOTS TO REALLY ATTRACT DEER — SPECIFICALLY BUCKS."

sert a branch or sapling. Then, you can make a mock scrape beneath it to really encourage bucks to use it.

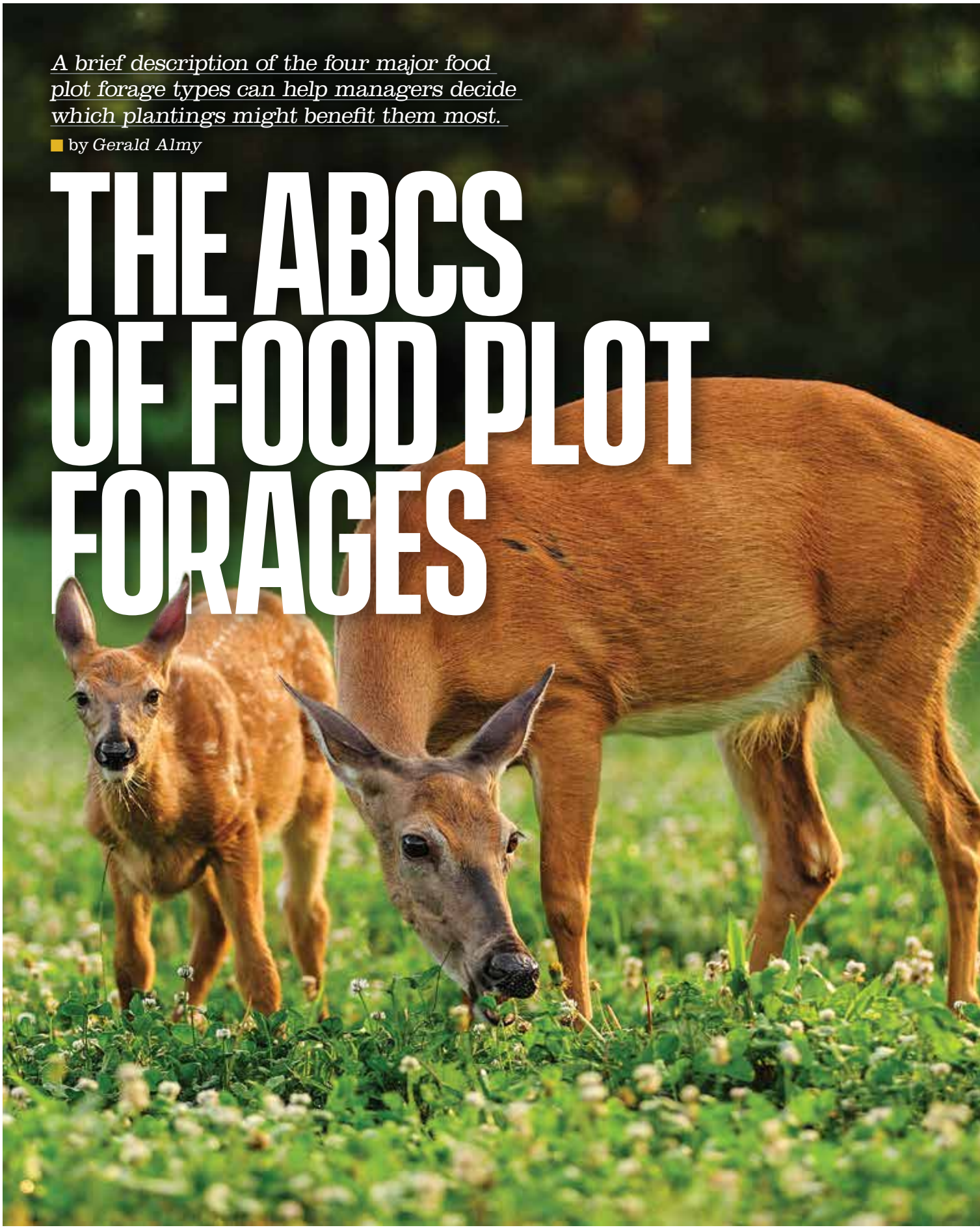
JUICE IT UP

I likened these six ways to juice up your hunting plot to advertising for a product or service. You can have a good product or service, but without good marketing and advertising, the product or service will likely produce mediocre sales or flop. A good food plot can attract deer on its own, but to create a buck magnet, make these enhancements your advertising and marketing ploys. These ways to juice up your hunting plots will give bucks six more reasons to frequent your plots. And that should increase your odds of filling your deer tag(s).

A brief description of the four major food plot forage types can help managers decide which plantings might benefit them most.

by *Gerald Almy*

THE ABCS OF FOOD PLOT FORAGES



This past season, I had the opportunity to take a nice buck with my bow as it walked through a PowerPlant field, another with my muzzleloader as it fed on a Winter Greens plot, and a third with my Melvin Forbes Ultralight .30-06 as it chased does in an Imperial Whitetail Clover field. Then, as the season neared its close in January, I had a final chance at a dandy buck munching Whitetail Oats.

I won't describe what happened in each case. The scenarios illustrate what a tremendous variety of plants whitetail managers have to attract deer and improve their health and antler growth. Each of those deer was in a different type of forage. And each of the plantings represents one of four major groups deer managers have to plant for various seasons and the different needs of animals. All are available as generics. But take it from someone who has tried them: The few dollars more for Whitetail Institute versions are absolutely worth it. Haphazardly mixing generics on the tailgate of a UTV will never match the quality of seeds or the precise blending of plants that make Whitetail Institute offerings so dramatically superior.

Let's look at the ABCs of food plotting and examine the major groups of plants food plotters have to choose from and their uses. All were planted on my land in western Virginia, as they are every year to help whitetails and my hunting success. I do that because each of the groups addresses specific needs of whitetails in ways that others do not, and at specific times of year and with varied taste appeal. Another reason? If I don't, chances are my neighbors will.

The major groups of forages include warm-season annuals, brassicas, cereal grains and perennials.

Most food plotters know a little bit about this plant or a little about that one, but they often lack a complete understanding of the major forage groups, and how they attract bucks and hold them on a property. A deeper knowledge of these plant groups will help you formulate a plan that will offer a continuous buffet of varied food for deer on your land year-round.

As mentioned, you can find these offerings in generics, but you will likely come back to Whitetail Institute products in each of the groups. These will typically be blends, for optimum appeal, and in most cases, they include proprietary offerings that were scientifically created through years of selective crossbreeding.

Whitetail Institute considers many factors when creating food plot offerings, including high protein content, palatability, resistance to overbrowsing, length of time available, size of forage leaves, ease of growing, digestibility in a deer's rumen, cold tolerance, benefit to the soil, drought hardiness and positive effects on antler growth.

THE GROUPS AND SPECIFIC PLANTS

When you delve into the major plant groupings, you'll find about 15 plants that are used regularly in food plots. Warm-season annuals hunters turn to include cowpeas, lablab, soybeans, corn, sunflowers and sunn hemp. Brassicas used most often include rape, kale, radish and turnips. Popular cereal grains include wheat, oats, rye and triticale. Perennials deer managers plant include ladino clover, intermediate white clover, alfalfa and chicory.

Those are the main plants. Here are important details about each of the major groups and the plants in each.

WARM-SEASON ANNUALS

These plants can go into the ground as soon as the soil temperature reaches 68 degrees. They yield tons of forage until frosts arrive but must be replanted each year. Most do best in high-quality soils or those amended with proper ratios and amounts of fertilizer. They tolerate summer's dry, hot conditions well, and have high protein levels. Warm-season annuals fill a crucial role in whitetail nutrition during a period when brassicas and cereal grains aren't available. (Only perennials also offer forage then.)

The vulnerability of young plants to heavy deer feeding pressure is a potential negative for some of these annuals. But there are ways around this, as Whitetail Institute knows. The company includes hardy nurse forages that grow faster and taller and take pressure off more vulnerable low-growing plants, such as cowpeas and soybeans.

Corn: With its high nitrogen needs, the difficulty to grow it, the brief time when it's available, large acreage requirements and young-plant vulnerability, corn is a poor choice as a food plot forage. It's low in protein and not particularly nutritious for deer. WINA does not use corn in any forage blends.

Cow peas: Originating in Ethiopia, cow peas rate high for palatability and pack plenty of protein, at 20 to 28 percent. This legume tolerates mediocre soil but requires liming if the pH is lower than 5.8. Cow peas are a major component of PowerPlant and bounce back strongly from deer feeding pressure.

■ Some brassicas have bulbs deer dig up and feed on after the animals eat the green tops.

Lablab: This bean, originally from Africa, is drought tolerant and first became popular in Texas for that quality. Whitetail Institute does not include lablab in PowerPlant because cow peas and forage soybeans, also legumes, are easier to grow, withstand grazing pressure better and produce just as much high-protein forage.

Forage soybeans: These are grown for their tender, high-protein leaves. They thrive even in the hottest, driest summer weather. They also offer bedding cover when they climb up and entwine plants such as sunn hemp and sunflowers, creating a thicket of food and cover.

Sunn hemp: This plant came from India and dates to 600 B.C. It grows up to 11 feet tall and is high in protein. Sunn hemp, included in Power Plant, is drought-tolerant, and acts as a nurse crop and structure for cowpeas and forage soybeans to climb and grow taller.

Sunn hemp is beneficial as a soil builder that recycles nitrogen, potash and phosphate, drawing them up from deep levels and leaving them closer to the surface and more accessible for future crops. It also secretes chemicals that suppress weeds and harmful nematodes.

Sunflowers: This annual is attractive to deer as forage, but it also acts as a nurse crop when planted with soybeans and cowpeas. Its tall, sturdy stalk provides structure for those plants to climb. It's an important component of Power Plant.

BRASSICAS

These plants have been used for many years by farmers for cover crops, soil conservation and forage for domestic animals. The best brassicas are components in many seed blends offered by Whitetail Institute, and the company has also created several proprietary plants, including Tall Tine Turnips and WINA 210 Kale. Those forages have been joined in recent years by exclusive radishes, called Ravish.

Brassicas are popular as deer forage because they grow easily, have high protein content, produce lots of food tonnage and have low planting costs. They also grow tall enough that they protrude through all but the deepest snowfalls. Brassicas work well in small, semi-shaded kill plots in woods, combined with annual clovers and cereal grains in products such as BowStand and Secret Spot.

For best results with brassicas, conduct a soil test, or use a 20-20-20 type fertilizer. Then apply 46-0-0 or a similar treatment a few weeks after the plants emerge.

Palatability is good early and becomes excellent after cold fall temperatures increase the plants' sugar content. As deer learn about brassicas, they'll often feed on them even before cold weather.

Rape: Brassicas developed by the Whitetail Institute can produce more forage with better palatability and resistance to insect damage than this plant. But a very small percentage of the best quality rape is included in some Whitetail Institute products because it's a hardy plant, is high in protein and is easy to grow in the poor soils in most smallwoods kill plots.

Kale: This brassica is extremely attractive to deer, with leaves that offer 18 to 25 percent protein. The Whitetail Institute developed its own variety of kale, WINA 210, to appeal to deer, with leaves that are more tender and better able to withstand cold. It's a major component in several brassica blends, such as Winter Greens.

Turnips: These plants produce a bulb that deer can dig up and eat after they devour the green tops. Leaves have 15 to 25 percent protein; bulbs 12 to 15 percent. Turnips tolerate drought well and are easy to grow. A fertilized stand of turnips can grow 2 feet tall, but make sure you plant enough. Deer love them. Whitetail Institute developed a proprietary variety – Tall Tine Tubers.

Radish: This plant has become a popular deer forage in recent years because of its hardiness, ease of growing, palatability, high protein level and soil-enhancing characteristics. Radishes can aerate compacted soil, their deep taproots can break up hardpan soil like a drill, leaving holes for water and roots of future plantings to penetrate.

Radishes are great crops for rebuilding the soil's fertility and productivity. Whitetail Institute Ravish Radish is unique to the company and was developed by crossbreeding to create a forage specifically to appeal to white-tailed deer.

Radishes absorb nitrogen and leave it at higher levels after they die, where it can benefit future plantings. They also release biotoxic compounds that reduce harmful pests and fungi, and drill deep holes with their taproots that aerate the soil.

CEREAL GRAINS

When natural wild foods decline in fall with colder weather, deer will feed more and more heavily on cereal grain crops, such as oats, rye and wheat. The more deer eat them down, the more the plants produce fresh, tender growth. If the plants turn yellow or struggle, a shot of nitrogen (46-0-0 or 34-0-0) will bring them back strong, turning them a deep rich green again.

