

HUNTER SHOOTS 227-INCH MONSTER IN OHIO

WHITETAIL NEWS

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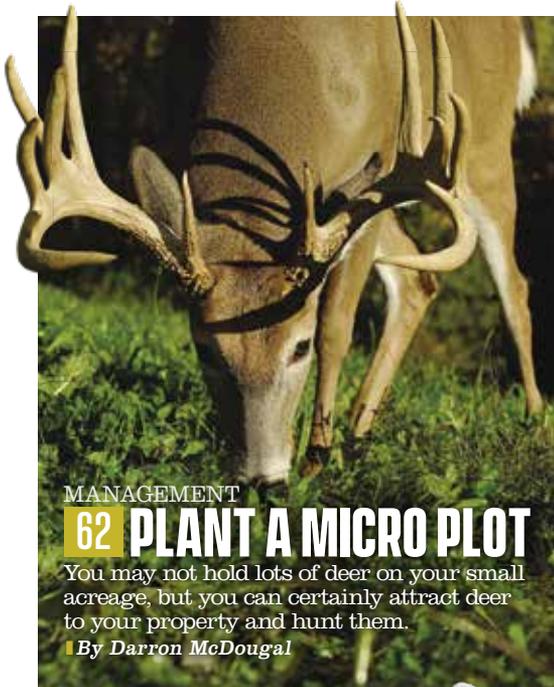


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GM GIVES PERSPECTIVE TO 2020 EVENTS

To say that the past year has been unusual would be quite an understatement. The mechanics of our daily lives radically changed during that time, as measures were quickly fashioned and implemented to combat COVID. Many of those changes were uncomfortable for us because they were forced upon us so suddenly — rapidly mandated responses to a virus that took the world by surprise. Thankfully, COVID numbers finally seem to be trending in the right direction in most places, and many are sensing that the worst of the pandemic might be finished. We've gone through so much, as a nation and personally, and it occurs to me in hindsight that there were some blessings among the uncertainty.

From a company standpoint, the appearance of COVID quickly focused Whitetail Institute's perspective on keeping its staff safe while simultaneously ensuring that the high quality of service our customers deserve didn't suffer. The team at Whitetail Institute was committed and quickly flexed to the remote work environment. Together, we learned to communicate a little differently but always kept our top-notch customer service standards. Whitetail Institute has weathered many economic storms since it started the food plot industry in 1988, and I believe those experiences prepared us as much as possible to deal effectively with the challenges COVID presented to our business.

As has been the case with so many families, my family was directly affected by COVID. We all experienced fear and loss, but I recognize in hindsight that we also received other blessings throughout the

pandemic. The sheltering-in-place order was an amazing blessing for my family in that it forced us to follow a united path at a slower pace. My wife was fortunate to be invited on a woman's turkey event hosted by Alabama Wildlife Federation in Spring 2019. The event introduced women to turkey hunting. She did not bag a bird on that trip but learned about various turkey calling techniques and other hunting strategies. It was enough just to have her ask me to take her. It's sad to

say, had we not been under the stay-at-home order, I'm not certain we would have taken the time to get out and turkey hunt together. Hunting with her was awesome, and she scored her first turkey on our second hunt.

My two children, who are enrolled in distant colleges, returned home as their schools transitioned to virtual classes, and those months with them home were an unexpected joy. We ate meals together and spent family time expanding the home menu as we all pitched in to learn new ways of cooking. We played cards and games and worked puzzles together. I never dreamt that my children would move home again, let alone at the same time. The four of us even had weekly fishing tournaments in our pond and tried many recipes for preparing and cooking bass.

Our close relationships with custom-



— **THE 2020 PANDEMIC** offered some silver linings, such as letting families spend more time together. In fact, William Cousins and his wife hunted turkeys together, and she bagged her first bird.

ers and friends revealed that many of them have had similar experiences

in their own lives. The pandemic has adversely affected them in some ways, but many found extra time to enjoy family togetherness and Mother Nature. Many had family members try outdoor sports for the first time and truly learned how remarkably enjoyable spending time outdoors can be. As is the case with most things, you can often find some good along with the bad, and with that also reasons to be thankful. The suffering and loss have been tragic, and I pray this will end soon. May the changes that united us provide strength, support and encouragement for a brighter future.



