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PREPARE NOW FOR GREAT FALL PLOTS

Preparing for fall planting requires thoughtful planning and careful preparation. Begin by testing your soil well in advance to allow ample time for adjustments based on the results. Soil testing is a simple, cost-effective process that can save you money in the long run. Additionally, lab results integrate seamlessly into the PlotPerfection app for easy planning. However, many of us tend to procrastinate, and before we know it, planting season is upon us.

If you have a perennial plot of Imperial Clover, Fusion or Alfa-Rack that is several years old and showing signs of decline, it might be time to consider crop rotation. Transitioning your plot to a fall annual such as Pure Attraction or

Whitetail Forage Oats can revitalize your soil and improve overall productivity. Crop rotation is a proven best practice that enhances soil health, reduces the risk of disease and promotes stronger, more fertile land for future growth. The fall annual crop will benefit from the high nitrogen left behind by the perennial crop, saving you additional money on nitrogen fertilizer.

I'm a big fan of diversity in food plots. This fall, consider planting strips of WinterGreens, Beets N Greens, Tall Tine Tubers or Ravish Radish. These options not only provide variety but also deliver vital late-season nutrition, which is especially crucial in Northern climates, where winters can be harsh

and unforgiving. These strips are easy to plant. I recommend a width equal to one spreader pass or drilling down one side of the plot. This doesn't take much time but adds significant diversity to the plot.

I encourage you to involve a younger person in all aspects of fall planting. They are the future stewards of the land, and the time we spend teaching them about food plotting, soil management and hunting traditions will ensure these skills are passed down for generations to come.

— William



Set Your Sights on Brillion Farm Equipment

Brillion Farm Equipment offers a full-line of equipment suited for food plot enthusiasts. The Food Plot Seeder

is an all-in-one solution for food plots handling seedbed preparation, seed metering and placement, as well as seedbed finishing. Brillion's ground driven

Till 'N Seed" shreds existing food plots and plants numerous food plot seed mixtures. All products are backed by Brillion's years as an industry leader in the Seeder and Pulverizer industry!

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Model BPSBA-8**

The Till 'N Seed is available in 8' pull-type or three-point hitch configurations and 6' three-point hitch models.

**Food Plot Seeder
Model FPSB-6**



RESEARCH EQUALS RESULTS

**WE STARTED THE FOOD PLOT REVOLUTION
AND OVER 30 YEARS LATER, WE CONTINUE TO LEAD**



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*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.



Slipshod planting practices that don't place forage seeds in intimate contact with soil particles create a high-risk condition for food plot failure. You can do better.

Starting out, my major as an undergraduate was entomology. That changed in graduate school to agronomy, the science of crop production.

As an undergraduate, I toiled through mind-numbing vertebrate and invertebrate zoology classes that mercifully redefined my career path. Graduate school further clarified my interests — as it should. As a 27-year-old Ph.D. student, I took several introductory agronomy classes as electives to make up for those missed in my previous undergraduate major. In retrospect, there is an interesting difference in information learned through the lens of a 19-year-old sophomore compared to that of a 27-year-old graduate student. Consider the phrase soil-seed contact, which was repeated during every lecture in one of my catch-up general agronomy classes. As a teenage sophomore, I would have been indifferent to that phrase. However, as an

older graduate student, something about the phrase piqued my interest. Forty-some years later, I know why. For any cropping system, the potential for success is determined by the conditions when crops are planted — specifically soil-seed contact.

The context of the phrase soil-seed contact is fundamentally important in food plots, as a goal and a necessary step for forage crop establishment. To germinate reliably, crop seeds need to be surrounded by and in intimate contact with soil particles. That's the case for all crop seeds and is highly problematic for forage crop seeds, which are small. Germination and seedling survival will be poor if a forage crop seed is surrounded by excessive amounts of cover crop debris (plant material), located in an air pocket of a cloddy soil, or simply lying on the soil surface. It's that simple. The challenge comes in achieving soil-seed contact. Variations in soil physical properties and a lack of tools that

produce soil-seed contact create difficulty. As you read this article, please accept the fundamental truth that forage crop seeds need to be in direct contact and completely surrounded by soil particles. No set of food plot conditions are the same. Look for a common-sense solution to achieve that goal based on your situation.

SOIL FACTORS

Soils have highly variable physical properties, including texture. Sandy soils are categorized as coarse textured, made of large particles. Clay soils are fine textured, with small particles. Silt soils have particle sizes between those extremes. Quantitative tests can identify the soil texture. Do not be fooled by the color of a soil and whether a soil is sand-, silt- or clay-based on color.

Soil texture creates conditions that directly affect soil-seed contact. A sandy soil containing large particles makes that soil

prone to being fluffy after tillage. Planting small forage seeds — such as clover, alfalfa and chicory — on fluffy sandy soil creates a risky condition. Tiny seeds tend to migrate downward in a fluffy sandy soil and end up being too deep for reliable seedling emergence. Additionally, small seeds in a fluffy soil are not in direct contact with soil particles because of air spaces, which results in poor soil-seed contact.

■ A cultipacker uses an array of cast-iron ridged press wheels that flatten clods and remove voids in the soil. The ridged wheels also press the seed into the soil, creating optimized soil-seed contact.



After seedbed preparation, a sandy soil needs to settle before seeding forage crops. One strategy when establishing forages on sandy soils is to wait for rain to settle the soil before seeding. We know the futility and maddening frustration of waiting on a rain. A better alternative is to use a cultipacker to mechanically settle the sandy soil. A cultipacker is a pulled implement made of many cast-iron ridged rollers. The weight of the cultipacker plus the focused downward pressure by the ridges on the rollers settles the fluffy soil, flattens clods and removes air pockets. A cultipacker can be any width; small enough to be pulled by an ATV or UTV, or larger sizes pulled by tractors. A cultipacker can be a stand-alone implement or mounted in tandem with other implements. Some all-in-one food plot seeders have an array of cultipacker wheels in front or behind the seed hopper. In this case, the front cultipacker wheels settle the sandy soil in the seedbed, and the rear wheels lightly press the sowed seed into the soil.

In contrast to sandy soils, clay soils present almost opposite challenges. On finely textured clay soils, a cultipacker is commonly operated twice, before seeding and after seeding. Clay soils tend to form clods when harrowed. The first pass with the cultipacker busts apart clods and compresses large voids in the soil before seeding. This ensures optimized soil-seed contact. Because of the small particle size of clay soils, that soil texture is prone to becoming compacted, and small forage seeds end up being stuck on the soil surface, creating a risky condition for crop establishment. The second pass with the

cultipacker lightly presses the seeds into the soil. The ridged wheels press the seeds into the soil without compaction.

SOIL-SEED CONTACT IN NO-TILLAGE SYSTEMS

Although Whitetail Institute recommends strategic tillage to prepare seedbeds for food plot forages, no-tillage food plots are certainly an option when you use specialized seeders and adequate tractor horsepower. Scaled-down no-till grain drills (agricultural lingo for a forage seeder) use devices mounted before the seed box to part cover crop debris and slice an opening in the soil for precise seed placement. Other attachments press soil around the seed, which achieves ideal soil-seed contact. When specialized no-till seeders are operated correctly, small forage seeds are sowed with minimum soil disruption and reliably establish food plots. The key is using the right equipment. Simply sowing forage seed into existing crop debris or onto a non-prepared seedbed increases risk of failure because of inadequate soil-seed contact.

SOIL-SEED CONTACT: REDUCING RISK

In my previous career as the state's peanut specialist, I became friends with an experienced and highly regarded peanut farmer. I stopped by one day while he was struggling to harvest peanuts that were planted along the contour (a soil conservation practice in which crop rows run

parallel to the contour of the field and not necessarily straight). Excessive peanut vine growth and curved rows made the harvest frustrating for my friend that year. When I stopped, he had lost the row pattern among the maze of curved rows. When I walked up, my exasperated friend blurted out, "You know what pressure is? Pressure is when you borrow \$2 million at the beginning of the crop year and have to pay it back later that same year." Despite my many years of experience in agriculture, I was humbled by the stark reality of what farmers face every season. That haunting comment still resonates with me. Farming is often portrayed in a nostalgic light, but it is foremost a business — an inherently risky business. From that point, my guiding philosophy was to help farmers reduce risk. That philosophy continues today as I work with food plotters to help reduce the risk of food plot failure. That mindset begins with recommending reliable and proven practices for food plot establishment that optimize soil-seed contact. The moment a forage crop seed is placed in the soil, the high-water mark of food plot potential is established. Slipshod planting practices that do not place forage seed in intimate contact with soil particles create a high-risk condition for food plot failure. We can do better than that.



ADVANCED FOOD PLOTTING

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

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

PERENNIAL GRASS CONTROL IN THE CONVERSION OF GRASS PASTURES INTO FOOD PLOTS

Combine herbicide treatment, tillage and careful management of the seedbed to convert grass pastures into productive food plots.

Converting grass pastures into food plots can be a great way to improve soil fertility, increase wildlife habitat and grow crops that benefit humans and animals. However, perennial grasses become troublesome when converted from pasture to food plots, and control is a monumental challenge. Perennial grasses are tenacious plants that are often well-established and can be highly competitive weeds with other crops. Here's a strategy for managing perennial grass control during the conversion process.

1. EVALUATE THE GRASS SPECIES PRESENT: IDENTIFY THE TYPES OF GRASSES

Perennial grasses are not equally difficult to manage or control. For example, tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass can be particularly difficult to control because of the plants' growth habits, but other grasses, such as timothy, might be less competitive and easier to manage. Consider the perennial grass's growth habit. Some grasses spread aggressively by rhizomes (underground stems), such as tall fescue, and stolons (above-ground stems), such as bermudagrass. Others spread by seed. This can influence your choice of control methods.

2. USE HERBICIDES TO CONTROL PERENNIAL GRASSES

Herbicides are often the most effective tool for killing established perennial grasses, but timing and proper application are critical.

Glyphosate: A non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate can be used to kill the grasses before seeding your food plot. It



■ The picture shows a grazing cage in a planting of Imperial Whitetail Clover with a nurse crop of Oats Plus.

works by inhibiting an enzyme in the shikimic acid pathway that the plant needs

for growth. Glyphosate is systemic, so it moves throughout the plant, including the roots. Adding broadleaf herbicides 2,4-D and/or triclopyr to glyphosate will improve broadleaf weed control. None of the herbicides have significant soil residual activity, so they can be used a few weeks before planting.

Apply glyphosate in late summer or early fall, when perennial grasses are actively growing and have reached full leaf development. Fall glyphosate applications capitalize on the period when grasses are translocating photosynthates downward to the rhizomes before dormancy, and glyphosate basically hitches a ride to the rhizomes, thereby improving perennial grass control. Alternatively, you can use it in early spring before food plot plants are seeded but after grasses have greened up.

Follow label instructions carefully. It's important to use a sufficiently high con-

centration to effectively kill the grass but avoid overspray to non-target areas.

Other selective herbicides: Depending on the specific grass species and crops you plan to plant; other selective herbicides might be more appropriate. Products such as Arrest Maxx can target specific grasses while leaving broadleaf plants unharmed, which might be useful if you're planning to plant legumes or other broadleaf crops.

3. RESEEDING AND PLANTING

When the grass has been controlled, you'll need to prepare the soil for planting. When converting a perennial grass pasture to food plot, it's preferable to plant a broadleaf forage for food plots so volunteer grasses can easily be removed using Arrest Maxx herbicide. Legumes such as Imperial Whitetail Clover, Alfa-Rack, Chic Magnet and Fusion are good choices that can be planted in fall or spring. They can also help outcompete any remaining grass by providing dense, ground-cover-

FOOD PLOT PLANTING DATES FOR

IMPERIAL CLOVER, NO-PLOW, FUSION, CHIC MAGNET EDGE AND EXTREME.

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

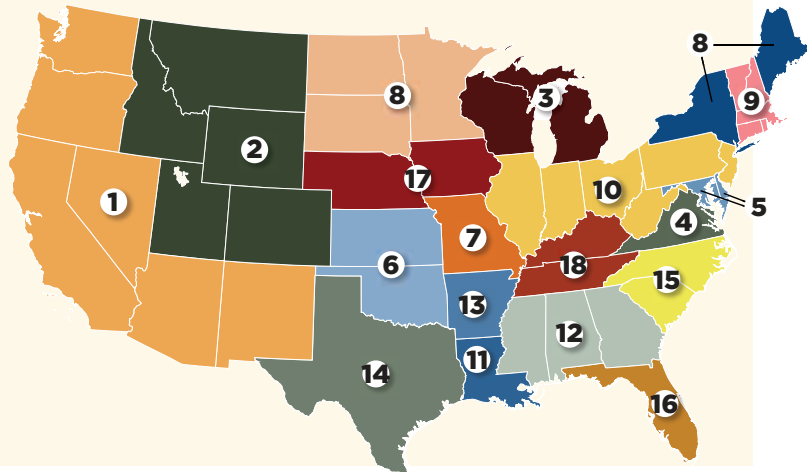
14 **North:** Sept 15 - Nov 15
South: Sept 25 - Nov 15

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



ing growth. If you want an annual crop, Beets and Greens, Ravish Radish, Tall Tine Turnips and Wintergreens can be planted and sprayed with Arrest Maxx for any surviving pasture grasses.

4. ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING YOUR FOOD PLOT

Planting: Before doing anything, test the soil to determine its pH level, nutrient content and any deficiencies. Many times, soils in old pastures have not been well managed, making them nutrient deficient and acidic. These conditions are better corrected before food plot establishment instead of afterward. Based on the results of the soil test, amend the soil with lime (if pH is too low) and fertilizer to correct nutrient deficiencies. This will create a better environment for food plot crops to grow. Follow the recommended planting dates and methods for your chosen crops. For example, cool-season crops can be planted in late summer or early fall, but warm-season crops should be planted after the last frost in spring.

Monitor and maintain: Read the signs by keeping an eye on the food plot during the growing season. Control emerging weeds

and grasses by spot-spraying with selective herbicides or hand-pulling, and be prepared to reseed if bare spots develop.

Use grazing cages as a diagnostic and management tool: Put out grazing cages. You can do this with wooden stakes, hog wire and zip ties. This will give you a good common-sense approach to look at any browsing issues. You might also want to use grazing cages to help determine the deer population, using browsing pressure on food plots.

5. CONSIDER THE TIMING OF THE CONVERSION

Late summer to fall conversion: If you are converting a pasture into a food plot in fall, you can take advantage of the growing season to establish your plot before winter sets in. Apply herbicides in late summer, and then plant food crops in fall.

Spring conversion: If you convert in spring, you might need to focus more on early season herbicide applications and soil preparation to ensure the site is ready for planting by late spring or early summer.

6. LONG-TERM GRASS CONTROL

Rotation and diversity: In the long term, consider rotating crops to minimize the

chance of perennial grasses re-establishing. For example, if you have planted a brassica mix in fall, you could rotate to Imperial Clover or Alfa-Rack Plus in spring, and later to a corn or soybean crop. One of the benefits of rotating crops in food plots is the ability to control weeds easier in one crop compared to other crops. Old pasture grasses are inherently difficult to control, and crop rotation might be necessary to deal with the old pastures.