These are some of the earliest plants food plotters used to entice deer into the open for a shot. If they grow too tall to be palatable, mow them down, preferably in strips on various dates to produce a variety of tender regrowth stages. Cereal grains start producing days after being planted in early fall and produce forage right through winter.

Whitetail Institute offers one high-quality cereal grain blend, featuring oats as its main ingredient. These are not just any oats, though. The company found out about this product in a research study conducted to find forage for cattle. This oat was removed from consideration in the study because deer liked it so much they decimated the test plantings. Whitetail Institute saw that and bought exclusive rights to the oats. Like most Whitetail offerings, Whitetail Oats Plus contains a blend of plants, with oats as the major component. The newest improved version also contains triticale for its unique palatability and ability to withstand cold.

Rye: Rye rates high for its ease of growing and cold tolerance. It also does well in acidic soils but doesn't like wet areas. It suppresses weeds with its dense mat growth and by producing allelopathic chemicals. Its protein level, however, is low (12 to 14 percent), and it lacks the taste appeal of the other major cereal grains. It's included in Whitetail's kill plot offerings because it grows well in poor-quality woods soils and resists disease.

Oats: Originally from Europe and Turkey, oats rate high for palatability and are easy to grow. They do best with a 6.0 or higher pH, occasionally necessitating liming the soil. The protein level is 15 to 25 percent. Whitetail Institutes exclusive oats are extremely high in sugar and very cold tolerant.

Triticale: This grain was created in laboratories in Sweden and Scotland in the late 19th Century by crossbreeding rye and wheat. The goal was to combine the disease-tolerance and vigor of rye with the yield potential of wheat. Triticale rates high for digestibility, protein, drought-resistance, cold tolerance and yield.

Wheat: This grain is easy to grow, cold-hardy, tasty to deer and drought tolerant, with good protein content (14 to 20 percent). After producing through fall and winter, wheat continues to nourish deer in early spring.

PERENNIALS

Perennials used for whitetail food plots include plants such as ladino clover, intermediate clover, chicory and alfalfa. They can last three to five years, depending on soil preparation, the type of seed, rainfall and management of the stand. One of the greatest strongpoints of perennials is they don't have to be planted every year. They have superb protein, mineral and vitamin levels. And they taste good to deer and are highly digestible.

Soils generally need to be close to neutral in pH (6.5 or higher), and a

mixture of 0-46-0 and 0-0-60 or 5-10-10-type fertilizer can do wonders for the plots, but the plants fix their own nitrogen. As always, a soil test is recommended. Mowing and spraying to kill grasses and competing weeds is extremely valuable for maximum production and attraction. Perennials can offer succulent forage nine to 12 months per year, depending on the location and varieties planted.

Chicory: This perennial thrives in drought conditions with its deep taproot. Whitetail Institute has developed its own product, WINA Chicory, included in mixtures such as Fusion and also sold as a solo planting called Chic Magnet. Whitetail Institute's proprietary chicory attracts deer better than other chicories because its leafage is more tender and palatable. It grows well even through dry, hot summers and tolerates slightly acidic soil. Protein level can range up to 40 percent.

Alfalfa: The common variety of this farming favorite is stemmy and used for cattle forage and hay. But the forage variety used in Alfa-Rack Plus is more palatable and grows more leaves and less stem for greater use by whitetails. Alfalfas are especially appropriate for drier hills and upland type soils.

Intermediate white clover: This perennial has a smaller leaf than the well-known ladino clovers. It spreads with above-ground roots called stolons, making it more stemmy.

Ladino white clover: No plant has captured the minds of deer managers like ladino clover, first popularized by Ray Scott with his Imperial Whitetail Clover in the late 1980s. Since then, Whitetail Institute scientists have pioneered the development of several additional new improved ladino clovers for this blend, engineered specifically for use by deer.

With ladino white clover's large leaves, high protein content (20 to 35 percent), excellent digestibility, drought resistance, ease of planting, palatability and persistence through three to six years, it's no wonder food plotters throughout the country turn to this product. It can yield 3 to 5 tons per acre. It's a year-round producer in most areas, and grows nine to 10 months a year in colder climates.

Deer cannot destroy ladino clover. In fact, they stimulate fresh, tender regrowth every time they take a bite. It sometimes requires lime, phosphorous and potassium, plus a bit of spraying or mowing for grasses and weeds. Other than that, ladino clover requires little care, fixing its own nitrogen. An Imperial Whitetail Clover plot can last up to five years.

Besides these major perennials, Whitetail Institute also includes some forbs. Persist burnet is a Whitetail Institute proprietary evergreen forb, which is a perennial available in Edge and Extreme for difficult planting situations.

CONCLUSION

A greater understanding of these major groups of forages should help you form a plan for your property that offers whitetails variety, taste appeal and high nutritional content 12 months per year. From my experiences through 40 years of food plotting, I've found that's the recipe for healthy deer, heavy racks and great hunting.

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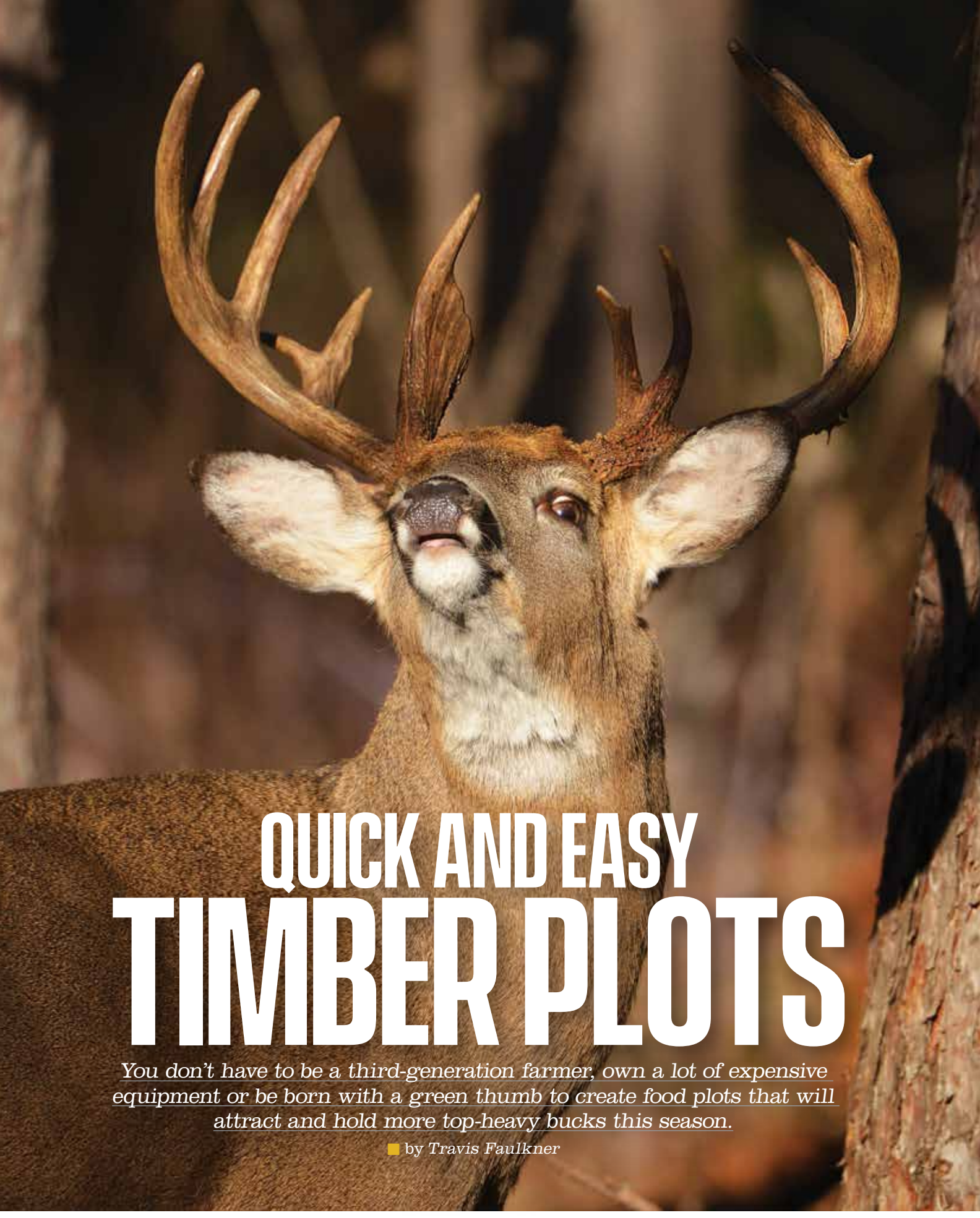

QUICK AND EASY TIMBER PLOTS

You don't have to be a third-generation farmer, own a lot of expensive equipment or be born with a green thumb to create food plots that will attract and hold more top-heavy bucks this season.

by *Travis Faulkner*

Does it feel like you need to be a high-roller or one of those Wall Street trust-fund types to hunt whitetails nowadays, especially if you enjoy pursuing wall-hangers?

Something as simple, true and naturally pure as hunting has turned into an exclusive rich-man's game. You see some of these cats on television and YouTube videos running super-sized heavy tractors with air conditioning in the cab, and they're working 4,000 prime private acres of intensely managed ground — the types of places most of us can only dream about hunting if we hit the Powerball lottery. I'm not jealous, nor do I blame those fortunate hunters for milking every ounce of potential their land offers. If I were in their shoes, I'd likely do the same thing. However, most of us don't have that luxury. Nor do we own enormous tracts of land and expensive farming equipment to go with it.

The good news is you don't have to be a big-time farmer or wealthy landowner with thousands of acres to attract and hold trophy-class bucks on your hunting ground. In fact, you'd probably be blown away by what you can realistically accomplish with a little work, some simple handheld tools, a no-till food plot mix and the right game plan. Here are some quick and easy tips for growing high-impact timber plots and other relatively inexpensive management projects you can pull off without complex farming equipment and a large bankroll.

BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

For mature bucks, super-sized agricultural fields and large-scale open food plots don't always make the most productive setups. Enormous fields and plots undoubtedly produce lots of attraction for hungry whitetails, but you need much more than a large food source to consistently connect with wall-hangers. Bucks that have survived long enough to get big and thick are not normal deer. These dudes are naturally skittish, extremely cautious and overly paranoid on a good day. They're also crafty, extremely adaptable, super stealthy and flat-out slippery when they've been hunted a few seasons and educated. Just because they will come to food doesn't mean you're

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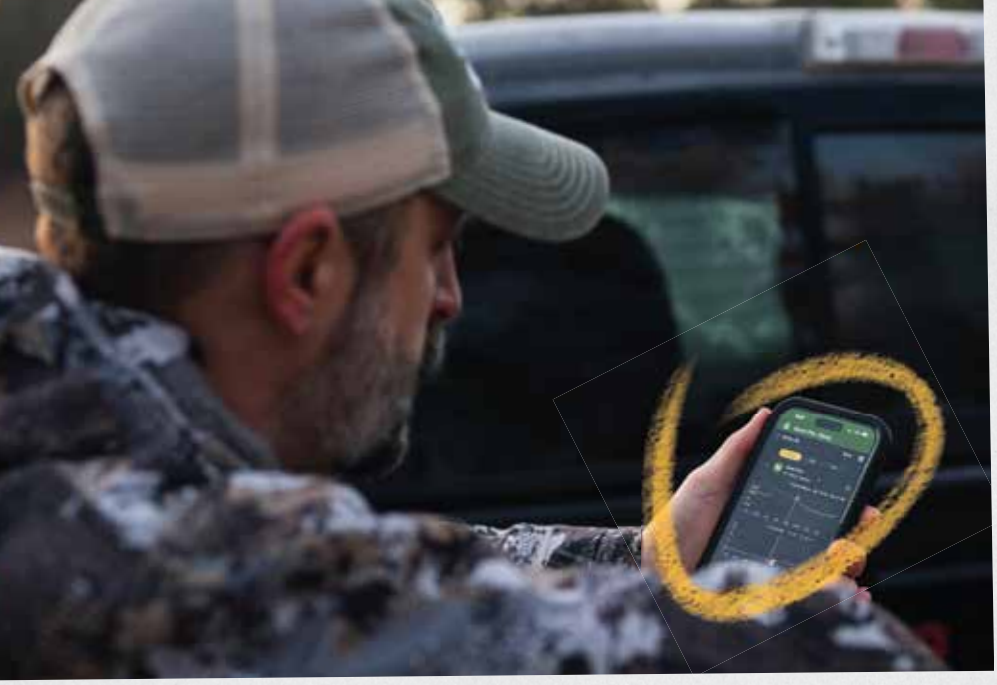

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■ The author has experienced great success by carefully positioning timber plots directly between bedding and primary feeding areas.