■ by *Scott Bestul*
PHOTOS BY RYAN BERAN

Ohio is a well-known producer of whopper whitetails. In fact, the Buckeye State leads the Boone & Crockett books as the top spot for killing a giant non-typical. But northeastern Ohio has not contributed much to the state's big buck reputation. And Ashtabula County, in the Buckeye State's northeastern corner, seems to have everything going against it for producing mature whitetails. Bordered by Lake Erie, the county is in the middle of the snow belt, where severe winters, small blocks of timber and intense hunting pressure make it tough for bucks to live long enough to grow monstrous antlers.

But Ryan Beran and his family are not deterred by those hurdles. They work hard to create and maintain habitat that attracts deer to their properties. That vigilance paid off for Beran this past September, when he killed a huge 4½-year-old buck he'd watched grow up. The 227-inch giant is proof that the family's tactics are working. Here's the story of Beran's hunt for the huge buck and the methods he and his family use to manage their property.

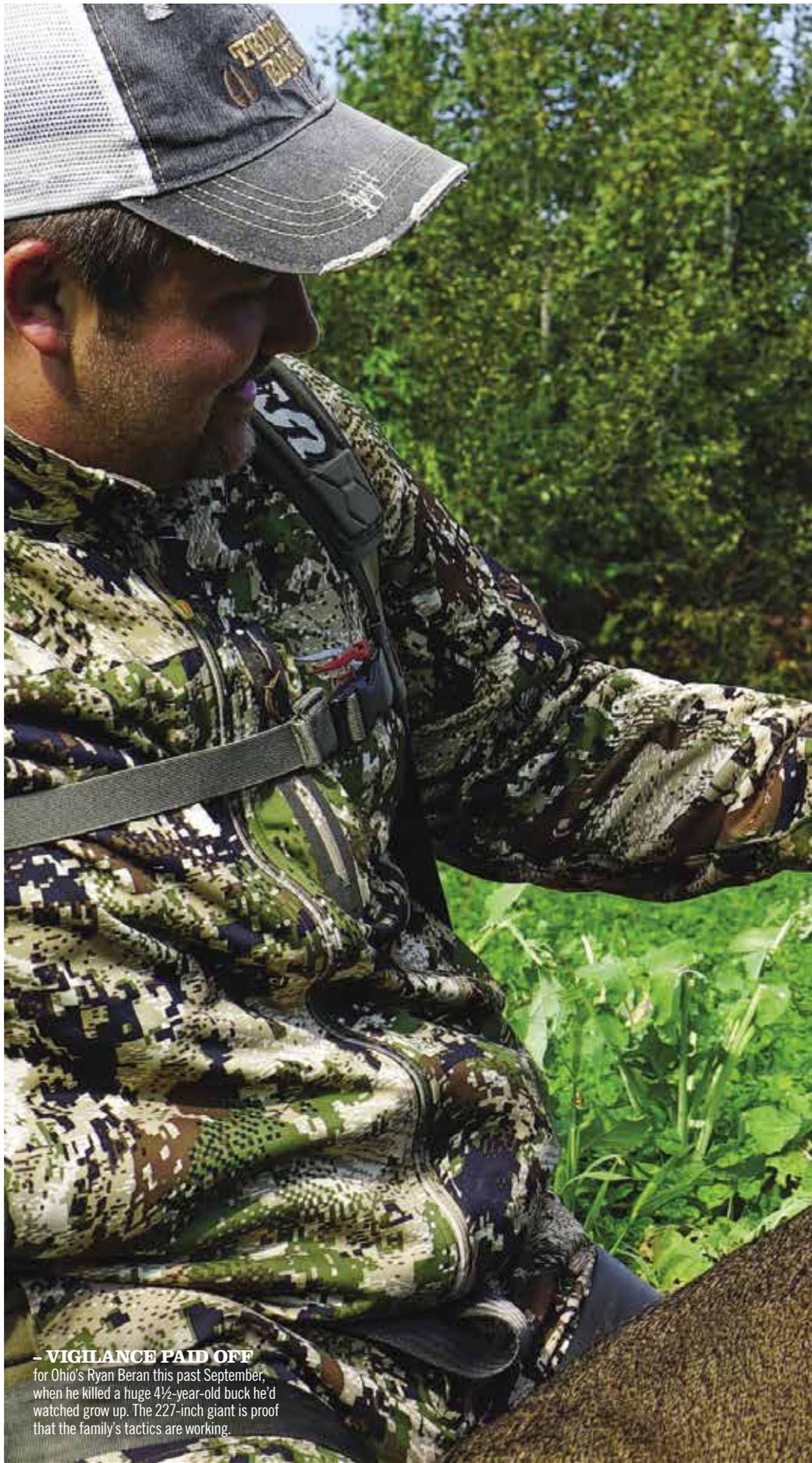
LETTING A BEAST GROW UP

Beran first encountered the buck in 2018, when it was 2½ years old.

"I could tell he had the potential to be a great deer even then," he said. "He had 13 points, with a split brow tine and a kicker. I found his sheds the next spring, and he scored 123, which is pretty amazing for a 2-year-old around here."

Although the buck's second rack was impressive, the buck was just getting started.

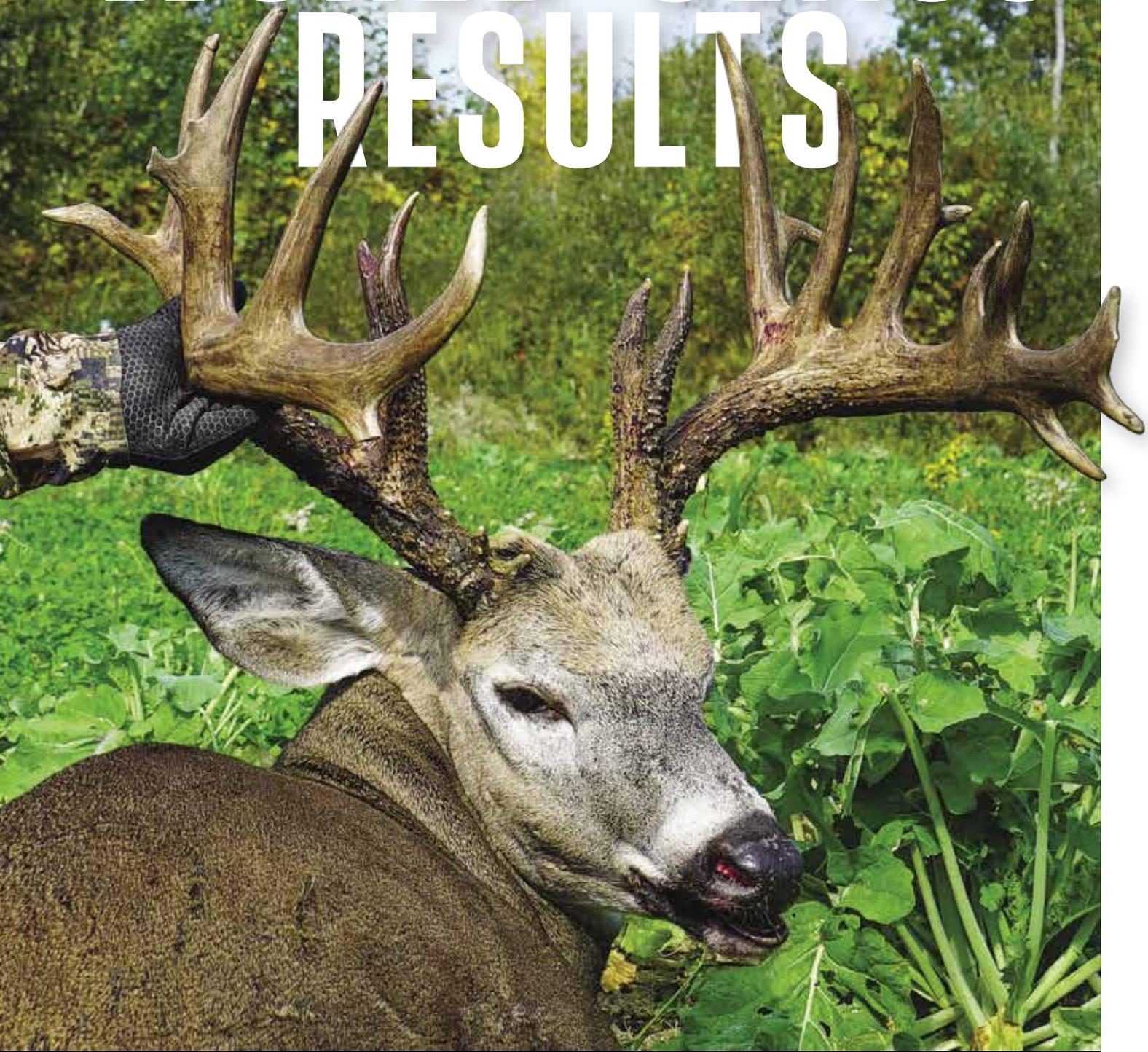
"The next summer, I started getting pics of him almost immediately on my mineral licks," Beran said. "He was also a regular on my Whitetail Institute Imperial Clover plots, which are between the thick bedding cover and destination food plots farther out. The buck was just growing all summer, and when the archery season opened, he had 18 points