Regular monitoring: Keep an eye on your food plot, and control any returning grasses or weeds early before they become a problem.

CONCLUSION

By combining herbicide treatment, tillage and careful management of the seedbed, you can successfully convert a grass pasture into a productive food plot. Be mindful of your timing, as it plays a critical role in controlling perennial grasses and ensuring your food plot is established and productive.





EVERY ACRE COUNTS

Good stewardship requires that you take every step needed to bring your land to its maximum potential as a deer factory. And every acre makes a difference.

■ **Text and Photos by Bill Winke**

I continually study aerial photos of my farm to make sure I haven't missed anything. What follows are the things I have learned to maximize every acre.

In no way is this process a straight line from Point A to Point B, because we all learn as we go forward. Things change, and we need to constantly re-evaluate progress. I hope this article will at least get you thinking about your property and the steps you can take to make every acre better.

IN THE TIMBER

I'm going back to a farm I owned for 18 years in southern Iowa as an early backdrop for this discussion. When I bought that farm, I noticed that the timber was open. I even remember the

previous owners, an older couple, telling me how "pretty" it looked. Of course, I didn't really want pretty, and what I did to the place after buying it was anything but pretty — except to the deer.

Most deer managers understand that by opening the canopy of a forest, they permit more light to reach the forest floor, encouraging plant growth. The result is better browse and better security cover for deer. Sunlight can make a dramatic difference, as I learned. But there is more to it than that — which I will get to soon.

My first step in dealing with the open timber was to engage in a timber stand improvement project that spanned five years and encompassed every timbered acre on the farm. I hired the work done, because cutting thousands of trees

through several years didn't fit into my work schedule. Since then, I have sold this farm and bought another, where I've done much of the cutting myself. There is no doubt that hiring it done is safer and the best route for most landowners. Cutting down trees is inherently dangerous, and it is a ton of work.

Mistake No. 1: I made a few mistakes on that first farm that I remedied on the second. My first step should have been a commercial harvest of mature timber. That makes the most sense — get at least some valuable stuff out before you turn the rest of the timber into matchsticks.

A few species are in high demand in just about every market, and if you have those trees, it makes sense to harvest at least some of them before the heavy TSI starts. I started my TSI work two years before I sold any commercial timber, so it was a bit more difficult for the cutters to get through all the downed junk in a



■ Land management doesn't go from Point A to Point B, because we learn as we go forward. Managers must constantly re-evaluate the progress.

take the marketable lower-grade pallet species, as well. These are less valuable trees, but they make up a big part of the canopy.

There were plenty of remaining nice mid-sized oaks, so removing the larger junk trees (these are typically ash, elm, cottonwood, hickory and hackberry where I live) would have benefited those trees and increased my income while reducing my TSI time.

Mistake No. 2: When full sunlight reaches the forest floor, it causes a flush of new growth. What flourishes is an extension of what is largely already growing there but struggling to find a foothold. Maybe that's oak saplings, but maybe it is an invasive plant, such as bush honeysuckle. If you have invasives eking out an existence along the forest floor, they will go crazy when you let the sunlight in. That can be a huge problem.

I made that mistake on the first farm in a few areas. I lost probably five or six acres to invasives within the first five years after TSI. I needed to deal with those plants before the cutting started or as a part of the early process. Now, I just have an extra person in the crew whose job it is to stay ahead of the cutters and spray the undesirable plants. That has really helped. The addition of burning to the management plan has also im-

proved the quality of the browse that came in after we opened the canopy.

Modifying the quality of the browse is a long-term goal and one you should monitor every year. The discussion of how exactly to spray and how exactly to burn is beyond the scope of this article but just be aware these will likely be critical tasks in your long-term success.

Going back to the southern Iowa farm, just two years after the TSI, the forest looked completely different. Some real benefits occurred. One of these was improved security cover and a dramatic increase in browse. Better browse means better deer — healthier deer.


The second benefit is also important: The thicker cover made it easier to sneak around the farm without alerting deer. The farm hunted way bigger. If deer can see you coming and going from 300 yards away, your property is going to burn out quickly. It is going to hunt a lot bigger if they can't see you.

A friend of mine who specializes in creating thickets on otherwise open pasture farms claims he can hold a mature buck per 40 acres of thicket cover. That seems incredible to me. My rate was definitely not that high when using TSI to thicken existing timber. However, I noticed that I held more mature bucks on my farm after the TSI than before.

few areas. They complained a little, but ultimately, I still got fair market price for the logs, so it worked out.

A good forester (a state forester or a private consulting forester) can help you fine-tune a harvest plan to meet your goals and later to help you outline the perfect TSI plan. There might also be funding available to help you pay for the TSI. The forester should know more about that, but if you want to do independent research, start by asking the representatives at your county Natural Resources Conservation Service (soil conservation) office.

When I sold my first logs, I was green and didn't understand the process. I let the timber buyer (I didn't hire a forester) talk me into taking just the highest-grade mature oak and walnut. I should have also required him to take some of the imperfect trees. And I should have pressed to have him



■ The author made a few mistakes on his first farm. The first step should have been a commercial harvest of mature timber.

I am guessing the bucks don't interact as much when the cover is thick, so the dominance battle isn't forced as often.

The final benefit of a good TSI program is less obvious and relates more to your grandchildren than to you. If you are serious about regenerating certain species of trees on your property, there is only one way you can do it — direct sunlight. Oaks, for example, will not regenerate well in the shade. The seed-

lings need maximum sunlight to grow and flourish.

TSI has a learning curve. Here are three critical things I learned in the five years after that project. First, I learned that I was not aggressive enough when I started. I didn't trust the outcome, so I cut fewer trees than I should have. You must create what I call mini clearcuts to make any real difference. You must get sunlight to the ground, and that means


you need openings. Again, it is best to hire a forester to help you make these decisions right from the beginning.

Second, I learned the value of eliminating invasive species first, but I have already gone into some detail on that, so I will keep moving. In some areas the forest floor is so open that you can't tell what will respond to the sunlight when the canopy opens up. In these areas, I often ended up with grass. I had some

WANT TO TAKE YOUR PROPERTY TO THE NEXT LEVEL?



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“NOTE ANY AREAS THAT AREN'T PRODUCING OPTIMAL FOOD OR COVER. COMING UP WITH A PLAN TO ADDRESS THOSE AREAS WILL BE A LOT OF FUN.”

small dispersed grassy openings growing in the middle of my timber in areas that had a totally bare forest floor at the time of the TSI cut. Those slowly filled in with small trees and underbrush, but that slow regeneration made for some interesting diversity, for sure.

Managing existing timber for a future sale is another big part of creating value on your land. Again, TSI does a really good job of promoting the growth rate of the trees you don't cut down. Overall, a good TSI program makes a huge difference on any timber property.

OPEN GROUND

When deciding what to do with open ground, food usually takes priority over cover. Determine how many food plot acres you need. As a rule of thumb, shoot for roughly 5 percent of the property invested in year-round food sources (food plots). Eventually, you might determine

that you need more, so try to keep that in mind as you plan out the use of your open ground.

Even if you are forced to plant some of your plots in marginal soils to meet your acre goals, the production you get from these acres is still important. Whitetail Institute has an increasing number of seed blend options that will produce well in poorer soils. Proper fertility and pH will also help to rev up poor soil, so be sure to get a soil test done before laying out your final plan.

Assuming you still have some open ground left after meeting your food plot goals, you must decide what to do with it. Obviously, these acres aren't needed for food, so they might as well be income (commercial crop ground) or cover. If the dirt and terrain are good enough, there is likely a neighboring farmer who will gladly cash rent that area from you for crop production.

More than likely, the good ground is already being farmed, so rather than figuring out how to get more commercial acres, you might look at some of CRP programs that promote long-term habitat, such as planting hardwood trees. It's an option you definitely want to consider.

ESTABLISHING COVER ON MARGINAL GROUND

You need a plan for the open ground that's beyond your food plot needs and too marginal to farm. Don't wait for nature to reclaim old pastureland. That might take 40 years. Instead, help the process. Finding something to plant that produces the best possible cover and browse in the least possible time is the goal. There are three options.

First, you can plant switchgrass, or a mix of native warm season grasses and forbs, to produce bedding cover. I have planted switchgrass and found that it can be fickle to establish. It has not been

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■ You can really improve your property by just adding a few small orchards of fruit trees.



well-used by deer in areas where I have planted it. Where deer have options, in my experience, they tend to choose traditional timber habitat. I don't plant switchgrass anymore, preferring instead to plant the kind of permanent habitat to which deer gravitate.

The second option is to plant seedling trees and shrubs in these marginal open acres. You can often buy these in bulk from a state nursery. After planting tens of thousands of trees in my life, using almost every conceivable method, I have been generally disappointed with

the result in areas with moderate to high deer densities. But I have been much more satisfied in areas with lower densities. So, deer density has a huge impact on survival rate when reforesting using bare root stock.

If you are serious about planting seedlings, it's a very labor-intensive job. You have to handle the seedlings carefully, keeping the roots wet until they are planted. Make sure they have complete root-to-soil contact (no air pockets) and that the root is pointed downward and not forming a J shape. And then, it will

really improve survival if you can water them right away and keep hitting them during dry times that first year.

If you are only doing an acre here and there, you can do all these things and tube the trees for optimal survival and growth. But if you're trying to reforest bigger areas, this method will become way too much work and get expensive. For example, I planted 40 apple trees one spring, and that proved to be very successful because I was able to give each tree the TLC it needed. But there is a big difference between babysitting 40 trees versus 4,000 trees. Just realize that bare root stock plantings can fail if conditions aren't good.

Now, when reforesting larger areas, I take a different approach. I do what's called direct nut-seeding. I have done this on about 75 to 80 acres during the past 18 years. Instead of planting young trees, I plant seeds — five bushels of acorns (from various species of oaks) and one bushel of walnuts per acre. That amounts to roughly 20,000-plus seeds per acre, or roughly one seed for every 2 square feet. Through the years, my germination and survival rate have run anywhere from roughly 10 percent up to closer to 50-plus percent.

Direct nut-seeding requires some experience to pull off successfully, but I can summarize the process and get you

off on the right foot. There's also plenty of information online to help you. Here's the way I have done it. First, spray the existing grass and weeds with glyphosate in midsummer. Then roughly a week before you expect to get your acorns, prepare the ground by tilling. I just use an old disk and run over it a couple of times.

Broadcast the seeds (we have always done this by hand, throwing them out of a tub on the back of a side-by-side or on a tractor-mounted implement). Immediately disk the seeds into a depth of roughly 1 to 3 inches. Don't let them sit on top of the ground for long, and don't bury them too deep. It works best if you can plant right before a rain to get the acorns settled into the dirt. The key to white oak regeneration is quality seed, so make sure to get acorns that have freshly dropped and get them into the ground as soon as possible.

For the first two years, you need to spray the planting area with a weed killer, such as Oust XP and Pendulum, to reduce competition. By Year 3, you can just let the planting area go, and the trees will

compete well enough with the weeds to hold their own. They grow at roughly a foot per year in average soil. This method will also work with other tree and shrub seeds if you can find them.

Finding the seeds might be the hardest part. I got a list of consulting foresters from a sawmill and called several of them to find one who would collect the acorns I needed. Your state forester might also know someone who does this collection work.

Acorns are expensive, so if you can collect your own with a simple roller basket, you will save a lot of money and will likely get the freshest possible seed. Perfect timing is not as critical with acorns from the red oak family because they germinate in spring, but you need to get white oaks in the ground as soon after they hit the ground as possible.

ones growing on my own land. But also consider plantings of other fruit species, including pears and even plums. You can really improve your property by just adding a few small orchards.

CONCLUSION

Grab an aerial photo of your property and walk the ground from end to end. Note any areas that aren't producing optimal food or cover. Coming up with a plan to address those areas will be a lot of fun, and the results will transform your investment. You likely bought the property at least in part for deer hunting, and you have a lot invested in terms of time and money. Good stewardship now requires that you take all the steps needed to bring the land to its maximum potential as a deer factory. Make every acre count.



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GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP

Developing and managing hunting property isn't rocket science, but it requires a solid game plan and hard work — and sometimes, a helping hand.

■ by **Gordy Krahn**



When Josh Congdon laid down the Benjamins to purchase 103 acres of hunting land in his home state of Virginia, he had a pretty good idea of what he was getting into — and what he hoped to accomplish. In many respects, he was working with a blank slate — property that had been fallow for years, void of the resources needed to attract and hold wildlife. He was determined to change that. All the necessary tools were at his disposal to improve the property and introduce food plots. Through careful planning and hard work, the new land manager was confident he could reach his goals — a viable habitat haven for a variety of nongame and game wildlife species and increased hunting opportunities.

The final spoke in the wheel was to elicit the help of a professional — a sounding board that would help him through the many stages of developing the land by bringing years of experience to the table. That someone was Jody Holdbrooks with Whitetail Institute's Next Level Consulting Team.

Whitetail Institute's Next Level Food Plot Consulting team of wildlife biologists, agronomists and weed specialists provides the expertise to help land managers improve their properties. These highly knowledgeable and experienced consultants are available to help hunters and land managers with all aspects of food plot development and habitat management. Services include an on-site visit and property tour, soil testing, comprehensive management planning, a planting schedule with instructions and hunting strategy recommendations. Land management enthusiasts can combine this service with Whitetail Institute's extensive assortment of science-based food plot seed products to transform their properties from idle to ideal.

After walking the property, Holdbrooks provided Josh with a list of critical habitat ideas to consider:

- ✓ Test soil and get food plots in order.
- ✓ Create the best wildlife habitat possible.
- ✓ Let bucks age and show their genetic potential.
- ✓ Maintain the timber in a state that will create habitat preferred by turkeys to roost and keep them on the property.
- ✓ Controlled burning and native browse management.
- ✓ Thin pine timber.
- ✓ Implement controlled burning when the thinning process is completed.
- ✓ Clear out transition areas around established food plots.
- ✓ Create a few small cutovers for more open natural growth, bedding and food.
- ✓ Add some kill plots for children and guests to shoot does and not disturb the backside of the property, which will be more intensively managed for maximizing quality bucks.

Armed with that directive, the new land manager was ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work. We recently caught up with Josh and picked his brain about his land management goals and experience working with Hold-

brooks and the team at Whitetail Institute Next Level Consulting. Here's what he had to say.

Whitetail News: Tell us about your property, Josh.

Congdon: "I bought a piece of property right on the Virginia/North Carolina border a little over two years ago, right at 103 acres. About 60 percent of it is pine, and the other 40 percent natural regrowth — probably a little bit over 20 years since it was forested. The biggest challenge was that the property hadn't been managed for many years. Trails were unkempt, old fields had gone fallow, and the pines needed to be thinned."

WN: What are your management/hunting goals for this property?

Congdon: "My focus is whitetails, turkeys and support for black bears — and I really want to get the quail population back. It's a neat area, but the property just doesn't have the right habitat for quail, nor does it really have the right habitat for [turkey] poults. So aside from deer, that's one of my main focuses — getting the right habitat for turkeys and quail."