"YOU'D BE BLOWN AWAY BY WHAT YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH WITH A LITTLE WORK, SOME HAND-HELD TOOLS AND A NO-TILL FOOD PLOT MIX."

guaranteed to get a shot at them. There's a huge difference between seeing big bucks and tagging them.

Mature shooters learn quickly and can adapt their behavior and routines even quicker. In fact, I'm convinced they're able to pattern us and make the right adjustments faster than we can sometimes figure them out. They don't get big by continuously showing themselves in open areas during daylight.

Think about this: How many times have you been on a mature buck that's pretty much locked down to a standard textbook early season feeding-to-bedding pattern? You glass through optics and watch the buck feeding from a safe distance during late summer and early fall as it predictably hits large food plots and agricultural fields. You get consistent trail-cam pictures and videos of your target buck, which is a real confidence builder. At that point, you've probably learned the buck's preferred travel routes, where he's possibly bedding and how he enters the food source. You know what sections of the field he seems to feed in the most and his peak activity periods. That intel has let you pick a seemingly perfect tree stand or blind location along the field edge, and all you need is the right wind direction to knock your shooter into the dirt.

The only problem is that in many of those common scenarios, you typically only have one or two hunts before the buck's daily patterns, routines and habits change drastically. Just a hint of hunting pressure is often all it takes to mess things up. For example, hunting those types of setups with the wrong wind direction or a sudden swirling shift can set off alarm bells. Heck, even making multiple trips back and forth to check your trail-cameras or changing the batteries might contaminate the area with alarming scent and noise, which causes disturbances that will usually not go unnoticed.

Further, whitetails typically feed in open agricultural fields and large food plots throughout the night, which makes it difficult to reach edge-type setups without spooking deer. Evening hunts can also be challenging when exiting your stand after dark with a field full of deer. You don't even have to bump your target buck to spoil your chances of getting a shot at him.

Multiple deer frantically alarm-blowing and noisily fleeing a large field during early morning or late evening can tip off any mature buck within earshot. Those bucks quickly realize they need to avoid that potential danger by changing their feeding times, travel routes and entry points.

In many cases, if you don't get a shot at your target deer during the first or second sit, the gig is up, and you'll only see slickheads and younger bucks in large open areas during shooting light. The main target buck you were after has patterned you and changed his routines to avoid open feeding areas until well after dark.

When mature bucks start switching up their patterns, you can take steps to flip the script. You might want to stray from the temptation of setting up along the edges of bigger plots and fields and instead focus on smaller, more productive ambush points under cover. That's where strategically growing smaller no-plow, shade-tolerant food plots in cover can potentially outperform bigger open fields. And that's great news for hunters suddenly facing major big-field pattern shifts from their target bucks or who don't have access to larger tracts of land.

GROWING UNDER COVER

I'm not trying to convince you that hunting edge-type setups along large fields is a waste of time. If you watch any hunting shows or drive through the Midwest, you'll likely see how popular those setups are and that they can produce results. However, many successful hunts from those setups often occur during the opening days of the season, before hunting pressure really kicks in and changes things, or throughout the primary and secondary rutting periods, when the big boys are lovesick and actively searching for does. Such setups can also be money during late winter, when food is scarcer and hunting pressure has decreased drastically, along with the temperature. It's a long season, and those types of setups offer a somewhat limited window of opportunity.

However, if I had to choose between exclusively hunting large field-edge setups or targeting bucks in cover, I'm going with setups that encompass cover more times than not, because that's where I've had the most success throughout each phase of the season and across the nation. These types of setups greatly extend your effective hunting time, and the cover helps maximize overall productivity. I need my setups to produce all season, not just during the limited early, middle and late segments.

In addition, I've also learned a way to get the best of both worlds by growing plots under cover. In fact, it can completely change how you hunt. Growing quick, easy timber plots helps create a false sense of security among wary bucks that have learned to avoid making daytime appearances in large open fields.

As mentioned, this doesn't require much money or fancy equipment. I've planted timber plots with not much more than a rake, gardening hoe and foldable handsaw with an extension pole. You can also use a weed-trimmer, leaf-blower and chainsaw, depending on the situation and

ground conditions. The trick is to leave adequate amounts of surrounding cover while opening up the canopy to increase the amount of sunlight that reaches the cleared ground. Selectively cutting overhanging branches and removing as many leaves, sticks, rocks and weeds as possible will increase the overall productivity of these plots. You want to create good seed-to-dirt contact and maximize the amount of sunlight the plot receives daily.

With poor soil or bad growing conditions, you can also add pelletized lime and fertilizer to help enhance a timber plot. Usually, I have found a quality shade-tolerant mix such as Imperial Whitetail No-Plow will grow with minimal effort about anywhere. This high-protein mix is scientifically coated with Rainbond seed treatment for optimum germination, emergence and seedling survivability. This stuff will just about grow on a bare rock, and deer love it. Ultimately, a few simple tools, the right no-plow food plot mix and the proper placement are all you really need to consistently exploit overly cautious bucks.

PROPER PLACEMENT AND LOCATION ARE CRITICAL

Let's cover some basics about dealing with proper placement and high-impact locations to grow quick, easy timber plots. If you're only looking to attract deer to these plots, you can plant them just about anywhere, and deer will likely start showing up. However, your ultimate goal needs to be larger. Seeing a shooter buck or getting him on a trail camera is great, but actually getting a close, clean shot at him is much better. The best way to make that happen is to strategically place timber plots in the right locations.

For starters, look for areas you can safely reach, hunt and exit from without bumping and spooking deer. The last thing you want is to scare away and educate deer every time you try to hunt a setup. Next, try to pinpoint primary food sources, such as agricultural fields, food plots, acorn flats or fruit orchards deer are hitting hard. Other critical areas to find before planting your timber plots include watering holes, staging areas, major travel corridors and preferred bedding locations. After locking down those high-traffic spots, you'll need to select relatively flat sections of ground that are wooded and provide adequate surrounding cover to prep and plant.

Through the years, I've had great success carefully positioning timber plots directly between bedding and primary feeding areas. Another solid option is to place plots along the edges of thick bedding cover or directly inside major buck travel corridors. Staging areas can also be perfect spots to plant a timber plot and exploit tough bucks. Those locations can produce major results at almost any point in the season when positioned and hunted correctly. In fact, when you combine food and cover, you might even attract shooter bucks away from larger neighboring properties with endless acres of extravagant food plots and agricultural fields.

With a little extra work and planning, adding quick, easy timber plots can help you take your hunting to a new level this season.

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Hard work, passion and habitat improvement were the catalysts for this young lady taking to the deer woods.

Text and Photos by *Mark Olis*

BECOMING A HUNTER

"I LOOK FORWARD TO BUILDING MORE MEMORIES WITH MY HUNTING BUDDY IN THE FUTURE."

When my son was born, my mind flooded with emotions. I instantly thought of playing catch with him and taking him hunting. As he grew and became old enough to start shooting a .22LR, we would set up at the farm and practice shooting. He proved to be quite a shot even with larger hunting calibers. We agreed that he could hunt after he placed three consecutive bullets into the 8-inch bull's-eye of the target. Whatever distance that was would be his maximum range in the field. After a few sessions, he was printing tight groups at 100 yards. He was ready, and when a large doe stepped into a food plot at 90 yards during our first hunt, he did everything perfectly and dropped her. I was so proud, and we were excited. I finally had the hunting buddy I dreamed of.

Although my son was a great shot and performed well in the field, hunting wasn't his passion. He expressed that to me while hunting the next fall. We talked about it, and I asked him why not. He said it just didn't excite him like it did me. He loved playing sports and soon found his passion for playing an instrument in the school band. That could have been devastating to me, as a father who loves hunting, but he's a great kid who's healthy and has found his passion down a different avenue than me. I wasn't going to let hunting blind me to the blessing he is. My son still enjoys going to hunting camp and helping during workdays with the other off-season chores that don't require sitting quietly and waiting for a deer to come out.

My wife and I are also blessed with a beautiful, healthy daughter. She's five years younger than her brother and altogether different. My son is laid back, but she is a fierce competitor who loves playing softball and being outdoors. She also took to hunting like I never imagined. I learned that one December afternoon a few years back when she accompanied me hunting for the first time. We sat in a shooting house atop a tall ridge looking over a food plot and cutover below. It was a perfect blue-sky afternoon, and we took turns using the binoculars to scan the cutover for deer. She had lots of questions, and I was happy to answer them. She wanted to know as much as she could about hunting and wildlife. Our conversation was abruptly interrupted when I spotted a deer's rump in the cutover about 120 yards below us. I told Ella I saw a deer, and she excitedly wanted to see it, too. I handed her the binoculars and talked her into where it was. She was thrilled to see her first deer while hunting, and then she said, "I think it's a buck!" Grabbing the binos, I scanned, and sure enough, it was a buck — a nice one.

■ Ella started shaking, and the author fought back tears as they walked up to the buck.

We took our time looking at the buck through the glass, examining if it was a mature deer. I pointed out the sagging belly, large neck and hump over the shoulder. When I mentioned that I thought it was a shooter, all Ella would say was, "You need to shoot that buck." I agreed and grabbed my rifle. When the buck turned quartering away, I squeezed the trigger. The buck jumped and disappeared into the thicket. My hunting buddy wanted to know if I got it. I told her I was confident, but we would have to go find it.

We spent about 25 minutes searching through the chest-high vegetation before finding the downed buck. Ella was so excited. It was her first time to hold up antlers, and she realized what an accomplishment that was. We snapped photos and made a big deal of it. She was bitten by the hunting bug that day, and she knew she wanted to become a hunter.

PREPARATION

Fortunately, Ella's competitive spirit played well into her hunting preparation. We had all off-season to get her ready and learn how to shoot. We started in the backyard with a scoped pellet rifle. She listened well as I taught her to squeeze the trigger instead of pulling it. She practiced her breathing while steadying the reticle on the target. Before long, she was consistently drilling the bull's-eye at 20 yards. Next, I moved her into a scoped Ruger .22LR. We moved the target out to 50 yards, and she worked at steadying her aim and trigger squeeze. She again mastered that level and was ready for something bigger.

Although an AR-15-style rifle isn't conventional for deer hunting, it was the perfect gun for a youth to shoot. The Daniel Defense AR was chambered in 6.8 SPCII, with a collapsible buttstock. Federal's Fusion 115-grain bullet is an ideal deer round out to 200 yards and shoots extremely accurately from that rifle. The collapsible buttstock let me adjust it to fit Ella's smaller frame, too. This rifle was also outfitted with a suppressor, which removes the obnoxious bang and also smooths out recoil. All those components made it

ideal for my 8-year-old daughter to hunt deer with.

Ella had been practicing all summer with the .22LR, and by late summer, it was time to take her to the shooting range with the AR. We first placed a target at 50 yards and got her set up on the bench with a thick jacket to place the gun on and get steady. I didn't want to use a sled or anything that locked the rifle in, as I wanted her to learn how to steady the gun by herself, as she would have to do in the field. Ella got on the rifle, carefully aimed at the target and squeezed the trigger. She quickly turned to me wide-eyed after the recoil pushed back into her shoulder. Then she smiled widely, instantly feeling the difference in power from the .22LR that she was used to. She fired two more rounds, placing three shots in the 8-inch bull's eye. Remembering the agreement, she was so proud that she had passed her proficiency test out to 50 yards, which would let her hunt out to that distance. Then it was time to test her skill at 100 yards.

I calmly coached her back at the bench and told her that any mistakes she made at 50 would now be doubled at 100 yards. I expressed how she would need to concentrate on settling the cross-hairs and squeezing the trigger even more. I saw her absorbing everything and processing it. Just like before, she settled into the rifle, went through her breathing routine and squeezed the trigger. She did the same, firing two more rounds downrange. She was anxious as we took that long walk to the target. As we neared the target, we could see three bullet holes printing a 2-inch group, all inside the bull's-eye.

THE FIRST HUNT

Our hunting property is in Alabama, and youth weekend is always the weekend before the general rifle season opener. Ella and I had that weekend circled on the calendar for some time. However, she had her last softball tournament that Saturday, too. So, we would have only Sunday afternoon after church to hunt. Fortunately, the weather was clear and cool, and the wind was perfect for the food plot I wanted to hunt. The well-managed plot was lush, and my Moultrie Mobile camera revealed that deer were pouring into it every afternoon.