— VIGILANCE PAID OFF
for Ohio's Ryan Beran this past September, when he killed a huge 4½-year-old buck he'd watched grow up. The 227-inch giant is proof that the family's tactics are working.

Ohio hunter's giant buck proves
careful management pays dividends.

WORLD-CLASS RESULTS



- RESTING PLACE

Beran shot this brute over an Imperial Clover field. After he shot the deer, it ran to Beran's Imperial Winter-Greens field, where it died.



- GAME CAMERAS PAID OFF

The upper photo is the deer at 2 years old on the very Imperial Clover field where it was shot two years later. The other trail camera photos show the trophy buck hanging around on Beran's property.



and a drop-tine. I figured he would be right around 170, and that would be the biggest buck I'd ever killed. But I just kept thinking about the jump he made from the year before and wondered if he could do that again. If so, I'd be looking at something special. So, when he walked out on the food plot and fed to within 10 yards, I didn't even draw my bow. I knew I had to let him go."

The next spring, Beran found one shed from the monster buck, so he knew the buck had survived, and with some luck, the chance at a true Ohio giant seemed real.

"When we bought this property, it had been logged not long before, so the cover was very good," he said. "We do our best to keep that habitat as good as we can by adding ponds and food plots. We tend to attract some of the best bucks in the area because of that, and I hoped that this deer would continue to feel safe and stay here."

Beran's hopes were realized when the buck started showing up at his favorite mineral sites in Summer 2020.

“In early summer, I could already tell he was going to be an amazing buck,” he said. “But I was not prepared for the jumps in growth I’d see as the summer progressed. His rack seemed to blow up every week. Early in the summer, I was getting three to four pics of him each week. But in late summer, it just got crazy. I’d bet nine days out of every 10, he’d be on my cameras. He wasn’t nearly that predictable the year before.”

With the archery season approaching, Beran believed the buck would be vulnerable at one of his favorite clover plots.

“It was an hourglass-shaped plot where, if I waited for the right wind, I knew I’d have a good chance if he showed up to feed,” he said.

He also opted to use a crossbow, which is legal during Ohio’s archery season.

“I almost always use a vertical bow, but I knew if I got a chance at this buck, I wanted every advantage,” he said. “I have a great crossbow, so decided I’d use that.”

As it turned out, Beran could have probably used a sharp stick to kill the giant buck he’d passed the year before. Opening weekend was warm, but with a good wind in his favor, Beran headed to the stand. The buck emerged from the bedding cover and into the food plot, where the favorable wind made the deer feel safe and gave a slight but critical edge to the hunter.

“He fed within easy bow range, and I made a perfect double-lung shot,” Beran said.

The buck tore off into the dense timber, and Beran was certain he heard the deer crash.

“Still, I gave it a couple of hours before looking for him,” he said. “I wanted people close to me to be with me when I found him. I called my wife, my parents and a couple of friends to join me on the blood trail, which was pretty easy to follow. I honestly didn’t think he was a 200-inch buck until we walked up on him. When I got to put my hands on him, I was pretty sure he was breaking that barrier with some room to spare.”



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MANAGEMENT PAYOFF

As gratifying as it was to kill a world-class deer, Beran was particularly pleased to see years of work creating the best cover and food pay off.