WN: How do food plots play a role in your property management? Talk about some of the Whitetail Institute products you use.

Congdon: "There is food in the general area, but not in close proximity to my property. [On my property] it's a monoculture under the pines, so it's not really habitat holding. I've done a lot of different things to build my soil back up, but as far as my main food plot, it's Imperial Whitetail Clover, which has really provided an opportunity for the turkeys to re-establish."

"We've planted Fusion and Whitetail Oats Plus in my other food plot, and it's providing more sunlight to the ground in those areas, and an opportunity mainly for turkeys that would come through the property but are now actually roosting and raising their young there. I've seen some poults make it into the fall. You can tell because they're a little bit smaller [than the adult turkeys]. I can see more sustainable support for the turkeys by keeping the trails open to sunlight even in the non-food-plot areas. Just by getting more sun to the ground, we're seeing a lot of more natural forbs, which also helps support the turkeys."

"I've also worked with Jody Holdbrooks on introducing some spring products — one year it was a combination of peas and sorghum that really had a beneficial impact on what I call the back food plot TMA 2, where the ground just hadn't had much done to it. So, I'd say mainly clover, chicory, some sorghum mixes and some other early mixes. I've also had one year with Imperial Winter Greens [annual seed], which unfortunately didn't really get a chance to get off the ground. It came up great, but the deer population was a little bit high, and they just devoured it. I've also used Whitetail Imperial Conceal to produce screens to take a little bit of pressure off the property."

“WHITETAIL INSTITUTE’S NEXT LEVEL FOOD PLOT CONSULTING TEAM OF WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS, AGRONOMISTS AND WEED SPECIALISTS PROVIDES THE EXPERTISE TO HELP LAND MANAGERS IMPROVE THEIR PROPERTIES.”



WN: Why did you seek the help of Whitetail Institute and its Next Level Consulting program? Explain how the process works.

Congdon: “I’d never had a property of this size, and it was a little daunting as far as what management tools and techniques to use. And as I talked to Jody about it, I had a lot of great ideas, but I wanted to make sure I was headed in the direction of my overall goals. Sometimes, you can get caught up in ideas that don’t really support your solution.

“So, a good portion of it is just gaining the support of someone who has that background and knowledge — someone who gets to see maybe 20 or 30 properties a year in different parts of the United States. He might say, ‘Hey, this is a good decision, or I like your idea, but could you maybe consider adjusting it a little bit to fit your overall goals?’

“I think one of the biggest questions is: Are you doing techniques to do techniques, or are you doing techniques to support your end goal? I think sometimes you get too close as a landowner. You see something that works for somebody else maybe in a different part of the country and you’re like, ‘Hey, I’m going to try that.’ But it might not actually be

beneficial for your geographical region and your end goals.

“There was a point on the clover plot in the front I call TMA 1 that Jody and I looked at during my consultation and weren’t sure if it was going to take, right? It takes two good years for clover to come up and we were borderline on tearing it up and starting over. And he said, ‘Josh, it’s really close — it could go either way. What do you think?’ I told him I wanted to give it a shot and let it go one more year, so we seeded it early in the spring. It just came back so strong, and he and I were both surprised. We had this beautiful clover — 8 to 10 inches in my grazing cages. That’s where you find that sometimes that confidence in yourself and then working with someone really pays off.

“If you’re going to spend the time and money to have someone come out, such as the people at Whitetail Institute, you need to have a long-term plan or at least some general goals. You need to make a commitment to build a relationship with that person and talk about what you’re doing to make sure you’re staying on track. They’re a valuable resource for you to call and say, ‘Hey, I’m stuck here, or I’m not quite sure there.’ I think too

many people don’t take the opportunity to use the available resources as much as they could — probably don’t take the proper steps and then don’t ask the questions they should.

“I would say that probably the biggest surprise was how quickly the turkeys responded to having areas to walk and places to strut and feed. I mean to see turkeys actually roosting on the property and staying there was a pretty big response.”

WN: What effect has this had on your property, the deer herd and your hunting?

Congdon: “I will say one thing, it’s helped having a long-term, focused plan. There are steps I haven’t incorporated yet, but working with some of the tools we’ve used in opening up lanes and getting sunlight to the ground is actually helping me when I do spend quality time in the woods. I’m actually able to pattern the deer a little bit better by understanding where they’re coming from. I would say the property was more of a pass-through location before, and now the deer are staying there. I’m working to get rid of some undesirable trees and brush to make the property more in-



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“JOSH CONGDON WAS DETERMINED TO CHANGE HIS PROPERTY TO ATTRACT AND HOLD WILDLIFE.”

habitable for wildlife. I bumped a fawn 5 yards from me when I was working with the chainsaw. He was basically waiting for me to walk off. And that just shows that they're staying on the property, that this is where they want to be.”

WN: Would you recommend this service to other food plot enthusiasts? If so, why?

Congdon: “I would. I think the difference is there are people who look to consulting to tell them if they do one or two things, they're going to see a massive response. And I would say more times than not it's part of the process, so you need to have a long-term idea of what you want to do if you want the best benefit and then you must incorporate some of those things. One thing Jody gave a lot of feedback on is

that I've done a lot of things right — you know, stayed busy and picked the months I wanted to work on the property and the months I wanted to give it a break and incorporate those things that support my long-term plan.”

WN: If you could choose only one Whitetail Institute product, which would it be?

Congdon: “With my property, I maybe don't have the options others have because my soil was so depleted. The sorghum and peas mix Jody recommended really helped with phase two of a three-phase plan — to get into the soil and get it going. I would say my favorites are Whitetail Imperial Clover and, this year, the Fusion. The oats were a nice nurse crop that allowed the Fusion and Imperial Clover to get established.

“I typically planted during the spring in the past. This year, I planted in the fall, and the response has been great. I've got does coming out an hour before dark and bucks cruising through the property. I even watched one of my target bucks come out in the field and chase does around. I mean, there's nothing better than to have something you strive for, or that maybe you've seen on TV, come to life. You know, to have a nice 10-point buck come out and chase does right in your clover plot. It doesn't get much better than that.

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A photograph of two men in hunting gear standing in a forest. The man on the left is wearing an orange shirt and a camouflage cap, holding a black and tan dog. The man on the right is wearing a camouflage shirt and cap, standing next to a large deer with impressive antlers. The background is a wooded area with bare trees.

The popularity of using canine helpers to locate wounded deer is increasing. Here's what you need to know about finding and hiring a good tracker.

■ by **Scott Bestul**

GOING TO THE DOGS

■ Despite gaining widespread acceptance, tracking dogs are relatively new kids on the deer hunting block, and for anyone who hasn't used one or watched one work, there are typically plenty of questions and misconceptions.

got the call on a beautiful October night, perhaps an hour after legal shooting light. One of my bowhunting buddies, who'd shot several deer but who I considered fairly inexperienced, had sent an arrow through a buck as the sun hovered over the western treetops.

"I felt pretty confident about the shot, but I lost the blood trail pretty quickly as it led into some thick cover by the creek," Kent said. "I was wondering your thoughts about leaving the deer overnight and taking up the trail in the morning?"

My default response when asked this question is almost always "yes," having started too many trails too early and listened to many more jump-started by others. Obviously, if the deer is dead, getting an early start is fine. But if the deer is alive and you jump it, your recovery job just got infinitely harder. So, I went into autopilot and told my buddy to wait and that I'd join him in the morning. But as soon as we hung up, I realized my arm was hanging out of my truck window into a warm fall night. And just to be sure, I checked my weather app and realized it was not going to get much cooler before dawn. Suddenly, things were getting more complicated.

Then I remembered another friend. Mike had acquired and was training a tracking dog, and he'd put the word out: If you shoot a deer, and even if you watched it tip over, give me a call. My dog needs experience, and the more tracks she gets, the better. So, I called Mike, and he eagerly jumped at the opportunity to get BB, his Munsterlander, a chance at another trail. We met at Kent's farm, Mike attached a lead to BB's collar and — although not all tracks go this quickly — within 20 minutes, Mike, BB and I were standing over a sleek 8-point buck. To Kent's credit, the buck had entered and died in some extremely thick cover, where it would have been difficult to follow a blood trail (especially in the dark), and even a veteran hunter would have needed luck to find that buck. But thanks to BB, we'd found a deer on a warm October night when the meat could have easily been compromised had the buck sat overnight.

THE GROWING POPULARITY OF TRACKING DOGS

As I called Kent to tell him we'd found his buck, I smiled, because only a handful of years ago, searching for a wounded whitetail with a dog like we'd just done

was technically illegal. Although our state game agency (the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources) did not specifically ban the use of tracking dogs, an old statute that prohibited the pursuit of big-game animals with the use of dogs (read; using deer hounds to chase deer to hunters) had remained on the books for decades. But as the number of handlers who owned and used leashed tracking dogs grew and they became organized, more states specifically legalized their use. Now, thanks to groups such as the United Blood Trackers (united-bloodtrackers.org), most states recognize the use of tracking dogs to help recover deer and other big-game animals. According to the latest information on the UBT website, only Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, Massachusetts and Connecticut prohibit the use of tracking dogs in the United States, and the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland similarly forbid the practice.

Despite that widespread acceptance, tracking dogs are relatively new kids on the deer hunting block, and for anyone who hasn't used one or watched one work, there are typically plenty of questions and, often, misconceptions.

To take a closer look at the practice of using tracking dogs, I turned to three veteran trackers for some insight. Shon Butler is a West Virginia native who heads a group called Longspur Tracking, which is comprised of 60 trackers who work in 12 states. Butler and his wife, Christy, followed their dogs on 80 tracks in the 2024 season, and Longspur members compiled 1,200 tracks during that season. Lisa Gargulak is a Minnesota-based tracker who followed 93 tracks this past season across several Midwestern states (that included bear hunts in northern Minnesota and Canada) behind her Gordon setter, Tuukka. And Shane Simpson is a veteran upper Midwestern tracker who co-founded an app that helps trackers and hunters connect and keeps stats about recovery rates, shot placement, weapons, broadheads and more.

HOW TRACKING DOGS FIND GAME

Although they're frequently referred to as blood tracking dogs, that term is a bit of a misnomer, according to Butler, a veteran tracker.

"Of course, dogs follow blood and are trained to do so," he said. "But the best dogs don't even need blood to find

mortally wounded deer or other game. They're keying on interdigital scent (which emanates from a gland between a deer's hoof), gut or other matter — even scents that we probably haven't identified. As a dog gets more and more experienced, it learns which tracks are viable and which are made by a deer that will survive. When I put my lead dog, Jessie, down on a track, I can tell in a very short time and distance what we're dealing with. If there's a dead deer on the end of the trail, the lead tightens, and Jessie pulls steadily, as if she's telling me, 'I can catch this animal.' Conversely, if the deer isn't mortally hit, the interdigital profile of the track changes, and Jessie will often just stop."

Almost all states that allow tracking require the dog to be leashed for the duration of the trail. This ensures that the handler always has the dog under control, and it won't be chasing or harassing a wounded (or other) animal. And with an experienced trainer and handler, the lead also serves as a line of communication between the dog and its handler. All the trackers I talked to related tales of reading their dog's seriousness about following the trail by the tension placed on the leash by the dog. The harder the dog pulls against the lead, the better the chances of recovering a mortally (or at least seriously wounded) animal. Conversely, a dog pulling lightly on the lead or wandering about is not picking up on the olfactory cues that indicate a serious track to follow. Several factors can cause this to occur. Chief among them is a deer that's not seriously wounded. But other issues can pop up, and among the most common is when the hunter has spent time trying to unravel the track himself (and, worst-case scenario, with several friends) or grid-searching for the deer. Those actions can compromise the freshness of the trail and give the dog problems (more on this later).

HOW HUNTERS CAN HELP TRACKING DOGS AND THEIR HANDLERS

One of the most common laments of the trackers I talked to was not getting involved in the recovery process until the hunter had made some major mistakes. All agreed that calling a tracker before seriously taking up the trail is a best practice.

"I don't mind a hunter looking for his deer one bit," Gargulak said. "But give me



FINDING A TRACKER NEAR YOU

■ One of the most common questions about tracking dogs is, “How do I find one?” And of course, that question is invariably uttered soon after a hunter has shot a big buck and wants to make sure the animal is recovered.

Although it's possible to contact a tracker during the season, it's a great idea to do some homework ahead of time. The sources here are excellent ways to find a tracker and develop a relationship even before the season opener. All the trackers I've talked to agree this is a great idea and will often float a hunter's name to the top of the list during the busiest parts of fall, such as during the rut and the firearms hunt.

The United Blood Trackers (unitedbloodtrackers.org/) is probably the oldest organization dedicated to the training and testing of tracking dogs, and providing a linkage between hunters and the trackers closest to them. The UBT website is very user-friendly and allows a hunter to simply enter his location (by state and/or zip code), and a map will pop up showing certified trackers in the area and their best contact info.

Another fine group is the American Blood Trackers Association (americanbloodtrackers.org/), which also offers an information-packed website for hunters seeking trackers and for dog owners wanting to train or test their animal. Unlike the UBT site for linking hunters and trackers, the ABT folks use an app called TRAKR, which can be downloaded on a smartphone or tablet. Shane Simpson is one of the co-developers of the app. I found the app easy to install and use, and it should be an excellent and seamless way for connecting hunters and trackers.

Finally, it's possible to locate a nearby tracker by a simple Google or social media (Meta/Facebook or Instagram) search. However, this method is not as efficient as the venues mentioned here, especially when things get busy in mid- to late fall. Establishing a relationship with a tracker in the pre-season or in the first weeks of the fall hunt is by far the best way to ensure a quick response to a tracking need.

a call first and tell me what you see. I want you to find your deer as badly as you want to find it, but developing a plan together is almost always better. If I could help hunters get better at recovery, I'd tell them to remember — as accurately as he can — everything that happened after the shot. Where was the deer standing? How did it behave as it walked or ran off? Which direction did it go? Ideally, a hunter would call me right from the stand and tell me these details, because they can offer some important clues about what to do next.”

Of course, most hunters are anxious to see the results of their shot by looking for their arrow or crossbow bolt (bullets are rarely found, for obvious reasons), or at least first blood, and most trackers are fine with that. Simpson encourages hunters to, before taking another step, pin the location of the arrow or first blood on a mapping app such as OnX, and then physically marking that exact spot with a swatch of toilet paper or surveyor's tape.

“It sounds crazy, but that's getting to be a lost art,” he said. “When I started bowhunting, everyone carried a chunk of toilet paper in their pack or pants to mark blood trails, and almost no one does now. Just that one old-school piece of hunting skill can save me tons of time on a track. I can't tell you how many times a guy has called me, and when I arrive, we stumble around for 45 minutes looking for the site of the hit. People think they're going to remember, but in the heat of the moment, they get excited and forget.”

Assuming the arrow or bolt is found, trackers agree on two main principles: Patiently examine the arrow closely and look for clues indicating the site of the hit. Also, take your time before striking off on the blood trail.