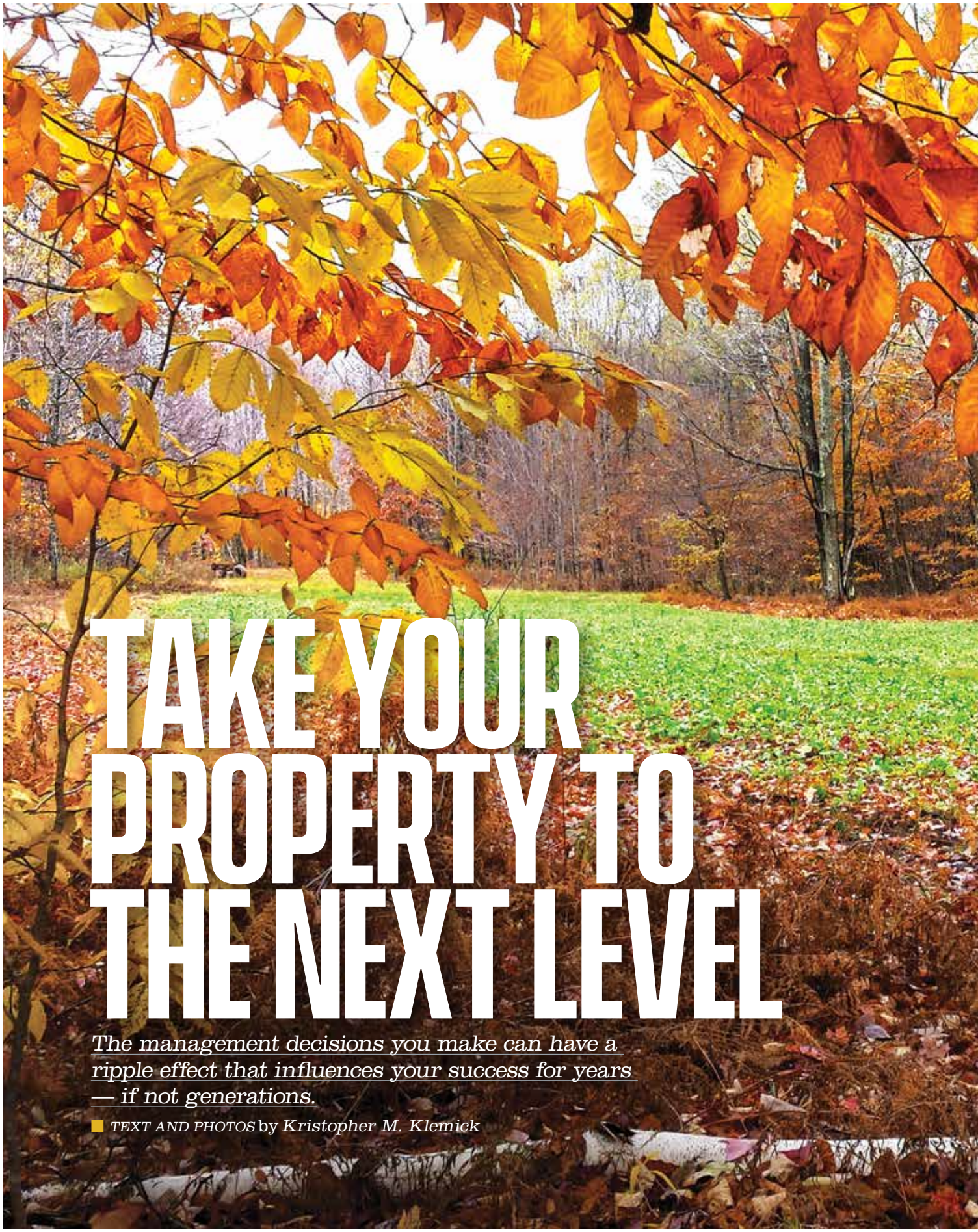
Ella and I climbed into the blind about 3:30 p.m. and got the rifle positioned out of the front window. I adjusted the office chair we had in the blind and folded my coveralls for her to sit on to get high enough to aim through the scope. To pass the time, we looked at pictures of deer with the vitals superimposed, and I showed her where to aim. About an hour into the sit, a large doe stepped into the field and began feeding on the sweet-tasting Whitetail Oats Plus. I instantly went into coach mode to keep Ella calm enough for the shot. Her breathing had audibly gotten louder and deeper. She was feeling the adrenaline coursing through her little system. I told her to focus on her breathing and not to rush anything, because the deer had no idea we were there. She got into the rifle, and I told her to first practice putting the cross-hairs on the shoulder of the deer, as we had talked about. She got comfortable with her aim, and she let me know she was ready. I clicked the safety off, and she patiently waited for the doe to turn broadside and stop. Then the rifle erupted. The doe dropped in its tracks at 95 yards. I was amazed at what she had just done.

After putting the safety back on and setting the rifle down, we began hugging and talking excitedly. Ella was so excited and shaking. I was shaking, too. She became a hunter the minute we entered the field that afternoon, but it was official to her now — she was a hunter. Unlike my son, who gagged as we gutted his first deer, she jumped right in and wanted to know where the heart was and what each organ was. She even held the body cavity open to help.

The next weekend, she got another doe, and I quickly realized I would now be the guide for the foreseeable future. I loved my new role. The remainder of the fall season, we settled into a routine where I braved the early morning cold while she slept in, and then I would resort back to being her guide for the afternoon hunts.

The next season, our goal was to get her first buck. Again, we circled youth weekend, and as luck would have it, a nice 8-pointer started showing up regularly on our Moultrie Mobile camera in the same plot where she'd taken her first doe. The wind was perfect for that plot, and we slipped into the blind that afternoon. After a brief sit, does began to filter into the plot. With her goal set on a buck, she sat patiently watching the deer feed. Within 15 minutes, I looked out of our window to the right, and the 8-pointer from the trail cam pictures entered a shooting lane. He and a 6-point began walking right toward us. However, the rifle was already situated out the front window, where we anticipated the action would unfold. We sat patiently as the bucks walked within 20 yards of the blind and headed into the plot to feed. We were trembling and breathing hard. She had to calm herself as the bucks walked toward the does in the back of the field. She worked hard to keep her nerves under control as she settled the cross-hairs on the buck's shoulder. When he stopped quartering away, she took her time and squeezed the trigger. The buck jumped in the air and kicked like a bucking bronc. He struggled and ran toward us, and did an end-over-end flip into the woods as he exited the field to our left.

She didn't see the deer go down and was asking if she had gotten it. I assured her she got it, and she immediately wanted to go see it. I told her I needed a few minutes to calm down. I was a mess. When we gathered ourselves and got down, I let her do the tracking. I saw the deer's white belly just out of the plot, but she walked us through where the deer came from and went, and then she saw it. She started shaking. I fought back tears as we walked up to the deceased buck. It was the best hunt I've ever experienced. There are no limits to what this kid can do in life, and I'm so thankful that I get to come along for the ride. These are memories that only she and I share. I look forward to building more memories with my hunting buddy in the future.



TAKE YOUR PROPERTY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

The management decisions you make can have a ripple effect that influences your success for years — if not generations.

TEXT AND PHOTOS by *Kristopher M. Klemick*

You've just been handed the keys to a kingdom — whether it's a multi-year lease, the opportunity to acquire a parcel of your own, or the OK from a friend, neighbor or private landowner who has agreed to let you do habitat management work on their land. The excitement for what happens next is unmistakable, and your enthusiasm immeasurable. So much potential, so many possibilities and so many projects to tackle before the next hunting season begins. But where do you start? More importantly, how do you know you're making the right decisions? The list is long and can quickly begin to seem insurmountable.

Fortunately, the company you know and trust for your attractant, mineral site and food plot needs also offers an unmatched service that brings all things habitat management under one roof and available at your fingertips. The Whitetail Institute of North America is the oldest true consultant in the industry, with a history and proven track record dating back to the 1980s of offering answers to questions and resources to help hunters improve their habitat, herd health and success afield. In 2023, the company took this leadership role one step further when it launched Next Level Consulting, a full service, end-to-end approach to land management headed by wildlife biologist and director Jody Holdbrooks.

Perhaps you've seen the comical television ads of people calling an insurance agent at all hours. Well, Jody is the Institute's equivalent of Jake from State Farm.

"Yes sir, the Whitetail Institute of North America has fielded more food plot questions than any other consultant in the country," he said recently.

"I'm available to answer all questions any time. I truly believe I have the best staff to work with, because they are all wonderful with customer relations. We've been doing it since 1988."

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the moment you reach out for information, the service Jody and his team provides is what you would expect when working with WINA — a top notch, best-in-class experience.

"I'm available all season," Jody said. "If a hunter wants me to come out, I can be there. To start, we'll discuss your property and talk over the phone, and look over maps and any soil tests. I also like to see what crops, if any, are being planted in surrounding areas. All I need is your location, and I can put together a quote."

The beauty in WINA's Next Level Consulting is in the name. It isn't focused strictly on food plots. Jody helps land managers take their properties to the next level by assessing the entire spectrum; everything from food plots and mineral sites, tree stand locations and access roads, timber stand improvement, weed management, herd density and health, opportunities for success, potential challenges and everything in between.

"We create habitat that allows food plots to be truly supplemental and not the sole wildlife food on a piece of property," Jody said. "This is not just food plots, even though we are focused on getting those right. I look at all avenues of wildlife management. My goal for all consulting clients is to create habitat that doesn't make the wildlife rely solely on food plots."

THE PROPERTY TOUR

After Jody has gathered and reviewed background information, and had an initial conversation with the landowner, the next step is a boots-on-the-ground site visit. Scheduled during a time most convenient for you, he'll perform a thorough review of the property, including pulling soil samples from established and prospective food plot areas.

"Site visit time is all up to the client and, of course, the size of the property," Jody said. "It's vital to look over the entire property to ensure we are doing all we can to properly manage each piece of it. While I really want the landowner with me, I have done a few site visits alone, which is doable but can present a disadvantage because I can't ask questions and get feedback while I'm there."

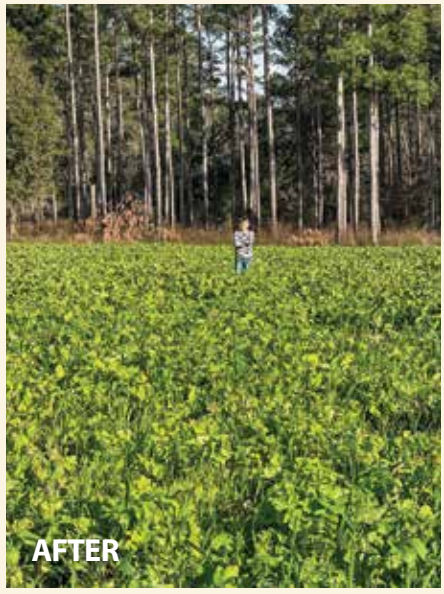
Josh Congdon recently obtained

NEXT LEVEL CONSULTING PAYS DIVIDENDS IN FLORIDA

A solid management plan turned a property with undernourished deer and few bucks into a hunting paradise.

by *Don Williams*


BEFORE


AFTER

Two years ago, I bought a 250-acre northern Florida pine farm with 10 acres of food plots. Unfortunately, the fields were overgrown and had been neglected for many years. The soil was sandy and full of weeds.

I reached out to Whitetail Institute to see if they had a hands-on consulting division that could help. I was looking for a multi-year approach that would tell me what the soil needed and also the best crops that would be good for the wildlife and help turn the sand into soil through time. Luckily, they did.


RESULTS

Whitetail Institute sent one of its consultants to test the soil, and we went to work. During the past two years, we've added almost 10 more acres of food plots, and the fields are getting better by the season. Whitetail provided me with written plans for each food plot that stated how to treat the soil, what to plant and how to treat any weeds. This process has worked extremely well.

After I bought my farm, the deer on my trail camera pictures were so skinny you could see their ribs and hip bones. Now, the herd is looking healthy. The size of the herd has also increased in just two hunting seasons. It's typical to see 20 or more deer in one hunt.

My first year on the farm, I didn't see many bucks. I decided not to shoot any bucks but to take four does. This past hunting season, we had more bucks, and larger ones. We let so many bucks walk this year. I harvested a large 8-point that I would say is a great Florida buck.

I can't wait to see where this goes in the future. A great land management plan from Whitetail Institute and a QDM plan have already produced results in just two years.

103 acres in Virginia. He knew what he wanted to do with his first piece of hunting ground and was confident in his ability to do it.

"I wanted to lay out the best practical use for the property," Congdon said. "So I created a plan looking at what the land offers today, where it has a monoculture, where do I want to make changes and where do I need to make changes? I can add food plots that support turkeys and deer. I've got spring food plots and fall food plots. I'll introduce controlled burns. There's so much, and I wanted to be able to incorporate all the tools available to accelerate those changes based on what I wanted to do with the property."