“I think it starts with our cover,” he said. “We have the best, nasty clear-cut timber habitat in the block, and most years, the best bucks in the neighborhood spend at least some of their lives here. I’m convinced that’s because of the cover.”

Right behind the bedding and security cover that makes bucks feel safe, Beran credits having superior food sources that attract and hold whitetails.

“We’ve developed a food plot system that ensures deer can have everything they want without leaving the property,” he said. “We have a 7-acre field on the edge of the property, and that comprises our destination food plot that keeps deer fed through a long winter.”

“Within the property are interior food plots that slow deer down as they travel to the larger fields. They also create hunting opportunities, and one of these is where I killed my 2020 buck. When I create these, I like to situate them in places where deer already like to go — part of their natural pattern. This seems to work better than trying to attract them to a place that’s easier for me but uncomfortable for them.”

Beran plants various Whitetail Institute products, but Imperial Clover is always an integral part of his plan.

“Imperial Clover is one thing that always grows well here,” he said. “Soil treatment is critical, and to me, pH is the most important of all. If that’s not right, you can waste a ton of money on fertilizer that can’t perform correctly because the

soil is too acidic. If your pH is 5.5, you’ll waste half the fertilizer you put down. Weed control is done through a combination of spraying and mowing. I mow my clover once in June and then about once every six weeks, depending on rainfall. I never mow in a drought, as it really stresses clover. I pay attention to the forecast and only mow once I know there’s rain coming.”

Water is a final component of Beran’s game plan.

“We put in ponds close to the food, and they really focus on these areas from summer into fall,” he said. “Water is super important to deer, and they’ll travel to find it if it isn’t readily available. We install ponds that are 10 yards wide by that same distance long, and 4 to 5 feet deep. It’s pretty flat here, so when rain fills them up, they hold water well.”

CONCLUSION

Although Beran’s Ohio giant netted 227 inches, it could have posted a higher net score, as the buck had broken off one of its drop tines on its death run.

“We looked for days but never did find that tine,” Beran said with a laugh. “If that had stayed with him, he might have gone over 230. But I obviously don’t care. Bucks like that are a rarity in this area. I was lucky enough to be able to watch one grow up on our property and then have a chance to tag him in his prime. Hopefully, he bred enough does during his life that another one like him might show up some day.”



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THEY DUG A BIG HOLE: SO WHAT?

Sometimes, land managers misconstrue signs as evidence their mineral is working. Actually, that determination requires more analysis than simply seeing a hole in the ground.

■ by *Matt Harper*

T I'm not particularly scared of spiders, mice, bugs, snakes and the like. That doesn't mean I would keep any of those as pets, but I'm also not prone to jumping out of my skin if I see one skitter or slither across the floor.

But one varmint really gives me the heebie-jeebies: rats. Maybe that's because as a child, I was constantly worried about them running up my pant leg when I was cleaning the corn crib. But for whatever reason, I think they're disgusting, evil little critters.

This hatred manifested into a full-on war a couple of years ago, when I went to battle against rats after they invaded my barn. Barns will always have rats, but thanks to a bad decision in the form of an open grain feeder too close to barn, I was suddenly swarmed. I tried everything short of blowing the barn up (which I actually considered), but nothing worked. Then one day, I had the idea to flood them out. I ran a hose down several rat holes and pumped several hundred gallons

right into their faces. Wet, soaking rats ran everywhere as I swung my scoop shovel like a battleax, hoping to smash a few to show as an example to the others. After a while, when all but a few had escaped, it appeared my rat problem was finished. However, that was delusional, as they soon moved back in and dug deeper, more extravagant tunnels thanks to the wet dirt. It wasn't until I spent several thousand dollars in concrete and sealed grain bins that the problem was fixed.

Often, we arrive at a conclusion based solely on what we see in that situation. The human brain wants to find answers and then move to the next matter, so if we witness what appears to be conclusive, we file it away as a determined subject. Sometimes, as in the case with my rats, I wanted the result to be something so badly that I used only one visual example to decide the matter. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew the rats would come back, but I stomped the thought down with what I saw.

There are attractants and there are true deer minerals, and the difference between them relates to what they were designed to accomplish. A true deer mineral is designed with nutritional supplementation as the first priority.