“This is another good time to call me, assuming you haven't done so from the stand,” Gargulak said. “Some veterans can look at the blood and hair on an arrow and get a pretty accurate read on where they hit the deer, but some can-

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not. If you call me and describe what you see, or take a pic and send it to me, I can advise you where I think the deer was hit and how to proceed. Most trackers are like me. I've been a lifelong hunter and did my share of tracking my own deer and then took things to a whole different level when I started using a dog. I've seen a lot of stuff."

If the blood trail, arrow or bolt sign and other clues indicate a mortally hit animal, chances are high the hunter can find the deer pretty easily on his own. Where trackers typically come in is when a less desirable wound occurs.

"Most of the deer we track are hit behind the diaphragm, meaning a liver or paunch shot," Butler said. "If you leave that deer alone for eight to 12 hours, he'll be dead in his first bed, and we'll find him quickly. But push the tracking and bump that deer, and he is gone. Things just got way more complicated. Look, I'm convinced 95 percent of deer shot with a bow or crossbow don't even know they've been shot. They feel some pain, walk or run off a ways, and realize they don't feel very good, and maybe ly-

ing down for a while will make it better. But as soon as a hunter walks up on him, everything changes. Now they know there's a predator on their trail, and the adrenaline and survival instinct kicks in, and that deer turns into Superman, especially if it's a mature buck. So that's one of the most important things in my mind: Give the deer time. We like to say on a buck shot in the evening, 'Dead now means still dead in the morning.' You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by waiting."

Again, trackers stress that a fresh blood trail is not necessary to finding a mortally wounded deer. In fact, Butler recalls a track from this past year when 10 inches of snow fell overnight, covering any visible blood and almost the entire deer itself.

"The dog was able to stay on the track despite the snow, and when we found the buck, all we could see was part of the rack sticking up through the snow," he said. "But the hunter had done a lot right in that scenario. Many times, we get called in after the hunter has not only followed the blood as far as he could, but

grid-searched with his friends. Those friends have likely dragged scent from the trail all over the woods and made things much more difficult for the dog, which now has to sort out and follow multiple 'trails.' It just adds time and complicates things."

Finally, learn to trust your tracker and his dog. They do a lot more tracking and recovering deer than even the most veteran hunters. View the track as a learning opportunity to soak in more knowledge about how to trail deer and how wounded bucks behave, as that can come in handy on future hunting experiences. And of course, please recognize that your tracker wants to find your deer as badly as you want to. So, if he says, "I think this deer is alive and is going to stay that way," he's probably right.

"When we're on a deer that I know is still alive, I tell the hunter to keep an eye on your trail cams, as he'll probably show up within two weeks," Simpson said. "And it's pretty amazing how often that's exactly what happens."



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■ Reading sign provides an early warning of serious weed problems before food plots are planted. In this case, the perennial weeds common bermudagrass and dog fennel surround this food plot and can be effectively controlled along the edges with glyphosate before planting forage crops. This will prevent their spread from the periphery into the food plot.

A man wearing an orange shirt and sunglasses is operating a green tractor with a spray attachment. The tractor is moving through a field of tall grass and weeds, with a dense forest of pine trees in the background. A fine mist of spray is being emitted from the nozzle. The tractor has a green canopy and large black tires with yellow rims.

READING THE SIGNS



Here's how the weed doctor takes a big-picture view of potential food plot sites.

■ by **W. Carroll Johnson, III, Ph.D.**

Agronomist and Weed Scientist, Whitetail Institute

Obviously, if you are reading this article, you are likely a deer hunter. At some point, somebody had to teach you to read sign, such as identifying rubs and scrapes, or learning tracking skills.

There is nothing overly complicated about reading sign. Basically, the process is built around the powers of observation, patience and creative thought. For Millennials, there are no algorithms or apps for reading sign. It's a good example of the power of the human brain to process multiple observations and sort things out.

I work remotely for Whitetail Institute from my home in southern Georgia. From time to time, I help our wildlife biologist, Jody Holdbrooks, with his clients as part of the Whitetail Institute's consulting service, Next Level Food Plot Consulting, which he oversees. This is one of the few opportunities I have to meet customers face to face. During our site visits to a client's hunting property, I make a point to figuratively step back and try to comprehend the big picture of food plot sites I'm seeing for the first time. Basically, I am reading sign, and these are examples of what I observe as part of my big-picture exercise.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE SOIL

Several years ago, I visited a property in the southern United States, not far from the coast. Despite its coastal proximity, this property had a rolling terrain of sandy hills. The soil condition raised a red flag that the site would tend to be droughty. Additionally, the previously planted forages in the food plots were stunted and overall appeared to be nutrient starved — another red flag. I pulled soil samples for analysis. Meanwhile, I checked a soil survey for

that county, and soil in that area was classified as a Troup loamy fine sand, which typically has sand to a depth of more than 40 inches. Sandy soils have poor water holding capacity, meaning forages growing on that soil are vulnerable to periodic drought. The soil survey also summarized the soil as being highly acidic and having low natural fertility. Those facts affect what forage crops could reliably grow. Said another way, planting a perennial such as clover (the landowner's preference) would be a risky choice at that site because that crop species is shallow rooted. The better choice for a perennial would be chicory, the tap root of which extends deep enough to find adequate soil moisture. An even better choice would be a series of annual forages with year-round planting dates scheduled around the availability of soil moisture. Extreme soil acidity and low natural fertility would mean a heavy investment in limestone and fertilizer applied multiple times per year to sustain forage growth. Knowing the limitations of a Troup loamy fine sand in advance would prevent planting the wrong food plot forage and squelch the tendency to cut corners on costly soil amendments, which would certainly result in poor-quality food plots.

All those observations entered into the final food plot management plan. The ability to read the signs about that site (deep sandy soil and nutrient starved forage crops) foretold potential problems, and my suspicions were validated by published soil series surveys and soil sample reports. By reading the signs, food plot production on that property was modified so the production risks linked to deep sandy soils were mitigated as much as possible. Accurately reading sign was invaluable.



■ As you manage food plots, spend quality time walking and observing your plots with a critical eye, never losing sight of the big picture.



NIGHTMARISH WEEDS

I cannot help it. One of the first things I notice when I visit hunting property are the plants: forest species for mast production, overgrown areas for cover, forbs for natural browse and weeds in food plots. When it comes to food plot advice, weed management considerations are my comfort zone. Food plots infested with troublesome broadleaf perennial weeds get my immediate attention. Successful management of perennial broadleaf weeds requires a dedicated long-term effort. There are no quick solutions or single fixes. Although perennial broadleaf weeds are not a detriment to a food plot's location, reading that sign is a clear indication of what must be proactively done to have a successful food plot. Your eyes must be open to the signs. Otherwise, food plot efforts will be futile because the plots will be overrun by perennial broadleaf weeds.

THE NEIGHBORS

This sign really has nothing to do with food plot management. Rather, it's based on big picture observations and willingness to adapt. I hunt on a small acreage near my home in southern Georgia. Nearby is an intensively managed hunting property, with lots of daily human activity throughout the year. Also, there are nearby crop fields with sudden activity during harvest season, which coincides with the prime time to hunt in my area. In this example, the big picture signs are our neighbors' activities that disrupt deer behavior. My hunting partner and I chose to greatly limit our on-site presence in the weeks before the beginning of hunting season. We try to have our food plot tasks and hunting stand maintenance completed weeks before deer season opens. With all the human activity surrounding our property, we try to create a sanctuary of sorts for deer and an unadulterated destination for roaming bucks when the rut begins.

CONCLUSION

This discussion is the least technical article I have ever written, and the specific examples mentioned are just that — examples from one person: me. As you manage food plots, spend quality time walking and observing your plots with a critical eye, never losing sight of the big picture. Do this several times during the growing season. Windshield inspection once a summer does not cut it. The human brain is a powerful tool that assimilates all sorts of observations and generates a conclusion that's usually pretty close to being correct. Adding observations and interpretations from others gives depth to the conclusion. Currently, there are all sorts of discussions about AI (artificial intelligence). Big deal. What is wrong with using I (intelligence), naturally generated by our own brains? We are all capable of reading sign.





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THE STATE OF THE INSTITUTE

What's happening at the Whitetail Institute?
A bevy of exciting new products, research,
services and collaborations.

■ by **Scott Bestul**



As the company that pioneered the food plot industry and has remained the undisputed leader in the decades since, it would be understandable if the folks at Whitetail Institute took their foot off the gas a bit. After all, it takes a ton of work to get to the top and a lot of sustained energy to remain there, so putting the machine in cruise control for a while would be the easiest thing.

Of course, none of that is happening at the Whitetail Institute. In fact, William Cousins, Whitetail's general manager, said the company is going stronger than ever and is breaking new ground in several areas that promise to keep it at the top of the game for years. Here's a look at four of the exciting happenings Cousins and his employees are working on now.

RAMPING UP: NEXT LEVEL CONSULTING

Now entering its third year, Whitetail Institute's Next Level Consulting continues to gain in scope and outreach, according to Cousins.

"We realized we could help many of our customers if we offered professional consulting services that would help enhance their food plot, land management and deer hunting goals," he said. "We tasked Jody Holdbrooks, who has years of experience visiting properties, writing management plans, and conducting follow-up visits to help ensure those plans are being implemented."

If Holdbrooks' schedule is any indicator, Next Level Consulting has struck a chord with Whitetail Institute customers.

"Just in the next few months, Jody will be visiting properties in Alabama, Mississippi, New York, Illinois, Ohio and Iowa," Cousins said. "He typically devotes a couple of days to boots-on-the-ground examination of a property and then follows with the landowner to discuss goals. Then he drafts a plan, employing input from others on the team. Dr. Joyce Tredaway and Dr. Carroll Johnson are certified experts in agronomy, soil management, forage establishment, and weed control. They provide valuable input for Jody as he develops plans for the property. When he visits the Midwest, Jody often teams up with Bill Winke, who has years of experience

consulting on Midwest properties and helping landowners achieve their management and hunting goals. It's not only a kind of dream team, but they all get along really well and love the challenges of working with different properties."

Cousins noted that although Holdbrooks continues to do a stellar and thorough job, he might soon need some help.

"I love seeing Jody busy and out there, doing what he loves," he said. "But not only is the program and customer list growing — he's booked 12 clients in the first two months of the year — but habitat and food plot management is a fluid process that needs constant attention and updating. You can't draft a plan and walk away. We want to be there for follow-up work and to make sure the landowner is getting the technical assistance he needs. I see the program getting too big for just Jody and anticipate looking for additional help for him in the near future."

NEW PRODUCT PROMISES EXCITING GROWTH

As noted, Whitetail Institute isn't resting on any laurels when it comes to testing, developing and offering new seed options. Cousins pointed to Summer Slam, one of the company's most recent offerings and among his personal favorites.

"It's actually my favorite late-spring, early summer plantings," he said. "It's a combination of peas, vetch, and Alyce clover variety that can be a little slow to start but is highly beneficial for the soil and, of course, deer out there. In my area, deer seem to allow it to become established, but when they turn their attention to it, it gets heavily grazed. Fortunately, it's one of those mixes that can take some grazing pressure."

As the time to plant fall plots approaches, Cousins discs his Summer Slam plots lightly, and then plants a fall seeding such as Winter Greens or Beets and Greens.

"The Summer Slam has established a great nitrogen bank in the soil, and discing the plots results in a nice bed of organic matter that the fall seeds flourish in," he said. "I've been testing that mix for four years now, and I'm really excited about it."



■ Whitetail Institute is going stronger than ever and is breaking new ground in several areas.

The initiative, Conservation Collaboration, unites the organizations in a shared commitment to preserving land use and wildlife habitats for future generations.

“As farmers, producers, ranchers, land managers, food plotters and hunters, we understand the vital role we all play in balancing agriculture with wildlife conservation,” Cousins said. “By promoting and educating on the integration of sound agronomic practices with conservation-focused approaches, this partnership aims to ensure long-term prosperity for hunters, land managers, outdoor enthusiasts and the wildlife we all hold dear.”

“We are thrilled to join forces with Whitetail Institute of America in this exciting venture,” said Dustin F. Lewis, head of marketing and product strategy at ADAMA. “Together, we can combine the best of agronomy and conservation to create a sustainable future that benefits both the land and its wildlife.”

The Conservation Collaboration will offer land managers valuable resources and knowledge to implement practices that benefit agriculture and wildlife habitats. The partnership aims to educate and empower land managers to make agronomically sound and environmentally responsible decisions that can help conserve and promote wildlife populations and enhance the land for generations.

Stay tuned for more details on how you can participate in this initiative.

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Unfortunately, supply-chain issues — in the form of limited seed supply, thanks to hurricanes — have affected availability for vetch and Alyce clover.

“We really urge our customers to keep an eye out for availability of Summer Slam as early as January and February, as our supplies are limited,” Cousins said.

NEW STAR ON THE CLOVER BLOCK?

Although Imperial Whitetail Clover has been the gold standard for the food plot industry for more than three decades, that doesn’t mean Whitetail Institute has stopped trying to improve on a good thing. According to Cousins, the Institute is now in its second year of partnering with the University of Wyoming to develop a “proprietary clover that builds on the exceptional genetics of our existing strains,” he said. “That work is being led by Dr. Donna Harris, one of the top forage breeders in the country. Dr. Harris’ team is using the two research

centers owned by the university to work on a clover variety that will enhance resilience, nutritional value and adaptability to diverse environments.”

Cousins said Harris’ project is “in the initial breeding phases and is so critical I can’t even talk about it yet. But if what she develops can produce seeds, we’ll have a very exciting new product.”

GROUND-BREAKING PARTNERSHIP

Finally, Cousins said the Whitetail Institute is partnering with ADAMA Crop Protection to launch a strategic partnership. Across much of the American landscape, a significant portion of hunting land is primarily used for agricultural and livestock production. Recognizing the critical balance between these worlds, Whitetail Institute and ADAMA are excited to announce a new partnership focused on conservation and wildlife habitat restoration.



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Don't give up when your food plots fail.
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and make the most of the situation.

■ **Text and Photos** by **Kristopher M. Klemick**

FAILURE IS NEVER FINAL





Everyone dreads food plot failure, but we should prepare for it. If you've been in the game long enough, you know that even with the best-laid plans, it's only a matter of time before you face it.

It can happen when Mother Nature shuts down — or never turns off — the faucet, or you're at odds with Father Time. Fortunately, Whitetail Institute has several season-saving food plot options with seeds that are quick to establish, produce abundant forage and can get you back on track before hunting season.

CHANGING TIMES

As time passes, it's human nature to reflect on the past. Ah yes, the "good 'ol days." A timeless photo album — remember those? — filled with endless memories, good stories and even greater times.

When my family and I started planting Whitetail Institute products four decades ago at our 232-acre property in north-central Pennsylvania, seasons and weather patterns were rather consistent. Sure, there were the occasional ups and downs, but you could pretty much count on cool, wet springs; warm summer thunderstorms; vibrant colors in fall; and the return of cold air and snow long before the end of the year. Looking back through my journal from the past two decades, however, it seems few years have followed anything close to that historic pattern.

Springs have been downright soakers or nothing more than a spritz shower here or there. Summers have seesawed from being complete washouts to deserts of dry, hot air. And by hot, I mean, holy moly. These are supposed to be the northern tier mountaintops of Pennsylvania, not the southern tip of Florida.