With Next Level Consulting, you have the entire Whitetail Institute team working hard for you so you don't have to go it alone. Important decisions you can trust are made as a team.

Even after years of practicing and actively managing habitat on other people's land, Josh recognized calling on Next Level Consulting and the full expertise of Whitetail Institute was a no-brainer.

"You don't want to miss out on an opportunity that exists or push certain aspects too aggressively," he said.

Making mistakes is a part of life. We learn and grow from them. However, from the seemingly smallest of decisions to the bigger ones, such as critical clear-cutting activities that can potentially affect generations, negative life lessons can be downright devastating for a property.

"Before Jody came out, he sent me an extensive series of questions about what's been planted before, past soil tests, deer density, how much I hunt, how many people hunt the property, neighboring properties — all the questions an experienced consultant should ask. We built a great relationship. We talked, talked again, had a couple of more conversations after those, and at that point, I decided to book a consultation with him. The site visit was fantastic. We spent the day together. We had breakfast and then went to the property and looked at every aspect of it bouncing ideas off of each other. We were able to spend a lot of quality time together on the property."

THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

What Next Level Consulting offers isn't a cookie cutter, carbon copy blueprint that might improve your property if the habitat manager follows everything to a T and the stars align. That's not realistic.

"Habitat management and deer hunting is a passion that's created a lot of methods and different ideologies on the Internet." Jody said. "Just because you have success with one management technique in one property doesn't mean it works on all properties."

Every piece of property is unique, and a comprehensive, individualized management plan is carefully crafted for each one.

"What Jody offers is a tailored solution to two things," Josh said. "The property layout itself and the aspirations of the owner. The management plan he prepared reinforced not only all of the things we talked about, but it also laid out different ways and styles to manage the challenges I have, offering different ideas to attack the issues."

PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Josh and Jody remain in regular contact with each other.

"I'm talking to guys via text, email or phone nearly every day," Jody said. "Consulting customers know that I'm available to help in any way."

"Jody is very accessible," Josh said. "His greatest skill is listening and creating a plan that facilitates your unique needs to your parcel. For example, when he came out, I showed him a clover plot I had going but it wasn't quite where it needed to be. This property is more than an hour from my home, and the plot got away from me. We looked at it and talked about tearing it up to start fresh but then he said, 'Josh, what do you think?' I said, 'If I look at this right-hand side, my gut says let's see it in spring, and he said, if that's your feeling, let's do that.' I did what I was supposed to do. We overseeded, we hit it with herbicide, and guess what? It bounced back, and I now have a beautiful plot. Jody looks at things. He gives you feedback, and he listens to you. These are the decisions we make together."

Thanks to Next Level Consulting and the relationship Josh has built with it, he's already seeing incredible results with deer, turkeys and other wildlife.

"You get out of it what you put into it," he said. "If you put the right practices in place and put in the hard work, you will see the benefits. Another example? I only used to have two or three turkeys on the property every now and then. Now I have an entire flock that is consistently on the property. They're now roosting in the pine trees off my clover plot. That didn't happen organically. I'm also seeing black bears more often, too."

If you're looking for a habitat management plan that's customized to your property, incorporates the pieces necessary for success, and partners with you every step of the way to help you achieve your goals, have a no-obligation conversation with Jody. To learn more about Next Level Consulting, contact him at (800) 688-3030, email **jody@whitetailinstitute.com** or visit **https://whitetailinstitute.com/next-level-consulting/**

A HAND IN TIME OF NEED

Whitetails are built to withstand winter, but there are limits to what they can endure. Wildlife managers can help by developing a solid year-round food plot plan.

by *Matt Harper*

Some long for the deep days of winter, when a strong north wind drifts feet of snow across roads and driveways, and temperatures drop to somewhere south of, "You have to be kidding." Unfathomably, some folks say, "This is the best kind of day of the year." I guess I can buy into that; a warm hearth and home, a steaming cup of coffee, and spending time with family watching old movies. But some of us, no matter the conditions, must venture into the frozen tundra to perform duties such as shoveling the walk, blading the drive, going for groceries and, in my case, providing hay for cows and chopping loose frozen cattle waterers.

Every time I return from one of these subzero escapades, I realize I'm able to enjoy a 90-degree temperature increase provided by my home. However, the animals I was caring for are still at the mercy of nature's thermometer. I always wonder how they can survive those unrelenting conditions.

Animals that live at latitudes that produce cold temperatures are equipped to stare down the elements. They grow coats to shed icy winter blasts or, in some cases, burrow deep within shelter and nap their way through the brief days and long nights. If not, they wouldn't exist there. Domestic and wild creatures have adapted to survive those conditions, but although domestic animals have food given to them by caretakers, wild critters are on their own.

This past winter, we had a stretch of several days when temperatures dipped well below zero, and that was coupled with more than 2 feet of snow, which had drifted to 5 feet or more in some places. I had to plow paths in the snow just to get hay to the cattle and then plow paths for them to reach food and water, as drifts rose higher than their midsections. I noticed that deer started using those trails and would show up to partake in the hay. Unless the hay is of the high-quality alfalfa, full of highly digestible leaves, deer won't usually resort to dried and wrapped forages. But when that's all there is to eat, that's what they do, whether it's digestible or not. As I pulled up to stab a bale with my tractor and saw the cored-out center where deer had dined the night before, I wondered what they would do if there were no bales.

SURVIVING THE WINTER

White-tailed deer are amazingly adaptable and resilient creatures. As long as they're not hunted out of existence, they find a way to survive. Of course, some animals in the herd will not survive, but that's the natural order of things, as the strong make it through and the weak perish, thus solidifying the overall strength and health of the herd.

One of the factors that aids winter survival is a deer's ability to slow down its metabolism, thus decreasing the demand for nutrients. Call it an intake/digestion/metabolic semi-hibernation state, in which deer minimize inward and outward energy demands for function and movement. No, they are not curled up in a den like a bear, but just as hibernating animals bring their metabolic rate to a near standstill, deer naturally decrease their metabolism, thus requiring less food intake and less overall nutrient consumption. Even in captivity, where deer have access to as much food as they desire, intakes in winter will decrease. In the middle to northern regions of the whitetail's range, winter brings about a scarcity of food in quality and quantity, and it's that ability to manipulate their digestive system to require less food that helps deer make it through. Cold weather can also be a factor in winter survival, but deer that live in cold places can ward off the effects of severe temperatures. The ability to maintain temperature homeostasis is accomplished through the production of internal heat via metabolic activity, in addition to the magnificent winter coat deer wear. Deer have two hair coats; one during the warmer months, and one for the colder months. Call it a summer and a winter wardrobe. Their hair in spring and summer is dense and contains solid hair follicles. In fall, deer essentially molt and shed their summer coat, and replace it with a winter version that contains hollow hair follicles that act as a thick layer of insulation. If you get pictures on your trail cameras in fall of deer that look ragged and almost scurvy, they are shedding one coat and replacing it with another.

But some extremely severe conditions can affect even the strongest of the herd. Although deer can withstand bitter temperatures, that requires more internal heat production, which requires a higher demand for energy. This energy comes from food or the fat stores deer built in summer and fall. Prolonged periods of extremely low temperatures deplete fat reserves, and unless there are energy sources deer can find to consume, deer will enter a negative energy balance. Energy is needed for almost everything, from temperature control to locomotion, so negative energy balances can eventually lead to weakness, which increases the odds of a deer falling victim to predation, becoming susceptible to disease and having a decreased ability to overcome injuries. Those circumstances dramatically increase the likelihood of higher winter death loss.

Land managers can help deer through winter by providing the right food at the right time.

Beyond cold temperatures, deep snow produces a deadlier winter condition. As mentioned, I plowed paths for cattle to access food, but in the wild, there's no snow plow to make a deer's life easier. Remember, energy is precious to deer during winter, and deep snow creates a higher demand on energy reserves simply to move. Further, deep snow will cover food sources, and deer reach a situation in which they're burning more calories in search of food they cannot find. The longer the deep snow sticks around, the worse a deer's situation gets, and extended months of deep snow cover will almost always result in higher winter death loss. In addition, deep snow favors predators, which also decreases the odds of deer survivability. In fact, deep snow is likely the greatest enemy a deer will face in its quest to reach the next spring.

Within a deer herd, some classes of animals are more susceptible to severe winter conditions. In general, the very young and very old will suffer higher mortality in winter because they lack strength compared to deer in their prime. But mature bucks also rank high in winter death loss. If you see a 4- to 6-year-old buck during the rut, he's a picture of strength and power, and it's hard to imagine that class of deer would struggle to survive. The issue, however, is that bucks burn most of their fat reserves during the rut while chasing potential dates and fighting off rivals. As mentioned, fat reserves help supply the energy needed to make it through winter. If bucks don't have food available in adequate amounts to rebuild their fat stores, winter can spell death to even the strongest.

Sometimes, winter conditions carry negative effects that cannot be easily seen or verified by a carcass in a snow drift. Does are carrying the next year's fawn crop and are trying to grow that fawn (s) while also attempting to survive. In an extremely rough winter with scarce food, does might make it to spring, but the survivability of their fawns is questionable. If it's bad enough, a doe might abort one or more of the fetuses. Or if the fawns are born, they can have low body weights, dramatically decreasing the chances of surviving the first few hours or days. If a doe also does not have adequate milk supply because of poor body condition, that only exacerbates the problem.

A HELPING HAND

Land managers often wish there was a way to keep cold temperatures at bay and have snow cover swept away, but there's really nothing we can do. However, that doesn't mean you're helpless to improve the situation for deer. The key is food, but not just food — the right food. Moreover, deer need the right food at the right time.

After autumn, bucks try to regain strength and body condition. Like a marathon runner on mile 25, they stagger out of winter and need nutrition to prepare their bodies for the next rut.

It begins in spring and summer, making sure deer have a quality food source to rehabilitate from winter and then prepare for the winter to come. Does are raising their young and need a high-protein, highly digestible food source to support lactation. It's a simple equation — the better the food supply, the more milk produced, and thus the stronger the fawns and the faster they will grow. The better the nutritional plan in spring and summer, the better the odds young deer will survive their first winter.

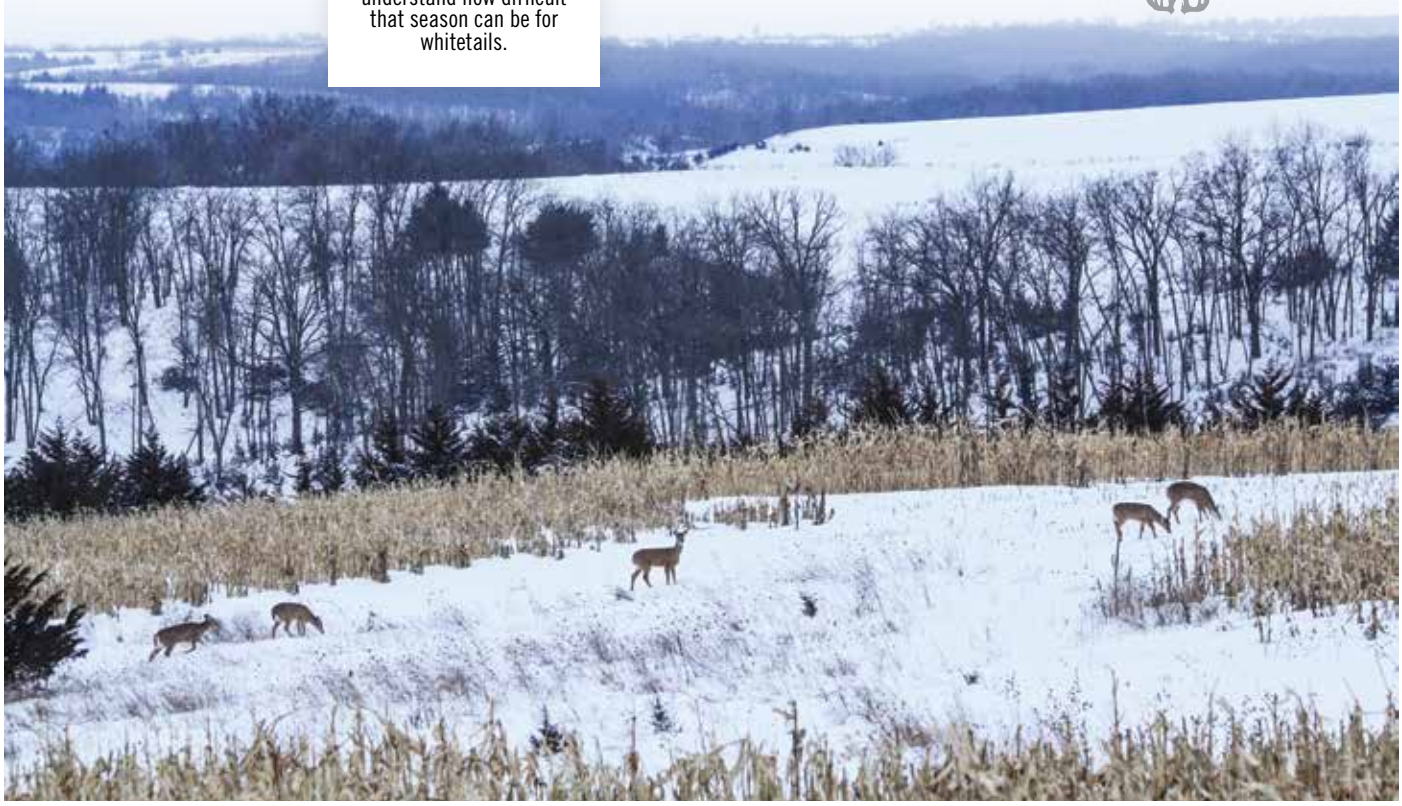
Bucks are also trying to regain strength and body condition. Like a marathon runner on mile 25, they stagger out of winter and need nutrition to prepare their bodies for the fall rut. Quality food plots provide high levels of nutrients in spring, summer and fall, which builds the foundation and bodily fortitude to face the looming winter.