Likewise, through the years, I've been involved in hundreds if not thousands of conversations, stories and debates about the use of mineral. The particulars vary, but one common thread woven through almost all of those interactions is the question, "Is it working?" After all, you can't see antlers growing as a buck eats mineral. There's no way to immediately tell if a herd is improving a couple of weeks after you create a mineral site.

Granted, you can keep good records and throughout a year to two try to analyze whether you're seeing heavier body weights, improved fawn survivability and increased antler growth. But that takes time, and most of us are too impatient to wait that long for an answer, so we seek other ways to get more immediate confirmation. What does that involve? Simple. We check out the mineral site a few days later to see if deer are eating it. I'm guessing most of us have

looked at a mineral site, saw that deer were digging a hole and thought, "That stuff must really be working."

Usually, when I ask someone if their mineral is working, they say, "Well the deer are digging a big hole," which apparently must correlate to the effectiveness of the mineral. In truth, it only relates to the effectiveness of consumption and doesn't prove any other benefits minerals can produce. I can throw a dozen doughnuts and bag of chips in front of my hunting buddies, and they would be cleaned up before I can get back with the beverages. They would eat the heck out of the food, and depending on the time in the evening, I could probably throw it on the ground and they would dig a hole for it. What good did they get nutritionally? Not much. However, many folks use the same type of thinking when analyzing the effectiveness of a mineral.

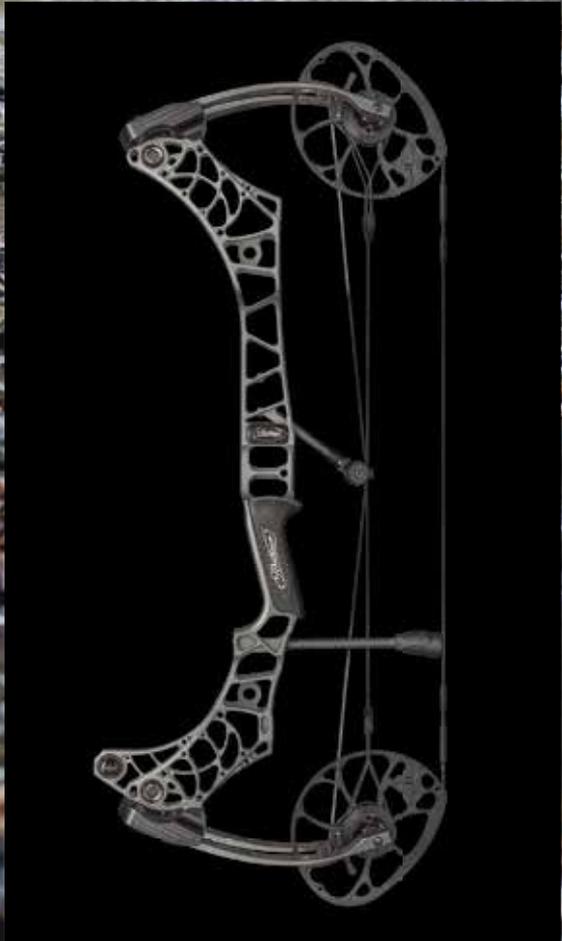
WHY DO THEY DIG A HOLE?

You might think that deer digging a big hole is what you want, because the mineral is attracting deer to one location. That's fine if you're most concerned about attraction, but let's make sure we're using appropriate terminology. There are attractants and there are true deer minerals, and the difference between them relates to what they were designed to accomplish. An attractant is designed primarily to attract deer, with little consideration for nutritional supplementation. The purpose of attractants is to bring deer to a specific spot but not necessarily to improve the nutritional plane of the herd. Some attractants purport to be deer minerals, but their product formulation is designed primarily for attracting deer, regardless of how the product is marketed.

A true deer mineral, conversely, is designed with nutritional supplementation



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Domestic livestock operations have seen the dramatic effects of mineral supplementation for decades, and deer managers and hunters have witnessed them with deer mineral supplements such as Imperial 30-06.

as the first priority. Of course, deer must eat it for it to have positive effects, so an attractant must be part of its makeup. However, only enough is used to ensure adequate consumption. In either case, you will often see a hole in the ground, especially if the spot is used during several years.