That last part might be a stretch, but hopefully you get my point: Weather patterns are changing. They are no longer as predictable as they once were. If you look back through time, though, humankind and everything that inhabits this planet has accepted the challenge of change, and adapted and overcome.

WHEN CHALLENGES ARISE

My family's property is situated across mature mountaintops, with miles of little more than native browse and hard mast crops. The old, hand-laid stone rows uniquely situated deep in the woods serve as testament to our once-crop-laden ground having returned

to the forest almost a century ago. Aerial photographs of the property from that time confirm what was farmed after the logging boom in Pennsylvania concluded. Today, we've managed to carve some of those original fields back out of the woods and return them to their productive glory. With several food plots and mineral sites spread out across the mountain, almost all have experienced setbacks through the years.

Overcoming challenges, though, is one reason why people enjoy most of the endeavors we undertake. For land managers, the artistry of building food plots, providing cover and unlocking the full potential surrounding all things wildlife are what drive us to do more — to do right by the land, and the next generation and the animals that call it home. When challenges crop up, we find ways to overcome and enact measures to help prevent them from occurring again.

Klemick case study No. 1: A few years ago, our near turn-of-the-century disc and cultipacker were showing signs of their age. More like screaming their age. Worn bolts were breaking. Cast brackets, plates and discs were cracking in half. Bearings were wearing out, and wheels wouldn't turn. For the cultipack, our annual maintenance routine that spring was a little more extensive. After tightening down and replacing all that we could fabricate for the 'ol girl, we gave her the normal complement of grease. Upon prepping her for the first job of the season, we felt pretty good about the work we'd done.

That is until five minutes into the first pass on the field, when the grease apparently did its job too well, and a bearing housing assembly decided it had finally seen enough soil, shattered and left us with an arm bracket in pieces and rollers in the field. We coddled together some parts and managed to finish the planting season.

Klemick case study No. 2: For the better part of two decades, we tried establishing a small apple orchard, but the bucks, bears and wood borers took each of the half-dozen or so trees out one by one every few years. When replacing them became a clear effort in futility, we decided to transition the orchard into another food plot. When the last tree was lost, we took to the woods with chainsaws and increased the plot's footprint by 500 percent, and in the shape of a boomerang. It took time to clear trees, pull stumps and dial in the soil pH, but our apple orchard failure wasn't in vain. The location has now consistently produced spectacular



■ There's opportunity in every adverse situation, even when the pressure is on.

results and some of our best bucks. In fact, we currently have a stand of Imperial Whitetail Clover in this plot that's into its seventh year in 2025 and still going strong.

MAKE THE BEST OF THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT

Equipment failures are one thing, but what happens when the problem isn't something physical you can prevent? When you consider the possible roadblocks that can impede your food plot success, there are always steps to mitigate negative impacts. For fellow Pennsylvania native and land manager Jason Say, the weather can be a difficult hand to play, but he uses proactive measures.

"Most important, I try to plant when there's rain in the forecast," he said. "The weatherman is rarely ever right, so you really need to look for a time when you've got two or three days of rain in the forecast. You have to do all of the steps with your soil bed prep. You've taken your soil sample, you've limed and got your soil pH where it needs to be, you've addressed weeds — those are some of the proactive things I do to consistently be successful."

Of course, Mother Nature seems to find humor in offering up just enough rain to start the germination party, and then watch us nervously shuffle as our plots struggle without another drop for days or weeks. But keeping an eye on the calendar and exercising your own meteorological mastery, even a reactive approach, can yield a 100 percent chance of incredible results. Say shared this story from two years ago.

"We had a worst-case scenario," he said. "We got rain right after I planted several of my plots, and then that was it for weeks. I had just dirt [and] very little germination. I always tell people, 'Don't panic, don't panic.' Well, it was time to panic."

"Whenever I have a plot fail — and I don't have many of them, but that year I had a bunch fail because of weather — three weeks in, if I've got very little germination, Whitetail Institute No-Plow is my 100 percent go-to seed. It's a fantastic blend that I plant not only on plots that have failed but in any new plot where the pH isn't where it needs to be yet. The deer love it so much that I also plant it in several places that have ideal soil conditions, too."

With the clock winding down before hunting season, Say made quick work recovering from the setback.

"I simply went back into all those plots, drug them with a drag harrow and seeded No-Plow," he said. "We got rain, and I had some of the most beautiful plots you can imagine that year. It absolutely saved my season. In fact, my biggest buck ever — a 165-inch giant that I shot a few years ago — I watched him walk through a pristine, beautiful, correct-pH clover plot to get to my No-Plow plot the third day of rifle season."

If that's not enough to sway naysayers, consider one more thing.

SUCCESS THAT STANDS THE TEST OF TIME

The Whitetail Institute of North America has been the food plot and deer nutrition industry leader since 1988. You cannot find a better alternative. As with any

industry, success breeds copycat competition. Anyone can sell seeds and, given the right conditions, a plant will grow. However, that plant's characteristics, palatability, nutritional plane and adaptability across the landscape aren't always the best, or even the right fit for what you're trying to accomplish. Likewise, anyone can offer advice or customer service, but do they stand behind what they sell? Do they offer decades of industry-leading experience and an unwavering commitment to share that knowledge with current and potential customers? And do they offer it for free? Doubtful.

Simply put, no other deer nutrition company invests in what it does quite like Whitetail Institute. Staffers spend exhaustive time, energy and money on research, development and testing across the whitetail's range, resulting in proven results, premier customer service and gold-standard accolades from serious deer hunters.

As Say said, "If you've got three or four weeks of growing season left, don't just bail. Food plots are a lot like life. The guys who don't quit are the guys who are going to succeed. You get out what you put in."

There's opportunity in every adverse situation, even when the pressure is on. Connect with the knowledgeable and friendly folks at the Whitetail Institute, and they'll help put you back in the game. Although success is never guaranteed, failure is certainly never final.





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FEEDING DEER

Feeding is a great way to keep deer on your property and improve herd health. But before embarking on a program, you must decide what your goals are.

■ by **Mark Olis**



There are two primary reasons to feed white-tailed deer. The first is to attract them to a specific area, a practice known as baiting. The second is to provide nutrition to the local herd. Although both options feed deer, each application is vastly different. We'll explore both so you know which is right for your goals.

Before you think about feeding deer, be sure your state allows it. Many states allow feeding deer but restrict it to the off-season. In other states, it's legal to feed during deer season. Further, if you hunt or live in a chronic wasting disease zone, feeding is not allowed.

■ Most hunters who use feeders will set them to go off just after shooting light in the morning and again an hour or so before dark.


WHITETAIL BIOLOGY

Deer have a four-chambered stomach adapted to digesting plant materials. This specialized system lets them convert plant cellulose into digestible nutrients. This is important to understand, as all feeds aren't created equal. And even if a feed claims to contain a certain amount of protein, a deer can only digest so much of it. So, the digestible amount of nutrients is an important number to look at.

Deer also need specific nutrients at specific times of year. In fall and winter, deer seek carbohydrates and fatty foods, such as acorns and mast crops.



“TO HELP DEER RECOVER FROM WINTER AND THE RUT, YOU NEED A BALANCED FEED WITH PROTEIN, CARBS AND FATS.”



feed a high-protein diet. Understand, this is not corn. Corn is a high-carbohydrate food that offers benefits in fall and winter but does little through spring and summer. In fact, if you're feeding corn during spring and summer, your deer will fill up on food that has less protein, and they will miss out on the nutrients they need most for antler and fawn development.

The most common and best way to deliver feed for nutrition is with a large-capacity gravity-fed feeder. Texas Hunter Products, of San Antonio, Texas, is well-known for its large protein feeders. These roto-molded feeders are strong and hold up to 2,000 pounds of protein

feed, with up to six feeding troughs, so deer can eat all they want. In spring and summer, you want deer to get as much high-quality feed as possible.

ATTRACTION

If your goal is to attract deer to a specific location for hunting or wildlife viewing, corn is king. It's no secret that deer are highly attracted to corn. This carb-rich food is a great source of energy for deer. In fall and winter, when temperatures cool off and bucks begin seeking does in the rut, corn can provide valuable energy that deer need to stay warm and keep them on the go.

Like anything in life, sometimes too much of a good thing is bad. In Northern states where deep snow and frigid temps force deer to eat twigs and tree bark, a sudden switch to corn can prove deadly. When deer eat too much corn too quickly, they can develop a condition known as acidosis, which can be fatal. So, corn is best used in smaller quantities. Corn can be spread by hand on the ground, but this also requires frequent trips to replenish the bait site. That's why spin-cast feeders are ideal for regularly distributing small amounts of corn.

Moultrie is one of the most popular brands of spin-cast feeders. It offers plastic and metal feeders that hold 50 pounds up to 600 pounds at various price points. The best part about spin-cast feeders is

that you can set feeding schedules to go off at multiple daily intervals for a predetermined amount of time. That way, you dispense a certain amount of feed, which attracts deer to that location a couple of times per day. Meanwhile, the remainder of the feed sits inside the dry hopper, so you can greatly preserve feed stores for months.

Most hunters who use feeders will set them to go off just after shooting light in the morning and again an hour or so before dark. This can help pattern deer movements as they grow accustomed to feeding at those times each day. And if you only distribute a few pounds of corn at a time, it can cause them to run out as they want to get a bite before it's gone.

REMOTE-CONTROLLED FEEDING

Moultrie also has a feeder that is controlled remotely through the Moultrie Mobile app — the same app to which Moultrie cell cameras send trail camera images. Feed Hub uses cellular connectivity to deliver intel from your feeder to your smartphone, no matter where you are. Feed Hub will show you feed levels in the hopper and battery life in the spin motor, and also send you alerts if the feeder is clogged or if feed and battery levels are getting low. It also allows you to change any of your settings remotely and feed on demand. This technology saves land managers a lot of time and stress because they can plan properly when it's time to refill feeders and change batteries. Before Feed Hub, the only way to know how much feed you had left was to remove the lid and look inside. To learn more about this innovative feeder option, visit www.MoultrieProducts.com.

CONCLUSION

Feeding deer is a great way to keep animals on your property, improve herd health and help pattern deer during hunting season. However, before you begin a feeding program, decide what your goals are. That will determine every step you take from there.



■ Moultrie has a feeder that is controlled remotely through the Moultrie Mobile app.

These high-energy foods help build up fat stores for rutting bucks and harsh winter conditions, when quality food isn't available. Burning carbs is also necessary to help generate body heat when temperatures are frigid.

Foods high in protein are essential in late winter and early spring and through summer. This coincides with the post-rut, when bucks are trying to recover after losing 20 to 30 percent of their body weight during the rut. Until a buck's muscular and skeletal system is fully or sufficiently replenished, its body won't allocate the extra proteins and minerals to its antler growth. So, the quicker a buck can recover health in the late winter before antler growth begins, the better chance it has at producing a larger set of antlers next season. Likewise, does need the same high-protein diet for fawn development in late winter and early spring, but they require the most protein during summer, when lactating after fawns are born.

NUTRITION

If your goal is to help deer recover from winter and the rut, you need a balanced feed with protein, carbs and fats. From spring through summer,

GROWING THE SOUL

When folks start growing food plots and wildlife, they are attracted even more to hunting, because they are part of the whole and not just the conclusion.

■ by **Matt Harper**



Memory is a strange but wonderful attribute, with the ability to fill your heart with incredible joy but also bitter sadness. Sometimes, it can also be maddingly frustrating when you struggle to find a memory and, no matter how hard you strain your mind, it eludes you. Memories can be vivid or hazy regardless of their chronology.

I've been blessed with a bounty of memories, but one that sticks out is likely my first conscious recollection as a very young boy: sitting on my grandpa Harper's lap. I did not see his face or remember what he said. But I clearly remember his hands. Grandpa's hands were massive, and not just compared to my child-sized hands. They were rough, scarred and callused, but also warm and vibrant. They exuded strength and love, which made my young heart know that as long as Grandpa held me, I would be safe from all the scary things in life. And although I admit that my fascination with Grandpa's hands was partly because of a child's need for protection, I think it was much deeper. My grandpa spent a lifetime growing things with those hands, and through the years of wear, strain, blood and abuse that attest to the effort, they became a symbol of life and vitality.

I love to deer hunt. I have a passion for it, and although the overuse of that word has somewhat dulled its magnitude, passion remains the descriptive. In fact, deer hunting is not part of my life but rather a component of the fabric that has constructed my life. I've pursued many types of game, but the center of my hunting universe has always been and continues to be chilly fall days hunting white-tailed deer.

But another puzzle piece that makes up my whole is the desire to grow things. That might seem a little odd to folks who are far removed from green places, but there is an undeniable satisfaction that comes with being a custodian in the process of new life, plant or animal.

THE BEGINNING

I was raised on a farm in southern Iowa during the late 1970s and 1980s, which was the catalyst for my love for growing things. Our farm was typical

for that location and era. You would find hogs and cattle as staples, with the likely addition of laying hens pecking around and maybe even some milk cows and sheep here and there. On the agronomy side, all farms, including ours, grew corn, soybeans, oats, wheat and hay. It was a wonderfully hard upbringing, during which I wanted for nothing important but understood the work and effort it took to achieve a position of contentment. You worked in partnership with the land, caring for and giving to it so it would give back to you.

And at a young age, you learned what it meant to be a caretaker of animals. The animals were in fences, pens or buildings, which meant they relied on you for food, water, protection and medical care. Without you, the birds and beasts under your care would perish, so neglect was not just a dereliction of responsibilities but rather something akin to manslaughter. I was taught that lesson at age 5, when I had chores, including filling up the water tank for the sheep. I forgot that duty one summer day, and when Dad found out, you would have thought that I had sentenced death upon those sheep. And had I forgotten the water for a couple of more days, I would have done that.

But it was not just livestock we cared for. We also took care of the soil and crops on the farm. We couldn't water the earth, but we nurtured the soil with fertilizer, kept weeds from killing the crops and did what we could to keep away pestilence. My early childhood memories are a collection of short clips of early mornings with Grandpa, walking through a dewy hay field to see if it was ready for cutting. Or hot summer days, I walked endless rows of soybeans, pulling out the "damned cockleburrs" or checking corn fields with Dad to make sure a bug or worm invasion had not occurred. The work was arduous, and I complained, just short of the point of discipline, but I count it as one of my greatest blessings to have grown up understanding the wonder and my place in the world of growing things.

GROWING DEER

As mentioned, I'm infatuated with deer hunting to the point where my wife often believes an intervention is

**"WE LOSE SOMETHING
WITHIN OURSELVES
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needed. If you're reading this, I suspect you might suffer from the same affliction. So if I told you the enjoyment and fulfillment I derive from growing food plots is equal to that of shooting a wall-hanger, you might disagree. You would probably chalk it up to guy who's

graying at the temples and getting a bit long in the tooth, and who tries to politicize the components of his life. And I guess I would give you that, as folks tend to become more philosophical when they have passed the halfway point in life. But as I wrote, the satisfaction that comes from growing things is deeply rooted, and it only seems logical that including the growing along with the harvest enhances the experience. It closes the circle, as you're no longer just taking but also giving back.