Growing winter food plots and providing high-energy food sources in winter helps diminish the threat of winter kill. Remember, the key is energy balance, and if energy intake can help decrease the demand on energy reserves, deer have a far greater chance of making it though winter and also making it in good condition. The key to winter food plots is use a nutrient-dense forage that is high in energy, and then be sure to provide enough of that food to supply deer as long as you can in winter. Think of it as your kitchen pantry. If you know you can't resupply the pantry for four or five months, you'd better make sure you have enough food to make it for that long. And what happens if your neighbors, who didn't prepare as well as you, come over and start eating food out of your supply? Essentially, that's how winter food plots work. When the killing frost hits or plots mature and quit growing, that's all the food that you will have until spring green-up the next year.

If you plant a winter plot and it produces 3,000 pounds of food, that might seem like a pretty good bounty. But let's do the math. If you figure a deer will eat 1.5 pounds per day (less intake than normal because of winter) and you have 20 deer on the property, that's about 900 pounds consumed per month. So you would have enough food for more than three months? This math doesn't take into consideration the neighbors. If the deer herd on your plots doubles in winter because adjacent properties lack food, you now have 40 deer using your winter plot. That gives them one to two months of food supply. It's extremely difficult — likely impossible — to plan for an exact number of deer using a winter plot and determining how much they will eat each day. But doing the quick math involving area and expected tonnage helps you better plan for an acreage that's sufficiently large to provide at least some assistance. One of the reasons I plant Imperial Winter Greens is it can produce a high tonnage rate per acre and is very high in nutrients. Further, I use Tall Tine Tubers to provide the root food source in addition to the leaves and stalks. Regardless of what you plant, remember the equation: Total food produced (acres plus tons per acre) divided by the expected number of deer equals the number of days of food.

SUMMARY

If you live where winter brings snow and cold, you understand how difficult that time can be for deer in that region. Whitetails are built to withstand winter conditions, but there are limits to even what they can endure. As wildlife managers, we always have ways to help by developing a solid year-round food plot plan. You might still feel bad for the deer out in the subzero, snow-covered outdoors, but while you're sitting by the fire, you can at least take heart that you did all you could to help deer survive and thrive.



Hunters in regions with cold, snowy winters understand how difficult that season can be for whitetails.

by *Brian Lovett*

In addition to helping Whitetail Institute customers, Tyler Holley manages about 3,400 acres near his house.

A CHAT WITH THE EXPERTS:

TYLER HOLLEY

One of Whitetail Institute's top consultants reveals his favorite plantings and the advice he gives to almost every customer.

Experience breeds confidence, which is likely why Whitetail Institute customers feel extremely secure when chatting with Tyler Holley.

A salesperson and consultant with the company for almost 10 years, Holley began planting greenfields with his grandfather's old tractor when he was 14. And that passion for hunting and management has helped forge a career helping food plotters around the country. Recently, *Whitetail News* sat down with Tyler to discuss his work and why he loves helping people realize their food plot dreams.

Whitetail News: You probably deal with many questions from food plotters every day. What are the most common?

Tyler Holley: "Really, a lot of folks normally start off asking, 'What's the best seed blend for my area?' We try to really convince them to always perform a laboratory soil test. That way, we can get them the best seed blend for the soil type they are planting in. Our seed blends are designed to grow in many different soil types. It's just trying to show folks that just spending that the small price for a soil test is a great insurance plan for their plot."

WN: How about the toughest questions you field?

TH: "There really isn't too tough of a question for us to answer. We have seen every situation and can typically find a resolution for any issues that arise. We are constantly improving our research, and we work together with our customers to improve their food plotting experience no matter what it takes."

WN: What general advice do you often give to beginning or novice food plotters?

TH: "Again, it's definitely to use the soil test. But the main thing is really to have patience, because most of our customers plant something and expect to have something growing within a few days. It takes time, proper growing conditions and good prepared ground to have successful food plots. All three of those work together for faster and better results."

WN: What's the best part of your average day?

TH: "A lot of customers call me directly. The main thing is just hearing that familiar voice again and just being able to catch up with them. And it's not only being able to keep up with their food plots, but they kind of turn into a family member you've never met. You share things. It's just knowing that through years of experience, people trust you for what you say regardless of how the food plots turned out. They know that we're steering them in the right way here."

WN: You've been doing this for many years. What do you like to plant?

TH: "I manage around 3,400 acres around my house. My No. 1 plantings would be Imperial Whitetail Clover, Pure Attraction and No-Plow. They're my three favorite seed blends. They work the best for me and my soil types, and they produce the most tonnage, also. I've killed a pile of turkeys off clover plots and No-Plow. And I also do other testing for new seed blends we have coming up here."

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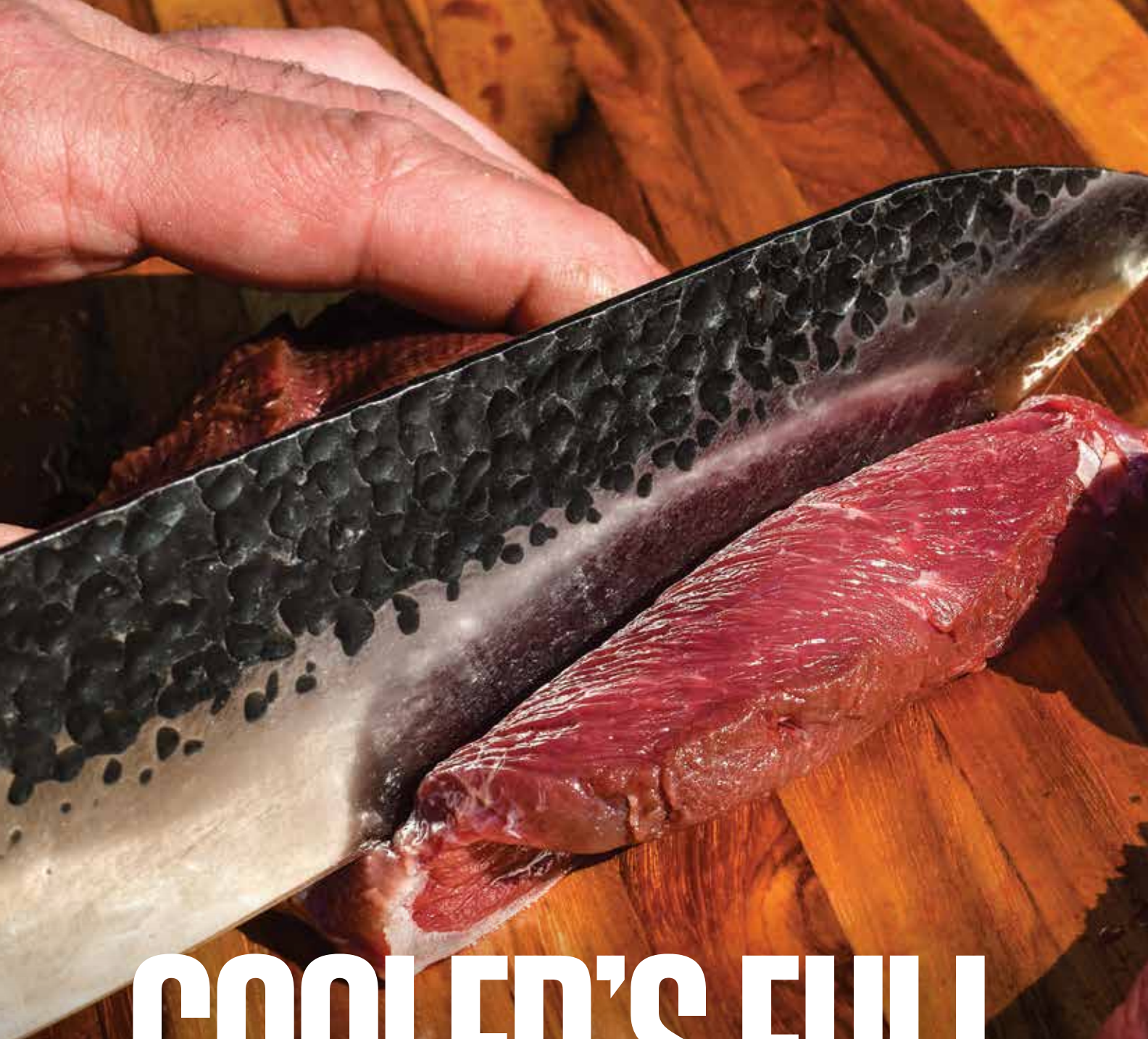

COOLER'S FULL

TAKING CARE OF YOUR VENISON WHEN THE PROCESSOR IS BRIMMING

You can still fill your freezer with high-quality venison, even if getting it processed isn't an option. These do-it-yourself steps can save you money and produce great meals.

by *Brandon Self*

■ When your venison is ready for processing, you can forge a plan on how to handle the cuts.

"Coooler's full." Those are the two most dreaded words for a hunter who has harvested a deer and expects to drop it off at a processor. But they don't have to carry dread. With a sharp knife and a little will power, you can provide your family with high-quality venison cuts in your home. And with a few pieces of good equipment, you can have a full-fledged processing facility that can save you money through time.

As the owner of a venison processor for more than 15 years, and having worked in the business for almost 25 years, I've seen every possible scenario between a customer and business. The last month of the season is the toughest on a processor, as everyone needs to meet their quota for meat in the freezer, and time is running out. Cooler space is limited, and a deer carcass typically needs to hang about 14 days for the aging process to occur. Balancing time and space is a delicate act for the business. As a customer, you should have a backup plan in case this happens.

■ To truly age venison, the carcass needs to hang head-down for 10 to 14 days in 35- to 45-degree temperatures.

FIRST STEPS

First, always remove the animal's entrails immediately after you harvest it, if possible, and have a place to keep the carcass cool until you have time to process it. That can be a spot in a friend's walk-in cooler. Or if the temperature is consistently colder than 46 degrees, you can hang it in a tree wrapped in netting to prevent bugs and other critters from damaging it. The other option is to keep the meat in a cooler packed with ice, and then drain and replace the ice every other day until it's time to process the meat. To truly age deer meat, I've found that it needs to hang head-down for 10 to 14 days in 35- to 45-degree temperatures with good air circulation around it. I recommend that you keep deer meat in a cooler packed with ice no longer than three to five days. Keeping the meat cool is of the utmost importance for the best product.

MAKING THE CUTS

When the carcass is ready for processing, you can develop a plan on how to handle the cuts. With a small investment in extra equipment, such as a grinder and cuber, you can make every cut and product a processor can make, including ground venison, cubed steak, sausage and stew meat. If you just want to use the knife, you can cut steaks, roasts, stew meat and any whole cut. A good meat saw is always a great addition to your processing arsenal, as it will help break down the animal.

KEEPING IT

Finally, after your meat has been processed, it must be frozen. A good freezer paper with a plastic coating is great for freezing venison. If you want to improve its longevity, you can invest in a vacuum sealing system for better protection against freezer burn.

Author's note: In the next issue of Whitetail News, I will continue this conversation with a further breakdown of my favorite equipment and the uses of each piece.

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KATE STOLFA | ILLINOIS

■ Illinois youth season — Winter Greens does it again. We also have a picture of a good buck that's still out there. We're probably going to let him go another year, but we're going to see when we get a closer look.

WINTER GREENS DOES IT AGAIN.