So, why do deer dig a hole? That involves a combination of several factors. In spring and summer, deer consume lush, green growing vegetation. That vegetation is high in water content (especially in spring), and many growing plant species are also high in potassium. Potassium has many functions, including muscle contraction, but it's also part of a unique regulatory process called osmoregulation, which helps to maintain the electrolyte balance in the body. Maintaining osmotic pressure is essential for the control of optimal electrolyte and non-electrolyte concentrations inside cells. Sodium, also an electrolyte, is involved in osmotic pressure, and in general terms, potassium and sodium work together to help maintain proper osmotic balance. With the high level of potassium coming from fresh, green growing plants, the body starts to crave sodium to maintain that balance.

Lush plants are extremely low in sodium, so deer must look for sodium anywhere they can find it. In some cases, it can be found naturally, which is the attraction to natural mineral licks. Farmers and ranchers call it "salt hungry," and nearly all grazers and browsers will be in that condition when eating green, growing plants, which is why salt blocks or mineral mixes containing salt are found in most cattle pastures. Salt (sodium chloride) provides the sodium needed to balance potassium, and deer will be attracted to it regardless of the form in which it comes. That's why salt is the main attractant in most deer minerals and attractants.

However, sodium can come in other compounds, which is why some products claim to have little salt in the product. Although that might be true,

the reality is that product simply uses a different sodium compound to provide attraction. With moisture and rainfall, sodium tends to leach into the soil. Particle size of the product will affect the speed in which the product leaches, with small particles leaching more quickly than larger particles. Deer dig, eat and lick the sodium-rich soil and continue to chase the leaching sodium deeper in the ground by digging it out — that is, digging a big hole. In fact, deer are more likely to dig for sodium than lick a block on the surface. That might be because licking dirt instead of a block is a more natural way of getting sodium, but if you find an old cattle salt block, you will typically see deer digging dirt around the block more than using the block itself.

Several years ago, a manufacturer introduced a product with such a fine granular size it was nearly powder. It was composed of a sodium compound, and the instructions were to pour water on it when you put it out. Because of its small particle size, the water caused it to almost immediately leach into the soil. In a brief time, deer would dig into the soil to go after the sodium, thus digging a hole. People would say, "That stuff must really work," because it appeared that deer were going crazy about it. Really, the product particle size along with water encouraged rapid leaching and the subsequent digging for sodium, which is why it appeared to be almost addictive.

A TRUE DEER MINERAL

If you're looking only for an attractant and not concerned about improving the nutritional plane of your deer herd, you probably don't need to read the rest of this article. You can simply put an attractant out and wait for deer to do some excavating. But if you want to attract deer and provide them with minerals that will help to grow body size, increase lactation, improve fawn growth and survivability, and improve antler growth, you might want to continue. We have established that sodium is the most common attractant used in deer products, and the

most common form it comes in is sodium chloride, or salt. The functions salt provides are important, but it does little for improving the aforementioned functions and characteristics.

Instead, minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc, manganese and copper are examples of macro and micro minerals that beneficially contribute to body, antler and fawn growth, as well as lactation. These minerals can be found in varying levels within vegetation, but in nearly all cases, one or more will be at suboptimal levels. Minerals in plants are derived from soil, and all soils are deficient in some minerals to some degree. That's why it's wise to supplement those minerals in the form of free-choice mineral.

Domestic livestock operations have seen the dramatic effects of mineral supplementation for decades, and deer managers and hunters have witnessed them with deer mineral supplements such as Imperial 30-06. The trick is to identify whether a product is a true deer mineral or mostly an attractant. The best way to determine that is to look at the product label to see if the product is primarily salt or some other form of sodium. If a product is comprised of 50 percent salt or more, it's likely an attractant more than a true deer mineral.

CONCLUSION

An old saying holds that seeing is believing, and that's true in many cases. If you see a deer dig a big hole in the ground, you believe a product must be working. But you have to be more specific on what working really means. Are deer merely attracted to it, or is it helping to develop a more productive deer herd?

Make sure to understand the product that's the catalyst to that hole, and you can determine what that hole means to quality of the deer herd.