There is nothing wrong with people whose deer hunting is limited to a long weekend once a year, during which the main objective is camaraderie with friends and family, meat in the freezer and possibly a nice rack on the wall of the garage. I enjoy hunting various critters, the pursuit of which only accounts for a handful of days each year. But then there are deer hunters who have stretched their passion to a year-round love affair. It starts innocently, maybe buying a couple of trail cameras and then scratching out a quarter-acre spot on your hunting property to scatter some seed. The next thing you know, you're buying equipment, getting alerts on your phone at all hours and taking vacation time — in summer, mind you — to work the property.

If that describes you, you've crossed the line from deer hunter to deer manager. And for folks with that much zeal, enjoyment begins to grow in all the activities that surround the affliction. Some people love fast cars, and although driving fast is the pinnacle of endorphin release, the obsession doesn't stop there. Those folks want to know why the car goes fast, digging into the guts of the mechanism, researching what would make the car better, going to car shows and spending endless hours online searching for a rare, elusive part that would make you the envy of your fast-car community. Sound familiar?

I'm biased, but I contend that a passion for deer management and deer hunting is one of the more fulfilling pursuits you can undertake. And I think it's because managing always involves giving as well as receiving — and in most cases, more of the former than the latter. To grow a good food plot, you need to care for the soil, spending time and money to make

it as healthy as possible. You pray for it to not rain next Saturday so you can carefully plant the seed. Then when it's completed, you pray for it to rain. Like an expectant father, you nervously check the plot, far too soon and far too many times, to see when the young sprouts emerge from the ground. Then one sunny evening, you notice that the ground has a carpet of tiny green plants covering the surface. Your chest swells a bit, but they are still young, so you're still worried. Throughout spring and summer, you care for the plot, keeping weeds at bay, mowing and fertilizing, and then watching the plot become a healthy, productive creation.

And then there are the deer. Your trail camera starts to pick up deer using the plot, including a doe and her two new fawns, which show up about every morning. You know that because of your labor and investment, the doe is getting the nutrition she needs to help grow those fawns. Then there are the two yearling bucks that appear each evening, using the protein the plot provides to grow their bodies to one day become monarchs.

Then it happens on a midsummer evening: You get a picture that makes your heart leap a bit, as a mature, massive 10-point and an ancient looking 8-point have found the plot. The summer continues, and you begin to feel the anticipation of opening day. But as you sit on your deck one evening, burgers sizzling on the grill and a cold one in your hand, you realize what has happened. You have been a part of growing things: plants in a food plot that are then used to grow deer on your property. And you feel a satisfaction — not pride necessarily, but a filling up of the soul, because you've contributed to the cycle of growing things.

THE FAMILY

I moved away from the farm for a brief time, but its pull was too hard to resist for long. When my wife and I started having children, we moved back to the farm — in fact, into Grandpa and Grandma's old farmhouse, where I sat as a toddler on Grandpa's lap. As my girls grew, I believed it was important for them to get into the growing business, so when they were old enough,

they had their own chores and, yes, one was watering the sheep. But they also were with me as we disked up fields and seeded food plots, and next to me on the side-by-side on those wonderful evening rides when we checked the plots and watched deer from afar. They were introduced to deer management before they began deer hunting, and I think it taught them a valuable lesson about the concept of giving along with receiving. My girls also understood that it's our responsibility to care for our farm and everything that lives there, domestic and wild. And of course, there's my dad, to whom I owe so much, and who taught me countless life lessons — often in the form of a parable — that played out on the farm. Although he loved to hunt and was the genesis of my lifelong affection for the sport, he was a farmer, and farming along with wildlife management was not really a thing in his time. As I took over more of the farm work and implemented wildlife management practices, he paid more attention to the number of turkeys in a food plot than to how the corn crop was progressing. Seeing the renewal of his great enjoyment of wild things was another measure of soul filling satisfaction.

A SUMMATION OF RAMBLINGS

Not everyone was blessed with a childhood on the farm. As more people move to cities and towns in search of greater opportunity, society moves farther from a true understanding of the natural world in its beauty and terrible, uncompromising adherence to the natural laws that dictate life and death. The sick don't always survive, and the lost calf doesn't always find its way back to the cow. In short, the natural world is not Disney, and the farther removed you get from that truth, the stranger the perspective, ideas and beliefs become. Beyond that, we lose something within ourselves when we stop working with nature to grow things. I think that's why when people start on the journey of growing food plots, deer and wildlife, they are inevitably attracted even more to hunting, because they are now part of the whole and not just the conclusion.



SECRET SPOT STAGING AREAS

If your target buck consistently gives you the slip, it's time to think outside the box and implement a deadly staging area strategy that can help stack the cards back in your favor.

■ **Text and Photo by Travis Faulkner**

At one time, we've all encountered a buck that seemed to be more ghost than deer.

We're talking about a different breed of whitetail that rarely slips up or makes mistakes that place them in vulnerable situations. They often move through their home ranges and core areas like shadows and have a knack for only showing up on trail cameras or near your hunting setups well after dark. These heavy-racked veterans are not actually supernatural,

but they know how to play the game. As my Papaw used to say, they didn't get big by being stupid, and there's a lot of truth and wisdom in that statement.

In most cases, these bucks simply wait until after dark to visit open feeding locations such as agricultural fields, food plots and other spots with limited cover. That doesn't mean they're completely nocturnal, but they display some nocturnal tendencies that make them selective in how and where they move during daylight.

These types of bucks are extremely difficult and challenging to hunt, but the good news is they're not invincible, and you can kill one with the right hunting tactics and setups.

Let's take an in-depth look at some cutting-edge staging area strategies that'll help you connect with those super-tough bucks this season.

DIAGNOSING THE SITUATION

When your target buck only shows up on trail cameras after dark and consistently evades standard or textbook setups, it's time to switch gears and try something new. We know these types of bucks routinely hug thick cover, rely on their noses when traveling and often bed inside protected sanctuaries that can be almost impossible to reach and hunt without being detected. Sometimes, they even enter their bedding areas well before daylight and don't leave until after dark, which really limits your chances. Textbook setups such as hunting the edges of agricultural fields, food plots or travel corridors, or even along the perimeter of bedding areas, might not be your best option in these situations.

So how do you flip the script? Many hunters continue to hunt traditional setups and monitor their trail cameras, hoping for a pattern shift. Sometimes, that might not happen until food sources change, cold fronts hit, or rutting activity starts to increase. Sticking with those traditional setups might eventually work, or you can wait for pattern shifts. However, you're likely wasting a big chunk of your hunting season with those options, and most of us don't have time to spare. When you work and your time in the woods is limited, you need to make the most out of every second to maximize your shot opportunities.

If you diagnose the situation and see what's not working, use your time and energy more efficiently to make changes. Don't wait for big buck pattern shifts or hunt the same stand again and again expecting different results. For example, try to figure out why the buck you're hunting shows up on a specific camera at 1 or 2 a.m. Ask how he's getting there and where he's coming from or going to after he leaves. Look at ae-



■ Mature bucks use natural staging areas to transition between food sources and daytime holding or bedding areas. You can enhance those established locations or even construct your own by strategically planting a shade-tolerant food plot blend inside the staging area.

“USE SIMPLE TOOLS SUCH AS A RAKE, WEED TRIMMER AND HAND SAW TO CLEAR OUT YOUR SPOT BEFORE PLANTING.”

rial photos onX Hunt or Google Maps to pinpoint possible bedding areas, food sources, travel routes and more important, potential staging areas that can be exploited. Then set up additional trail cameras to monitor those critical locations, and piece together his daily patterns and routines before making your next move.

EXPLOIT TOUGH BUCKS WITH SECRET STAGING AREAS

When you've completed those steps, use the intel to accurately locate or select potential staging areas at specific points between primary bedding and nighttime feeding locations a shooter buck likely uses regularly. There are natural staging areas that deer — especially mature bucks — use to transition between food sources and daytime holding or bedding areas. However, it's possible to enhance those established locations or even construct your own by strategically planting a shade-tolerant food plot blend inside the staging area. Creating your own secret staging area or enhancing an existing one by adding these miniature low-maintenance plots can dramatically increase your shot opportunities throughout the season.

The trick is to choose locations you can reach, hunt and exit without bumping deer during any part of the process. If you're spooking deer every time you hunt a staging area setup, you're just educating a tough buck and making him even harder to hunt. Taking extra steps and precautions to make sure you can hunt these areas without being detected will be crucial to your success.

When creating a secret staging area, it's critical to find the sweet spot between established nighttime feeding and daytime bedding locations. For evening setups, I like to place a staging area relatively close to established mature buck bedding locations. The close proximity of the secret staging area helps entice a wary buck to exit his protective daytime sanctuaries a little earlier than usual, because it creates a false sense of security. Quick and easy access to the stag-

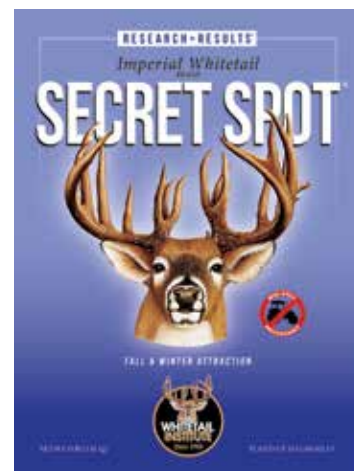
ing area from the thick-covered bedding locations makes it almost impossible for a buck that has been locked down most of the day to resist sneaking in for a fast snack. It's also not uncommon for these staging areas to pull bucks off the bed periodically throughout midmorning and early afternoon.

For morning hunts, I often place these secret staging areas a little farther from daytime bedding locations. I'm looking for a good midway point between a buck's after-dark feeding locations and daytime sanctuaries. That positioning choice lets the staging area catch and stall mature bucks as they're returning to their daytime bedding sites. Plus, it lets me safely enter and exit these hunting setups without getting too close to feeding and bedding areas, which decreases the chances of accidentally bumping deer.

CONSTRUCTING YOUR OWN SECRET STAGING AREAS

After you have located a staging area or chosen to create your own, the next move is to use simple tools such as a rake, weed trimmer and foldable hand saw to clear out your spot before planting. You don't need expensive farm equipment, ATV attachments or anything complex to pull this off. The key is to rake away leaves, sticks, briars and small sapling trees to establish good seed-to-soil contact. A foldable handsaw will let you remove any low overhanging branches and help maximize the amount of sunlight that will reach the ground.

However, you'll want to leave enough surrounding and inside cover within the staging area for a skittish buck to feel safe. Use a hand-seeder to evenly spread a hardy shade-tolerant food plot blend designed for these types of plots. Two of my favorite blends are the No-Plow and Secret Spot by Whitetail Institute. Both are extremely easy to plant with minimal ground preparation, and they don't require a lot of sunlight, maintenance or upkeep. No-Plow includes specifically selected clovers, brassica, WINA 412 radish and



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

SECRET SPOT

NO TILLAGE EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Available in 4 pounds (plants 4,500 square feet).
- Mix of several varieties of highly attractive forages for out-of-the-way and hard-to-reach plots.
- Easy to plant.
- Contains a pH enhancer.

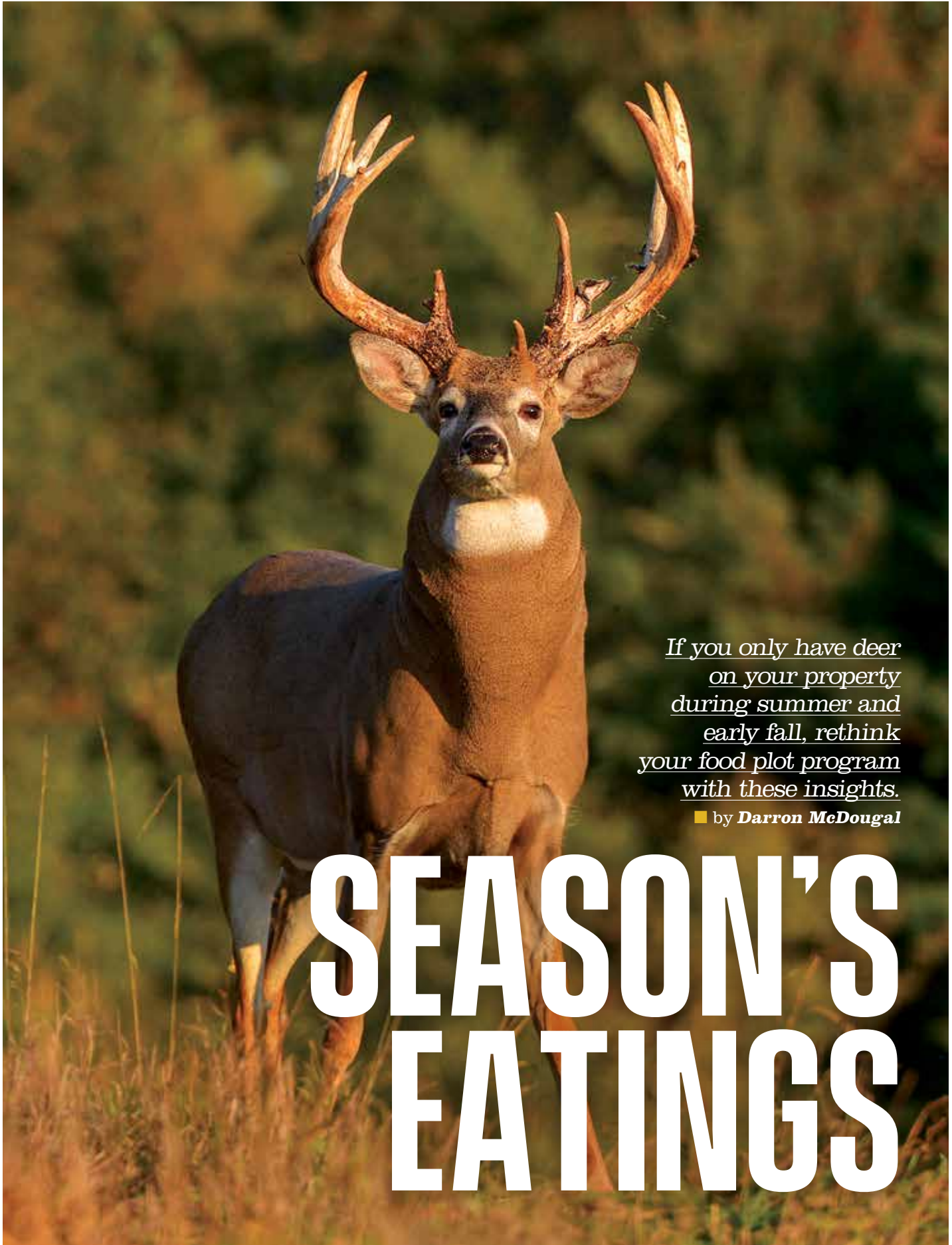


other forages. Secret Spot encompasses a broad range of 11 forages and contains soil pH boosters to increase forage growth even in slightly acidic soils. These blends are extremely drought- and cold-tolerant and grow rapidly.