HUNTER MOORE | PENNSYLVANIA

■ Ravish Radish worked great to pull this mature Pennsylvania buck in when an early-October cold front hit.

DAVE ANDERSON | MICHIGAN

■ We hunt a high-pressured area in Michigan. We plant a variety of Whitetail Institute products, and it keeps deer in front of us all season. My 9-year-old got our biggest buck during youth season in 2023. His buck was feeding in Beets and Greens. The does we harvest during the late season are plump and have a thick layer of fat on them. Healthy herd. Thanks to Whitetail Institute.

JEREMY JUDY | WEST VIRGINIA

■ I've noticed more deer on my property since using Whitetail Institute products, and definitely more mature buck sightings and photos. Both of my daughters harvested nice bucks on the food plots this fall. I believe a combination of these products and passing younger bucks has played a role in this.

JACKSON SHIFFLETT | VIRGINIA

■ This buck was taken over Whitetail Institute clover and oats.

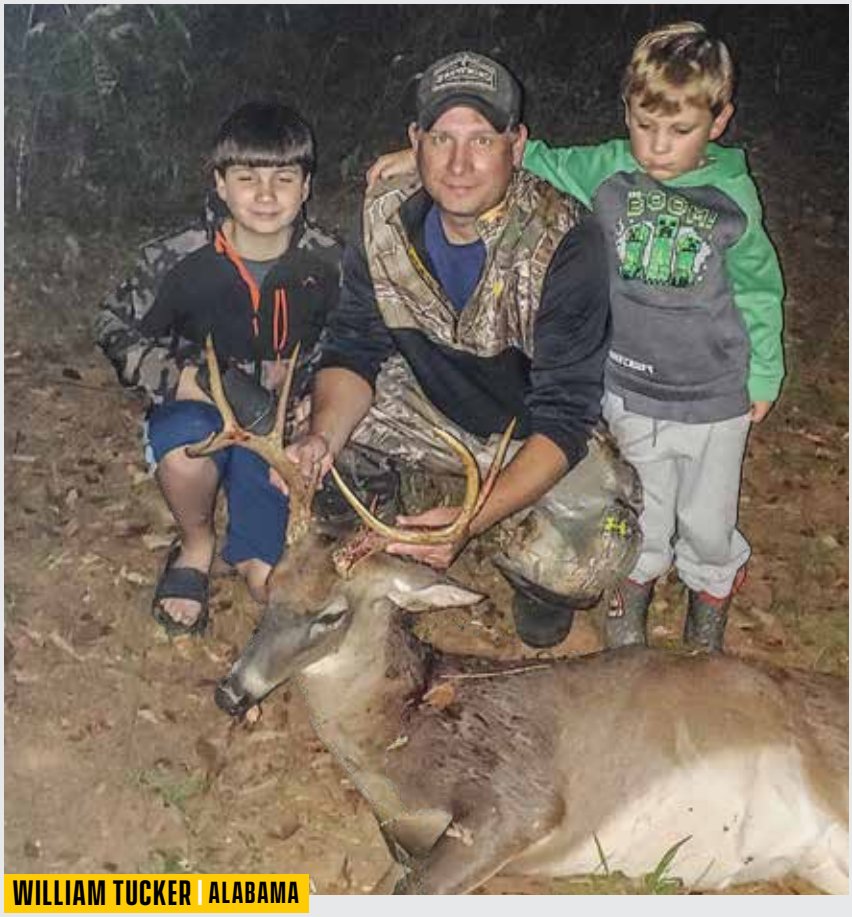
MONSTER TURNIPS, HUGE RADISHES, GIANT WHITETAIL

DREW RUTLEDGE | INDIANA

I would like to send a picture of the archery deer I harvested Nov. 17 in one of your radish and turnip plots. It scored 185-2/8.

TY DUTRO | OHIO

■ Tall Tine Tubers are the best in the business. Couldn't have done it without you.



WILLIAM TUCKER | ALABAMA

■ Whitetail Oats Plus and Beets and Greens are my favorite winter seeds to plant. We have been harvesting nicer bucks since I started planting Whitetail Institute seed mixes.

PETE LONG | PENNSYLVANIA

■ I would like to thank everyone at your company for a job well done. I recently harvested the biggest buck of my life next to a plot of Pure Attraction. And the funny part is, I would not have had a chance at this buck if I would not have missed another big 8-pointer while archery hunting in an Imperial Whitetail Clover plot.

Anyone who is planting food plots and not using your products is wasting their money. Thank you.

DALTON HARRISON | TENNESSEE

■ I harvested one of our target bucks yesterday evening. He couldn't stay out of the Whitetail Institute Edge plot. It was a short tracking job with my hunting buddy Nick Manzella. My phone went dead, so I had to get a picture taken at the processor.

FOOD PLOT WORK PRODUCES FIRST BUCK

After a summer of picking rocks and preparing plots, a thrilling hunt was the perfect reward.

by *Justin Rice*

Marcus Rice, 7, shot his first buck Sept 27, 2023, in Lincoln County, Wisconsin. The buck was killed on a Whitetail Institute Winter Greens plot.

But the story begins before that day.

It's been a serious undertaking having our woods marked and logged three years ago, including having equipment brought in to remove stumps, fix trails and dig the water hole and pond. This was the first year we planted the food plots. Marcus and all the children helped pick rocks, drag the plot, spray and seed. With that work under his belt, Marcus was ready to hunt.

After settling into our blind that evening, we spotted Marcus' buck come up from by the pond. The bank was steep, with the pond being low after a dry summer. The deer fed in the plot a bit but then headed north and went behind the massive stump and brush pile in the middle of the plot. Figuring he was just going to continue feeding that way, I didn't expect it to happen. A few minutes later, he popped back out and resumed feeding. He came to about 30 yards but never presented a good shot, and then worked back behind the pile and out of sight.

I put my head down and said a little prayer to my dad, who has passed. Then I looked back up, and the buck came back out, walking across the plot to us. He walked to 31 yards and stood broadside. Marcus had been shaking and was very excited to that point. But when the buck came and stood, Marcus locked in and focused. I told him, "Whenever you're ready, buddy."

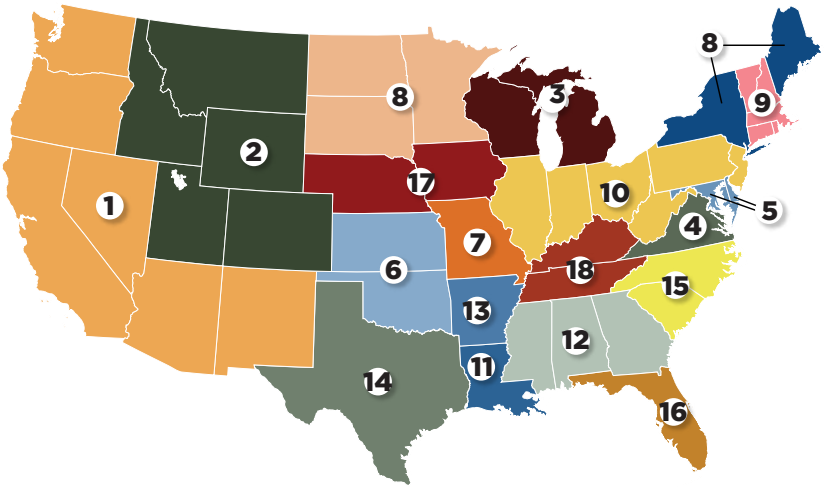
Using Matthew's Mission Sub-1 XR crossbow with an NAP Spitfire Maxx cut-on-contact broadhead, he connected on the shot.

Whack.

The buck dropped, and then tried getting up but just pushed himself with his back legs over the pond bank. The deer made it 40 yards and died at the edge of our pond, which is between two food plots. Marcus was beyond excited. And hugs and knuckles were given. We walked back to the house and called his adult brothers and cousins to help recover the deer, being confident in the shot.

We really were blessed this year, and the Whitetail Institute plots didn't disappoint. In addition to Marcus' deer, my girlfriend's son harvested his first buck from the same blind and plot opening day, and it was a 6-point in full velvet. My daughter is 8 and shot her second buck this past fall on a Whitetail Institute Fusion plot.

FOOD PLOT PLANTING DATES...



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

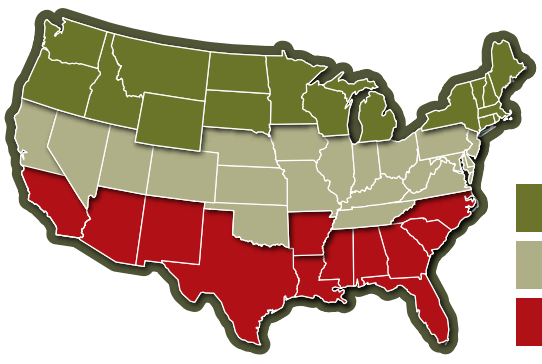
1. **Call for planting dates**
2. Apr 1 - July 1
3. Apr 15 - June 15
   Aug 1 - Sept 1
4. **Coastal:** Feb 1 - Mar 15
   Sept 1 - Oct 15
   Southern Piedmont:
   Feb 15 - Apr 1
   Aug 15 - Oct 1
   Mountain Valleys:
   Mar 1 - Apr 15
   Aug 1 - Sept 15
5. Feb 1 - Apr 1
   Aug 1 - Sept 30
6. Feb 1 - Apr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

PLANTING DATES FOR WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

YOU SAVE $5.02

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **POWERPLANT**

SOLD OUT!
Call 1-800-688-3030 opt1 to pre-book for 2025

50 LBS.-1.5-2-ACRE PLANTING

$84.99 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $90.01
___ (50 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail PowerPlant
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $30.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **PURE ATTRACTION**

39 LBS.-.75-ACRE PLANTING

$84.96 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $114.96
___ (39 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Pure Attraction
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $29.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **WINTER-GREENS**

24 LBS.-4-ACRE PLANTING

$189.98 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $219.96
___ (24 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Winter-Greens
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $39.95

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **"CHIC" MAGNET**

9 LBS.-3-ACRE PLANTING

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

YOU SAVE $34.98

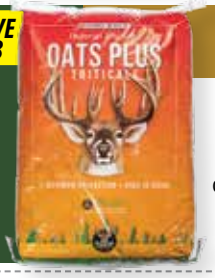
IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **TALL TINE TUBERS**

24 LBS.-4-ACRE PLANTING

$164.98 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $199.96
___ (24 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Tall Tine Tubers
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $10.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **OATS PLUS**



45 LBS.-1/2-ACRE PLANTING

$69.00 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $79.98
___ (45 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail OATS Plus
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $42.98

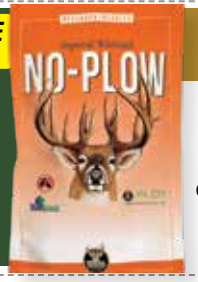
IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **ALFA-RACK PLUS**

33LBS.-2.5-ACRE PLANTING

$246.98 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $289.96
___ (33 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Alfa-Rack Plus
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $30.04

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL **NO-PLOW**



40 LBS.-2.25-ACRE PLANTING

$109.92 *+ tax*
Suggested Retail $139.96
___ (40 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail No-Plow
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $20.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

WINTER PEAS PLUS

44 LBS.-1-ACRE PLANTING

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

YOU SAVE UP TO $16.05

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

KRAZE

$42.96 *(4) pak*
Suggested Retail $52.99
$59.94 *(6) pak*
Suggested Retail $75.99
+ tax
___ (4) 5lb bags @ $42.96
___ (6) 5lb bags @ $59.94
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $15.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

RAVISH RADISH

10 LBS.-1-ACRE PLANTING

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

YOU SAVE UP TO $6.03

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

APPLE OBSESSION

$49.96 *(4) pak*
Suggested Retail $52.99
$69.96 *(6) pak*
Suggested Retail $75.99
+ tax
___ (4) 5lb bags @ $44.96
___ (6) 5lb bags @ $69.96
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE $7.06

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

DESTINATION

36 LBS.-1-ACRE PLANTING

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

YOU SAVE UP TO $20.02

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

IMPACT SOIL AMENDMENT

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

$59.98 *(8.5lbs)*
Suggested Retail $80.00
$149.94 *(25.5lbs)*
Suggested Retail $169.95
___ (8.5lbs) of Impact $59.98
___ (25.5lbs) of Impact $149.94
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE UP TO $11.97

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

30-06 BLOCK

$34.98 *(one block)*
Suggested Retail $39.95
$57.98 *(two blocks)*
Suggested Retail $69.95
+ tax
___ (2) -Pak blocks @ $57.98
___ (1) -Pak blocks @ $34.98
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE UP TO $13.00

ARREST MAX HERBICIDE

• 1 PINT-1 ACRE
• 1/2 GALLON-4 ACRES

$56.99 *(1 pint)*
Suggested Retail $69.99
$159.96 *(1/2 gallon)*
Suggested Retail $169.00
___ pint(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide
___ 1/2 gallon(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE UP TO $11.97

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

MAGNET MIX BLOCK

$32.99 *(one block)*
Suggested Retail $39.95
$57.98 *(two blocks)*
Suggested Retail $69.95
+ tax
___ (2) -Pak blocks @ $57.98
___ (1) -Pak blocks @ $32.99
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

YOU SAVE UP TO $39.02

SLAY HERBICIDE

• 4 OZ.-1 ACRE
• 1 PINT-4 ACRES

$57.98 *(4 oz.-1 acre)*
Suggested Retail $72.99
$129.98 *(1 pint-4 acres)*
Suggested Retail $169.00
___ 4 oz. of Slay Herbicide
___ pint(s) of Slay Herbicide
TOTAL *(Add 7% Sales Tax)*
$_____

SHIP TO: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____
(No PO Boxes, Cannot Ship to Canada)

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Payment: ❑ *Check or Money Order enclosed*

Charge to: ❑ *Visa* ❑ *Mastercard* ❑ *Discover* ❑ *AMEX*

Credit Card #: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Sec.Code: _____

Signature: _____

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Brian Lovett~*Whitetail News Senior Editor*

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME

Shuffling through records of your hunting license history can reveal moments of triumph and failure.

The backpack held a few surprises, including a long-forgotten pair of socks and an unidentified food wrapper from firearms season. But the neatly sealed zip-lock bag really got my attention.

Pressed tight and folded over twice, it contained most of my tags from a previous deer season; a few unused antlerless permits and, regrettably, an unfilled buck license. Years ago, when permits were filled out by hand and harvest tags were made of rugged, built-to-last material and designed to stay with your kill, I probably would have kept the licenses as mementos. Nowadays, of course, they're just paper computer printouts and have lost most of their sentimental value.

Well, maybe most.

Shuffling through the tags, which were from the first or second year I'd hunted our little property, brought back that autumn's happenings in vivid detail. Unfolding the archery buck permit took me to the warm November evening when several does and an obsessed 10-pointer walked in and out of my life at the last minute of shooting light. I'd managed to draw on the buck as it walked directly away from my perch in a black cherry tree, but the deer never stopped or otherwise offered a shot, and soon vanished as quickly as it had appeared. I sat in the dark, mosquitoes buzzing around my head, stunned by what had happened and convinced that a better bowhunter would have put that buck tag to use.

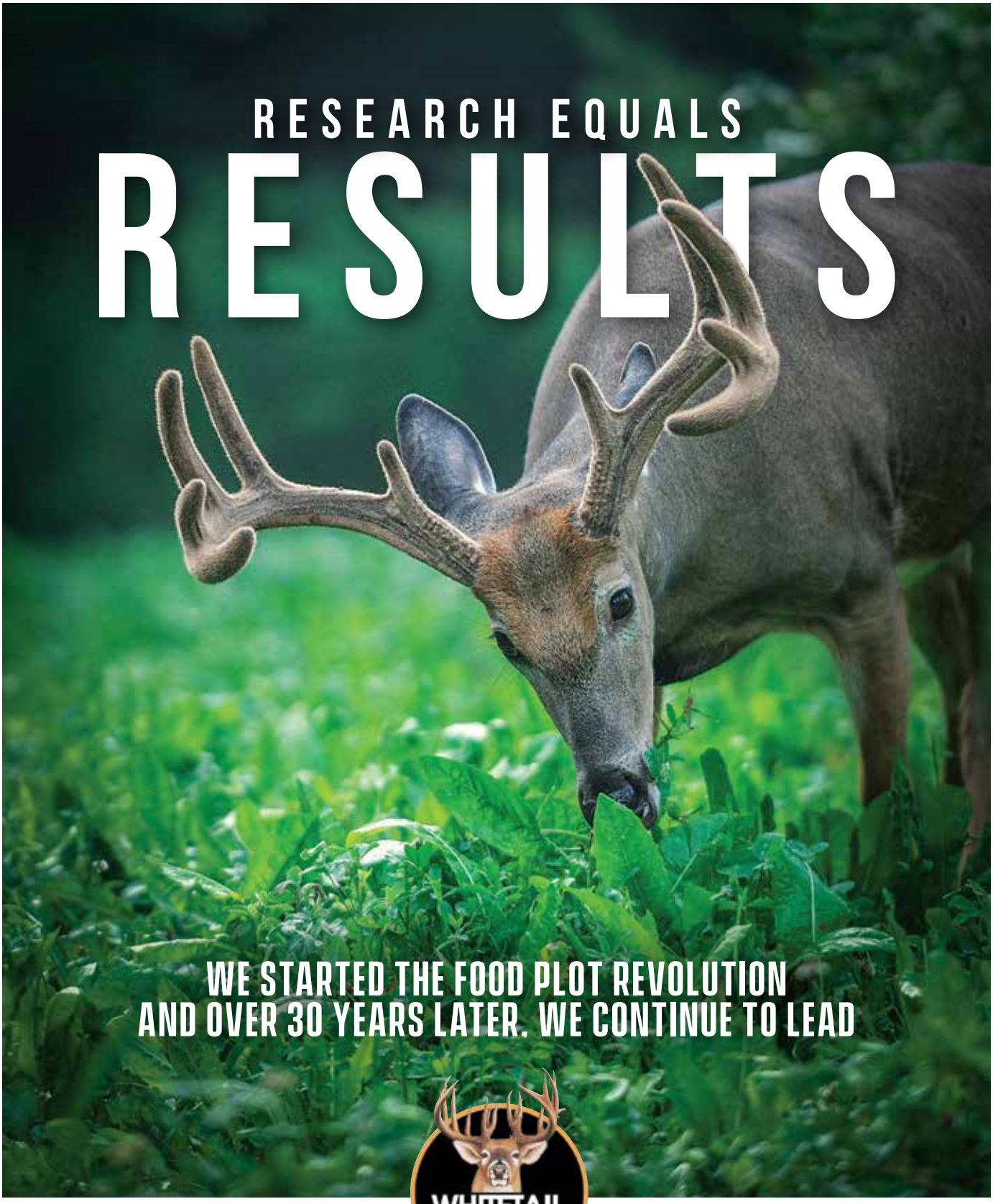
Another scoop into the bag produced a doe tag — one of several that went unfilled that year. No big deal there, as I had shot enough to stock our venison supply for the winter. And if I remembered right, I'd done it in pretty efficient fashion, dropping a fat doe just yards from an old gun stand, leading to a 30-second, 40-yard tracking job and the easiest recovery you'll ever experience in that hilly, timbered part of the world.

The unfilled firearms buck tag under the doe permit grabbed my attention next. How close I'd come to punching that several consecutive days during gun season. But with a missed chance here and a poor shot opportunity there — intermixed with many young bucks and long periods of nothing — the tag remained unfilled and stayed right there in the zip-lock.

Minutes into my daydreaming session, I realized I'd basically re-lived that entire deer season. How many unused tags from other years did I have stuffed into pockets or jammed into desk drawers? A bunch, I'm sure. And what about all those rumpled Tyvek permits, ancient metal harvest bands and stained, crumpled shreds of paper from successful hunts? I was pretty sure rummaging through those would let me recall dozens of days afield spanning several decades.

Nostalgia aside, and regardless of whether I'd punched them, the tags brought home an important notion. None of them promised success. They had simply given me the chance to try; to keep hunting for that buck, doe, gobbler or whatever until the date printed on the permit expired. And no matter what that tag had cost, that seemed like a pretty good deal. As long as that permit remained valid, I was part of a lucky hunting club; a guy who could get outside and participate in a ritual as old as humankind. Sure, the filled tags evoked better memories and made for better stories, but even the whiffs served as sort of an informal hunting journal through years afield. Maybe that's why I used to save my old licenses and permits. They really weren't worth anything to anyone else, save perhaps as an interesting bit of trivia. But they had been extremely valuable to me, especially as those hunts have begun to fade in my mental rearview mirror.

More tags began arriving recently (via printable PDFs, of course), as our new license year began. I clipped them apart and arranged them in a drawer, noting when I'd get to use each one. Some will get filled. Others won't. And I won't know which is which until after this coming season has played out. And for that reason, those thin paper tags are pretty darn valuable indeed.

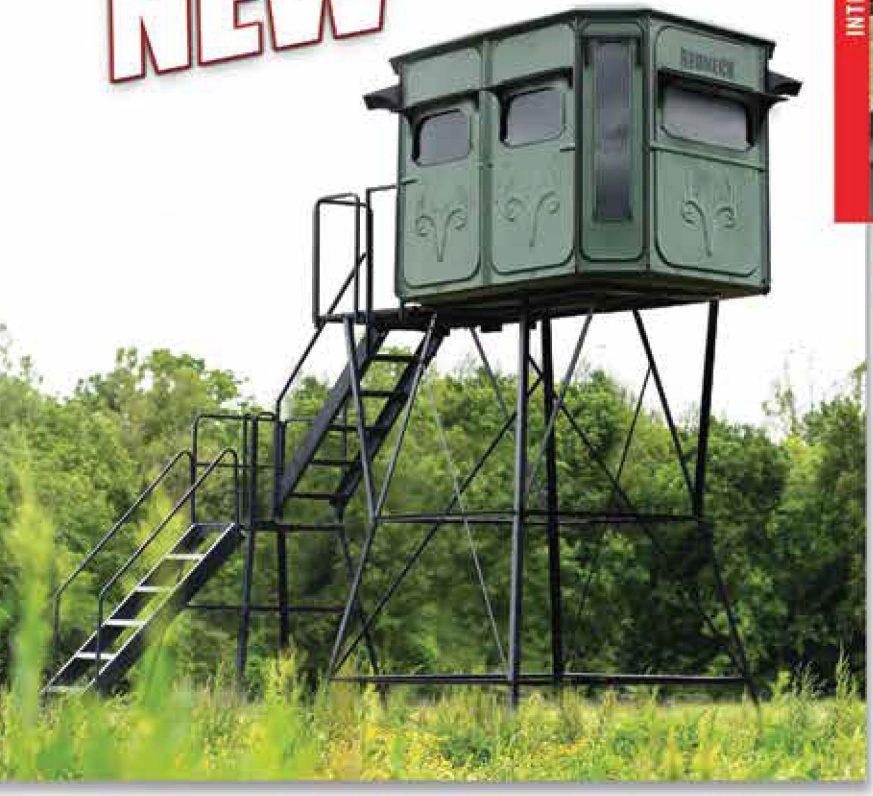


WHITETAIL INSTITUTE
239 Whitetail Trail, Pintlala, AL 36043

*Whitetail Institute's extensive research and development network includes deer hunters, universities, farmers and seed producers around the world allowing us to discover new and improved forages. Our research, development and testing is conducted within our system of Certified Research Stations and field testers across North America. This unique process lets us subject our forage blends to the harshest critics of all – Mother Nature, real hunters and wild, free-ranging deer all across North America.

VISIBILITY TO THE MAX...

NEW



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Weight :	550 lbs
Door Size :	30" Wide X 63" High
Exterior Size :	77" Wide X 100" Deep X 82" High
Interior Size :	70" Wide X 94" Deep X 80" High
Door Window :	18" Wide X 10" High
Front Window(s) :	36" Wide X 14" High
Side Window(s) :	25" Wide X 14" High
Corner Window(s) :	10" Wide X 46" High
	36" Height from floor to bottom of horizontal windows

ON 10FT DELUXE STAND

THE NEW 6 X 8 GAME CHANGER PLATINUM 360° BLIND TAKES VISIBILITY TO THE MAX...

The Game Changer changes the way you hunt... Big enough to comfortably fit 3-4 adults, this blind is the ultimate solution to being able to scan a wide area while hunting with multiple hunters. Having more room to accommodate more helpful eyes to spot your trophy of a lifetime, the Game Changer really sets the bar high.

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. If there is the need to sleep in the blind to catch that big buck at first light without getting busted, the Game Changer has ample enough space to accommodate a small cot or air mattress!

ON 10FT STAIRWAY

FEATURES

- Made from long-lasting fiberglass
- Vertical and horizontal tempered, automotive glass windows for bow, crossbow, or gun hunting
- Closed cell foam insulated ceiling, acoustical foam covered walls for superior sound control and insulation
- 3 highly functional consoles pre-installed to help organize your hunting gear
- Built in shelves and gun holders
- Marine-carpeted foam floor liner
- Available with Deluxe 5ft, 10ft Stands and 5ft, 10ft Stairway Stands

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