CONCLUSION

With a little extra planning and work, it's easy to enhance existing staging areas or create your own secret staging areas to maximize success. When facing tough hunting conditions and stubborn bucks, you can let a difficult situation control the outcome of your season or take control and make your own luck. If you're looking to consistently tag mature bucks, you really should give these tactics a try this fall.





If you only have deer
on your property
during summer and
early fall, rethink
your food plot program
with these insights.

■ by **Darron McDougal**

SEASON'S EATINGS

You've labored intensively to get your half-acre clover plot into the ground and growing beautifully. You mow it late in summer, and it comes back thick and lush. Your trail cameras show lots of deer frequenting the plot, including two nice bucks. You shouldn't have any trouble filling the freezer with a couple of does, either.

But you don't get your buck during early bow season, and deer activity subsides substantially as fall transitions to winter. You notice lots of deer on a neighboring property where the landowner left soybeans standing. It's frustrating that you still have your buck tag but no bucks to chase.

If this sounds familiar, it's time to step back and look at your food sources so you can identify what's missing. To help, let's consult Whitetail Institute's Brandon Self about how to stop losing deer to neighboring properties by having food for every season.

GETTING STARTED

Most food plotting is nuanced because of many variables. Planting zones, deer-per-square-mile ratios and the acreage you have at your disposal — especially tillable acreage — are factors. Depending on those factors, you might need to reassess and tweak your food plotting program through several years. But if you're willing to put in the work and invest some money, you can have deer on your property 365 days a year. If that interests you, read on.

SPRING AND SUMMER

Spring and summer are critical periods for whitetails. This is when bucks are growing antlers and bulking up for the fall rut. Does are also feeding like crazy to keep up with milk production. And for hunting, this is an important time to have deer on your property and in your plots so you can monitor them and see what's out there.

"The main crops that are important for deer during the spring and summer months are soybean or pea products," Self said. "Imperial PowerPlant and the new product that we're releasing this year called Summer Slam are some powerhouse options. PowerPlant is a mixture of soybeans, sunn hemp and

DON'T FORGET ABOUT MINERALS

■ The right food throughout the seasons will definitely attract deer. However, minerals and feeds are also attractive to deer and can boost herd health.

"Where legal, feeding minerals and supplements will help bolster your property's attraction," Whitetail Institute's Brandon Self said. "It can also improve lactation in does and antler development. From Whitetail Institute, you can't go wrong with 30-06 or 30-06 Plus Protein.

"We also offer 30-06 Thrive, which you can feed (again, where legal) in the post-rut and throughout the deep winter when the deer need a boost. Nutritionally, it has everything that deer will need to get through that tough season.

There are a lot of minerals and supplements on the market, but 30-06 products are designed and blended specifically for white-tailed deer, not cattle or horses."



sunflowers. Summer Slam is a mixture of peas, legumes and some vetch. Both products offer great mixtures of spring and summer crops that are attractive to deer. Both have high tonnages and excellent browse tolerances, along with high protein content, fast production and superior drought tolerances."

FALL AND WINTER

With antler growing season behind and the rut ahead, fall bucks feed in force up through the pre-rut, their bodies and necks peaking by late-October. Protein is critical, so Imperial Whitetail Clover is a must-plant.

When the rut kicks in and bucks become less interested in food and more interested in does, the importance of food doesn't diminish. Having doe groups at your food sources mean the bucks will be scent-checking them, and at the rut's tail end, the bucks will transition back to food to replenish spent calories. Self suggested a few products that are highly attractive to deer from late fall through early winter.

"I would definitely plant a brassica blend," he said. "Some really good options are Whitetail Institute's Tall Tine Tubers, Beets and Greens, and Winter Greens. These are blended crops that include early season attraction and late-season forages. That way, you'll have deer all throughout the hunting season, especially as other food sources disappear due to the fall harvest. When frost hits and snow accumu-

lates, deer will dig up the ground to get to the tubers."

Although brassica blends are great throughout the country, Self outlined some additional fall and winter food sources that appeal to deer.

"Down in the South, anything with triticale is going to hold deer through the winter months," he said. "Rye and winter wheat (we don't have any products with that) are also strong options for the southern United States. We have a few products with triticale, which are Extreme, Full Strut and Pure Attraction."

ALL YEAR

Self also hammered home the importance of offering a perennial plot.

"As a general rule, I always suggest having a perennial plot as one constant protein source," he said. "Imperial Whitetail Clover and Fusion are excellent perennials that are scientifically optimized for white-tails. Whitetail Clover is a proprietary clover blend, and Fusion is a blend of whitetail clover and forage chicory. Both have excellent cold tolerance and heat-, drought-, and disease-resistance."

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

You can have 20 acres of tillable ground planted in clover, brassicas, corn or other crops, but to hold deer, the property must have bedding cover. Properties that have a lot of deer



■ If you're willing to put in the work and invest some money, you can have deer on your property 365 days a year.

during summer and early fall but few to none in fall and winter usually lack cover. Spring through early fall foliage decreases visibility and offers security, but when the leaves fall, does the property still offer any dense security? Tall switchgrass and thermal cover are ways to thicken up parts of your property and give deer reasons to bed there.

Another consideration, especially if you hunt directly over your food plots, is access. You can have food, but if

you're constantly blowing out deer while entering or exiting, something has to change. Say hello to screening. There are different types of screening options, such as switchgrass, miscanthus, corn and sunflowers. From Whitetail Institute's lineup, your option is Conceal. It's blended with seeds that grow to various heights up to 8 feet tall to provide a thick screen to block your entry and exit and also calm deer while they feed in your plots.

ONE MORE THING

If going from no food plots or a small kill plot to having enough food sources to attract and hold deer all year feels like a giant you can't slay, there are resources. If you have a budget, you might consider hiring a property consultant.

"If you want to take your deer hunting property to the next level, Whitetail Institute has a consulting option aptly named Next Level Consulting," Self said. "Our consultants can run through all of the important details from soil testing to what seed to plant to how to access the property and stands and blinds — everything you need to know to optimize your individual property."

A small kill plot is better than nothing, especially if you have a small property or lack the tools to create bigger and better plots. A larger plot planted solely with clover can also effectively attract deer for parts of the year. But to attract and hold deer year-round, give the details we've covered a fair shot. I bet you'll see a tremendous difference that's worth your time and money.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE DEER GONE?

■ If you jump through all of the hoops to lay out a deer buffet with the plantings discussed in the article and suddenly see a decline in deer activity at your plots during hunting season, there are two possible reasons.

First, how often are you hunting your property? If you have only 20 to 40 acres and you're hunting it constantly, it's almost impossible to avoid pressuring deer. They will catch on regardless of your access and how discreet you are and shift patterns as a result.

If you've hunted sparingly with extremely careful access but have noticed a decline in deer activity on your food plots, the problem could be other food sources. Think acorns and chestnuts. Food plots can't always compete with these. You might have to transition your hunting efforts to the timber, where deer can bed and eat highly desirable forest foods in a small area. Acorns and chestnuts will compete with your food plots for deer attraction for a time, but when those little forest snacks are depleted, deer will buckle down hard at your brassica plots for fall and winter.





GET HAPPY

HOW NEXT LEVEL
CONSULTING HELPED
DON WILLIAMS

■ Don Williams said management recommendations from Next Level Consulting have started to show great results at his property.

The Florida landowner's three-part undertaking is already producing big results.

■ by **Alan Clemons**

After Don Williams got a grasp of his new property just south of the Florida-Georgia line, he knew he'd need some help. With overgrown food plots and sandy soils in the former pine plantation, the land had potential but required long-term thinking.

Williams has about 250 acres mostly surrounded by about 400 acres of federal preserve land, both about the snaking, black-water Alapaha River. Williams' property is primarily pines, with several overgrown food plots established by the previous owner.



For Williams, his continuing project is akin to a three-part play that needs some touchups for a renewal in the spotlight. He hired Next Level Consulting to give him advice on various things after hearing his ideas. Here's how things are working out for him so far.

ACT 1: THE BEFORE

Williams bought this land about three years ago from an older man who had let it go. The potential was there, but it would take time and effort.

"The gentleman owned it for more than 30 years but got to where he couldn't take care of it as he got older," Williams said. "But he was a hunter and had created different areas of food plots. So, he knew what was there. Those plots probably hadn't been touched for more than five years by the time I bought it. Everything was overgrown. It's pretty much all sand, and he hadn't planted anything in quite a while."

Williams considered some different seed blends and talked with friends with similar soils. He opted to go with Whitetail Institute blends and checked into the Next Level Consulting program. Williams was one of the first landowners to sign up with NLC, which had restarted after a brief hiatus.

"I knew Whitetail Institute had the decades of research, the researchers still putting in the effort, all the time invested over the years, and creating food plots was nothing new," he said. "Obviously, they had research and the brains behind it, so that's where my hopes were to help get things going."

ACT 2: EVALUATION

Boots on the ground is the best way to evaluate property, whether it's for planting crops, checking timber or figuring out what to do to create enjoyable deer hunting.

Williams met with two NLC specialists and gave them a tour. They discussed the land's history, existing — albeit overgrown — food plots, plans and dreams, what kind of deer Williams had been seeing, vegetation management and more.

As with several Southeastern states, Florida has a problem with feral pigs and black bears. Both can put a hurt on supplemental food, such as corn or protein, and pigs can devastate food plots. Williams discussed some things he'd like to accomplish, along with goals of improving the health and size of deer on the property.

"They made some solid recommendations for food plots," Williams said. "It's a pine (tree) farm, so in some areas, they said I could possibly expand some plots in the second year. So I added some areas, changed a little here and there, and they also made some good recommendations to open some things up."

"I started with a new ground plow and really, really turned it over. I had brush-hogged pretty good and then hit it with that new plow to turn it over, and then they arrived to look around. They helped guide me on weed control and soil cultivation. With the latter, I'm trying to turn sand back into dirt by planting things like sorghum, letting it die and then turning it in to build the soil. I'm probably three years into a five-year process of turning Florida sand into dirt, which is tough."

Plants such as sorghum have dense leaves and stalks, which helps produce good organic matter. The goal with these kinds

of plants is to create decomposing organic layers that can be turned under to improve the soil. Repeating this process for several years eventually replenishes and rebuilds poor soil.

"I'm starting to see a difference already," Williams said. "The lime that I put out is starting to last longer. I was putting out lime twice a year at first because it was just leaching through the sand. We do a good bit of soil testing, and this year was the first time in three years that the soil didn't need to be touched. I only had to lime once, and that felt pretty good. It was proof that things were going in the right direction."

ACT 3: THE FUTURE

Williams said the deer population was in poor condition when he started seeing bucks and does, with "ribs and hips showing, just really not looking good at all."

As many hunters do, he started throwing the corn and protein at them like candy at a children's party. Corn provides carbs and energy. Protein builds muscles, helps with antler growth and is good for does or bucks. Protein is the building block of everything, pretty much, and his deer quickly jumped on both.

"I probably go through 2,000 pounds of protein a month, along with corn and the supplemental plots, and we're still in a challenge period of making it better," he said. "There are a lot of deer but, yeah, they were skin and bones. Now they're happier and healthier. I've sat there watching 20 or more at a time, and they look better."

Williams said he's doing some doe management, trying to figure out a good number to take each season, along with dropping a few cull bucks. Yes, he said, he knows that's "a touchy thing in the industry," but he's in the cull camp, and that's fine. So far, he believes things are paying off.

"We have some 2- and 3-year-olds with great potential, tall tines, and one buck will be 4 years old this season," he said. "We have his sheds. He's going to be an absolute beast. We're selective, and as this process goes along, I'll take the time to make good decisions."

Next Level Consulting has paid off with solid plans Williams can follow, along with suggestions for weed control or even some experimental plots. So far, he believes working with NLC is one of the best decisions he's made for his property.

"I just will stay with it and still do the soil testing, pick their brains for weed control or other questions, and if the guy I talk with doesn't have an answer, then I know he'll go get one," he said. "I've had a couple of different experimental plots to test some sandy-soil seeds, which is interesting and fun to try something new."

"One of the biggest things that proved we're on the right track is plot cages. I didn't think anything was growing, and one of the guys said to put a wire cage in the middle of the plot. It was shocking to see how hard they were mowing down whatever came up, and how fast they did it. But it was proof that things were working."



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

ALFA-RACK PLUS:

TAKING ALFALFA FOOD PLOTS TO THE TOP LEVEL

This mix outperforms hay-type alfalfas and is versatile enough to plant in various soil types.

■ by **Whitetail Institute Staff**

One of the hallmarks of Whitetail Institute product research and development is its practice of developing products to meet specific performance criteria in food plots. Alfa-Rack Plus is a prime example of that approach, in this case to extensively improve upon the attractiveness, longevity and versatility beyond that of standard hay alfalfas.

COMPONENTS

Any discussion of Alfa-Rack Plus must begin with its primary forage type: alfalfa. Most folks are familiar with alfalfa generally. However, the alfalfas in Alfa-Rack Plus are different from standard hay-type alfalfas. Specifically, Alfa-Rack Plus features grazing-type alfalfas, which produce more

leaf relative to stem, and are more cold tolerant than hay alfalfas.

Alfa-Rack Plus is primarily designed as an alfalfa planting, but performance and versatility are significantly enhanced by two other components: Imperial Whitetail Clover and WINA Chicory. Imperial Whitetail Clover is the No. 1 food plot product in the world. It was originally developed through six years by scientifically cross-pollinating and selecting offspring of more than 100 clover varieties gathered worldwide for many factors important to usage in food plots, such as protein levels, disease resistance, early seedling vigor, attractiveness to whitetails, and tolerance of heat, cold and drought. Through the years, Whitetail Institute has continued to breed new clover varieties and add

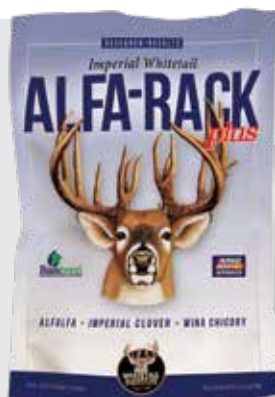
them to Imperial Whitetail Clover (and Alfa-Rack Plus) when doing so further improves attraction and performance. Unlike other chicory varieties, which can get waxy and stemmy as they mature, WINA Chicory remains extremely palatable to deer as it matures. The final seed component in Alfa-Rack Plus is a small amount of annual clover, which is included to let the plot to green up as rapidly as possible after planting while the perennial components are still establishing their roots.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF THE BLEND

All components in Alfa-Rack Plus are highly attractive to deer. Having all of them in one product further enhances attractiveness by offering deer a variety of food within the same plot. Another huge benefit is the enhanced drought protection afforded by the alfalfas and chicory. And Alfa-Rack Plus lets you take full advantage of plots that feature various degrees of drainage, as long as the soil is of good quality. Alfa-Rack Plus can provide even coverage of the plot as the clover establishes in areas that hold more moisture, and the alfalfa and chicory establish in areas that are better drained. The combination of grazing alfalfas with Imperial Whitetail Clover and chicory produces a primarily alfalfa-based food plot that's easier to establish, produces greater yield, is more disease-resistant and tolerant of heat, cold and drought. And it's more attractive than any traditional alfalfa or alfalfa blend ever used for food plots.

If you want an alfalfa food plot that's enhanced to outperform standard hay-type alfalfas and versatile enough to handle good soils that are moderately and well-drained, Alfa-Rack Plus is your answer. For best results, perform a laboratory soil test well before planting Alfa-Rack Plus so you can ensure soil pH is 6.5 or higher when you plant. That's a good idea when planting anything, but it's especially wise with any product containing alfalfa, because alfalfa is so sensitive to soil pH.

If you have questions about Alfa-Rack Plus or to order, go to whitetailinstitute.com, or call (800) 688-3030.



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL ALFA-RACK® PLUS

UP TO 44 PERCENT PROTEIN

- Perennial; three- to five-year longevity.
- Available in 3.75 pounds (plants .25 acre) and 16.5 pounds (plants 1.25 acres).
- For medium to well-drained upland-type soils. Contains high-protein browsing alfalfa, exclusive WINA Chicory and Imperial Whitetail Clover.
- Contains a pH enhancer.





MY TROPHY WHITETAILS

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

**PLEASE SCAN HERE AND
TAKE A QUICK SURVEY**

• <https://whitetailinstitute.com/field-tester-survey/>



“CLOVER MAGIC”

SHANE McCURRY | ALABAMA

■ I purchased a small tract of land in Etowah County, Alabama, five years ago with hopes of having a nice hunting area close to home for my boys. We cleared two fields about 2 acres each and planted them in Whitetail Institute products. One field is Imperial Clover, and the other is an annual rotation of Power Plant in spring and Pure Attraction, Ravish Radish and Whitetail Oats Plus in fall. During the past five years, we have watched our deer herd grow

significantly. Our overall herd health and body size has improved greatly, as evidenced by the 130-pound doe my son was able to harvest this past fall for his first deer with a rifle. The does were small-framed and only had one fawn for the first couple of years. Now they have twins each spring. The occasional pics of a decent buck have now become multiple, with 120-plus-inch deer in our plots regularly. And the turkeys love the clover field.



MY TROPHY WHITETAILS



TERRY HORTON | NEW YORK



■ Through the years, we've had great success with many Whitetail Institute products, such as, Winter Greens, White-tail Oats Plus, PowerPlant, Ravish Radish, Destination as well as others. But my all-time favorites have been Imperial Whitetail Clover and Tall Tine Tubers. We are able to hold

deer on our property year-round with those products. The does rely heavily on the clover during summer while taking care of their fawns. Plus, we have taken many more bucks during the hunting season because of the does living here on our property. Yes, the bucks will come.



FIRST DEER

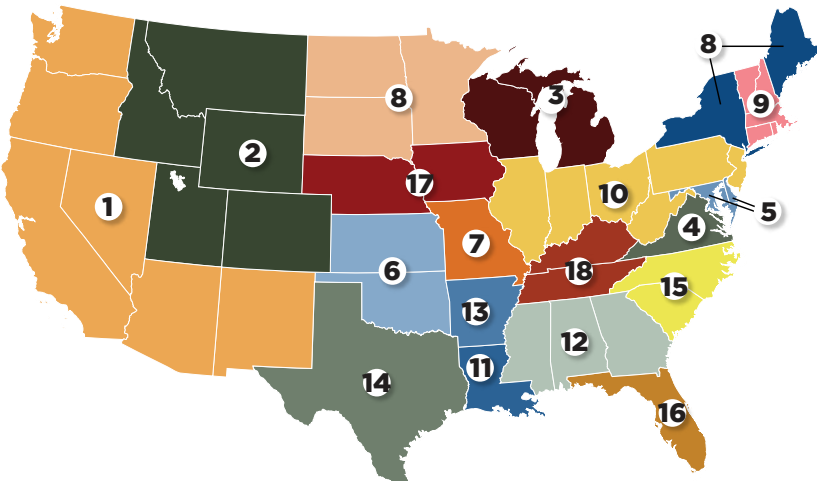
JOHN WYATT MCWHORTER | ALABAMA



KELLER DEAN | ALABAMA

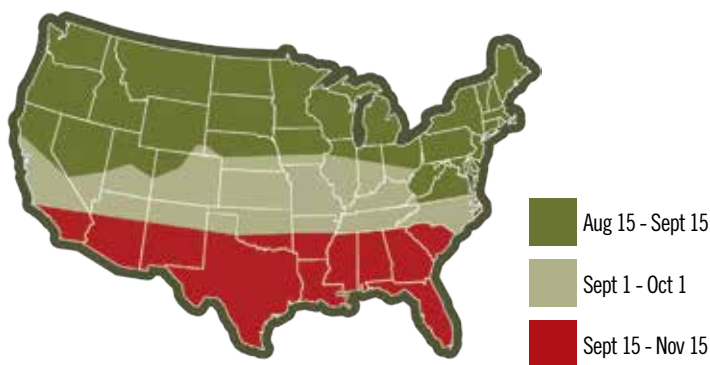


FOOD PLOT PLANTING DATES...



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

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

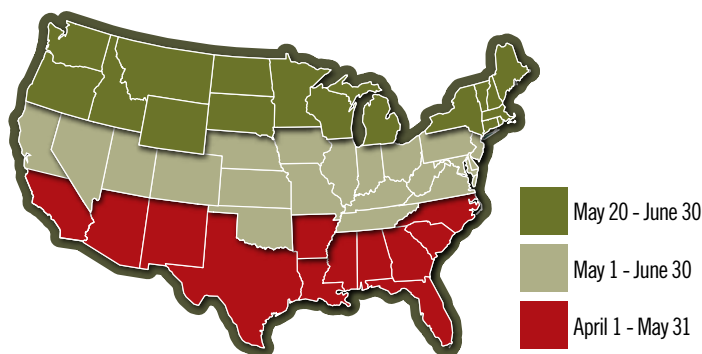


PLANTING DATES FOR WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

Use the map 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 FULL STRUT, VISION, PURE ATTRACTION, SECRET SPOT, WINTER PEAS, BOWSTAND, AND DESTINATION

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



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

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



FOR THE LATEST PROMOTIONS, SALES AND NEWS VISIT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/WHITETAILINSTITUTE



DISCOUNT COUPONS

ORDER TODAY!

SHIPPING INCLUDED IN PRICES

YOU SAVE \$29.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER

36 LBS.-4.5-ACRE PLANTING

\$249.98 + tax
Suggested Retail \$279.96
— (36 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Clover
TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)
\$ _____

YOU SAVE \$42.98

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL EXTREME

33.6 LBS.-1.5-ACRE PLANTING

\$198.96 + tax
Suggested Retail \$241.94
— (33.6 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail EXTREME
TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)
\$ _____

YOU SAVE \$20.03

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CONCEAL

28 LBS.-4.5-ACRE PLANTING

\$159.98 + tax
Suggested Retail \$179.96
— (28 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail Conceal
TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)
\$ _____

SOLD OUT!
Call 1-800-688-3030 opt1 to pre-book for 2026

YOU SAVE \$43.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL FUSION

27.75 LBS.-4.5-ACRE PLANTING

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

YOU SAVE \$5.03

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL POWERPLANT

50 LBS.-4.5-ACRE PLANTING

\$154.98 + tax
Suggested Retail \$160.00
— (50 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail PowerPlant
TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)
\$ _____

SOLD OUT!
Call 1-800-688-3030 opt1 to pre-book for 2026

YOU SAVE \$30.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL PURE ATTRACTION

39 LBS.-.75-ACRE PLANTING

\$89.97 + tax
Suggested Retail \$119.97
— (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

33 LBS.-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 \$30.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL NO-PLOW

40 LBS.-2.25-ACRE PLANTING

\$119.98 + tax
Suggested Retail \$149.98
— (40 lb.) quantities of Imperial Whitetail No-Plow
TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)
\$ _____

NEW

YOU SAVE \$40.00

SOLD OUT!

Call 1-800-688-3030 opt1 to pre-book for 2026

SUMMER SLAM



\$99.96 + tax
Suggested Retail \$ 139.96
— (31.5 lb.) quantities of
Imperial Whitetail Summer Slam
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 @ \$49.96
— (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 \$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 \$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)
\$ _____

YOU SAVE \$25.00

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL FULL STRUT



40 LBS.-1-ACRE PLANTING
\$114.96 + tax
Suggested Retail \$139.96
— (40 lb.) quantities of
Imperial Whitetail Full Strut
TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax)
\$ _____

SHIP TO: _____
Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

(No PO Boxes, Cannot Ship to Canada)

Payment: ☐ Check or Money Order enclosed

Charge to: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Discover ☐ AMEX

Credit Card: _____ Exp. _____

Date: _____ Sec.Code: _____

Signature: _____

Whitetail Institute

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BACK-40 NOTEBOOK

■ **Brian Lovett** ~ Whitetail News Senior Editor

AILUROPHOBIA

*The outdoors can bring many surprises.
Typically, being attacked by a predator isn't one.*

I didn't realize it at the time, but I'd already peaked that day.

Lying in my bunk, listening to wind-driven rain pound the metal roof, I figured we probably wouldn't hunt that morning. Snoring from nearby bunks confirmed it, so I clicked off my alarm and tried to catch a few more winks until the weather cleared. Typically, that'd be fairly easy, but it was the first day of a much-anticipated trip to western Oklahoma, so turning off the go switch seemed a bit tougher. But spring rains don't last forever, so I figured I'd scratch my itch soon enough.

Eventually, light, intermittent showers replaced the heavy rain, and the bunkhouse began to stir. We'd find them in the pastures, everyone agreed. Conventional wisdom proved correct, as we quickly located turkeys in a big ag field. I won't bore you with the details of that unsuccessful hunt. The turkeys had reached the field before me, and although I scrambled around the periphery and tried to get in their path, they juke me again. Ultimately, hours later, I slipped toward a neck of woods between the creek bottom and the big cottonwoods, hoping the turkeys might pass through late that afternoon on their way to roost.

Hunters who've spent enough time at such setups know they can be, well ... rather boring. And if you're like me, you're pretty squirrely after about an hour of that, assuming the turkeys aren't playing.

But, as noted, I'd vowed to be patient, and because the turkeys I was "on" hadn't gobbled much the previous few hours, I figured it didn't make sense to stumble around and bump Rios into the next county.

So I sat, yelped a bit, and then sat some more. At some point, I figured, the turkeys would provide some clue that would spur me to action or bring the hunt to a close. Something had to happen, I figured.

Perhaps 90 minutes into my sit, I picked up a glass call, ran a few series of calls, set it down and then turned my head slightly to the left. Instantly, my day changed.

A blow from behind and above shoved my head forcefully into my chest, and for an instant, I could only endure the pressure. Then, as if someone had grabbed my temples on both sides, the force violently thrashed my head up and down. Having no clue what happened, I imagined that one of my campmates had somehow slipped behind me and was attempting a bad joke.

After the second or third thrash, I must have hit a panic response and reared my head backward forcefully. The weight subsided, and in that millisecond, I thought to look behind me to see my assailant.

And that's when I glimpsed the bobcat hit the ground and sprint away.

I'm no stranger to Outdoor Life-esque "This Happened to Me" moments, and I'd read quite a few stories about turkey hunters being stalked by bobcats or mountain lions. In fact, I'd even seen a few bobcats approach my calling in Florida, Alabama and elsewhere. But obviously, I'd never been the victim of a full-out bobcat attack.

Stunned, I immediately figured the top of my head was slashed to ribbons by the cat's claws. I ran my hand under my cap and along my bald head. No pain. No blood. Nothing. In fact, I only found one slight scratch atop my dome. Then, wondering if I'd imagined the episode, I checked my hat. It was covered in bobcat hair.

At that point, with my adrenaline still surging and heart pounding, I didn't give a rip about the turkeys. I was done hunting for the day. Gathering my stuff, I left the setup and headed for the road, hoping I could reach my guide via text for an early pickup. He replied quickly, saying he'd be there in a bit.

The break gave me pause. Figuring I'd only have such an opportunity once in my life — as bobcat attacks likely wouldn't be an annual occurrence — I needed to take full advantage of the situation. That would be no problem for a great oral storyteller. I'm not one of those, preferring the brevity and forcefulness of written words to bar or campfire talk. But I couldn't blow this one. I had to spin at least a respectable yarn to the guide and my buddies to make sure the event would carry the impact it deserved.

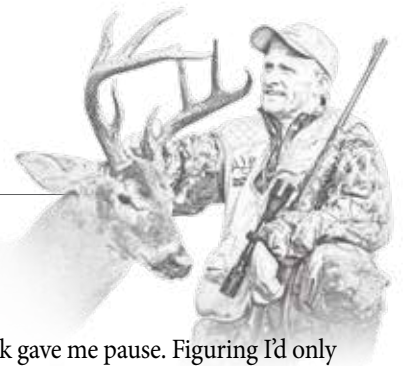
Maybe it was divine intervention or PTSD, but I managed to craft a decent tale that built up drama, described the ferocity of the attack and then revealed the cause. So when my friends arrived and asked what I'd seen, I slowly set into it and delivered a fair yarn, all the while hiding my hair-covered cap behind my back to reveal later with dramatic effect.

Their reaction was perfect, complete with gasps and astonished looks. Even the guide was stunned, saying he'd seen a big male bobcat in that area but never imagined that it might stalk a turkey hunter. (Actually, that made me feel good, as it seemed better to have been jumped by a big, bold male cat rather than an immature female.)

With that, we returned to camp for dinner. One hunter had killed two gobblers, but everyone else had struck out that day. So, with few turkey stories to tell, we circled back to the bobcat again and again. And as the weather improved the next few days and longbeards began to fall regularly, the cat story became another part of camp lore.

I still have the hat somewhere, plus a few pictures of the scratch on my head. Most days, I don't think about the cat attack. Yet every spring when I sit by a tree to blind call, I glance behind me just to make sure no predators are crouched in waiting.

Paranoid? Yep. But I experienced it once and have no interest in reliving the event. Besides, a second attack wouldn't have nearly the impact of the first, and any subsequent story would probably fall flat.





RESEARCH EQUALS RESULTS



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL POWERPLANT

Imperial PowerPlant is a blend of forage beans, peas, sunflower and sunn hemp. PowerPlant produces several tons of highly attractive, highly nutritious forage even during the hot summer months.

Still the leader since 1988



WHITETAIL INSTITUTE

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VISIBILITY TO THE MAX...



**NEW
COLOR**

Redneck Blinds is excited to announce our all-new "Redneck Camo" option for the Game Changer 6x8, Big Country 6x7, and Buck Palace 6x6 Fiberglass Box Blinds.

The long-lasting Gel Coat finish will not scratch off from branches or other normal uses and provides contrast to blend in with fall colors.

SELECT BLIND COLOR



THE 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!

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 Sft, 10ft Stands and Sft, 10ft Stairway Stands
- Available with Deluxe Sft, 10ft & 15ft powder coated steel stands
- Full line of accessories available to enhance your hunting experience
- NEW "Redneck Camo" color option



6X8 GAME CHANGER PLATINUM 360°

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



ON 10FT STAIRWAY