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A TALE OF TWO BUCKS —

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN





- PA BRUTE

Say used Whitetail Institute's Imperial Oats Plus as a nurse crop with his primary planting of Fusion, a mixture of clover and chicory. This 148-inch brute was the result.

Careful management and an innovative stand strategy helped Pennsylvania hunter Jason Say kill two great bucks in a highly pressured area.

■ by Gordy J. Krahn

Jason Say's journey that ended when he shot a bruiser 148-inch Pennsylvania buck during Fall 2020 actually began when an even larger buck began showing up with clockwork regularity at one of his food plots three years earlier. And although his home state is not known for monster bucks, Say was staring down the possibility of putting an arrow in his largest Keystone State buck.

"I had this huge buck coming into a small Whitetail Institute Pure Attraction food plot every single night, and it was absolutely driving me crazy, because I had to be at my sister-in-law's wedding on the Saturday of the archery season opener, and in Pennsylvania, you can't hunt on Sunday," Say said. "I was losing my mind thinking, 'He's in there, the wind is perfect, everything is just right.'"

Unfortunately, things didn't stay "just right." As (bad) luck would have it, the wind was wrong for hunting the food plot that Monday and Tuesday, and the Pennsylvania bowhunter had to anxiously bide his time, waiting for his first opportunity at the buck and hoping it would stick to its pattern of showing up at the food plot during shooting hours.

The wind turned a little on Wednesday, and Say hunted the plot. Almost immediately, he began seeing deer, including six bucks. It was very warm — 80 degrees — but that buck was so patterned that Say was confident it would show up.

"He was one of the easiest deer I've ever hunted, because I had him so patterned for the past month and a half — he was basically living in this plot," Say said. "And he was also the biggest."

It's great when a plan comes together. The buck appeared before dark, and a 37-yard shot put the 154-inch monster on the ground.

A TRADITION OF HUNTING

Say grew up in northwestern Pennsylvania, where the hunting tradition is strong but truly big bucks are somewhat rare.



“If you know anything about this state, you know that when it comes to big bucks, we’re not Iowa, we’re not Illinois. Pennsylvania has one of the highest hunting populations in the country — almost a million hunters. But with antler restrictions in place, we’re finally starting to see bigger and bigger bucks.”

Say said his story is similar to those of many people from Pennsylvania.

“Growing up here, hunting was a way of life,” he said. “Before you were 12, you’d sit by the window all day waiting for your dad to come home from hunting so you could hear his stories and see if he got a deer. Then when you turned 12, you could barely stand the excitement until you could go hunting with your dad and your uncles and do deer drives on the first Saturday of doe

season. So, I was like 99 percent of the kids in Pennsylvania back in the ’80s. We grew up hunting. We loved it, and that’s what we did.”

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Fast forward three years, and it was déjà vu all over again for the Pennsylvania bowhunter, when about two weeks before the season opener, a buck eerily similar to the one he’d shot three years prior began showing up at one of his most remote food plots, which was seeded in a nurse crop of White-tail Institute’s Imperial Oats Plus and a primary planting of Fusion, a mixture of clover and chicory. A nurse crop is a fast-growing secondary crop that’s planted with a primary crop (in this case, Fusion) in the same seedbed to take some of the pressure off of the pe-

rennial crop.

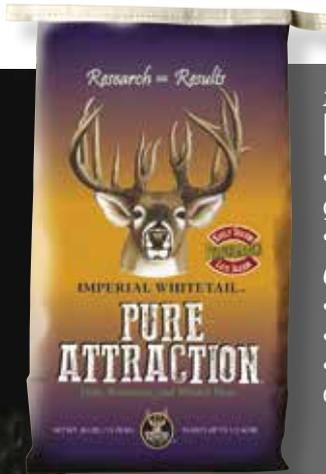
“It was my first year planting a nurse crop with Fusion, and man, the deer just hammered it,” he said.

“This was a very hard food plot to get to. It was one of those cameras that I’d check once every four or five months because it was such a pain to get in there. Then, when I started using Moultrie cellular technology and could check my cameras remotely, I was able to increase my surveillance of the plot and discovered a huge buck was routinely visiting the plot. And the cool thing was, I was getting all of these pictures sent right to my phone, and that buck was there every evening, same as the other one. And I’m thinking, this guy is here all of the time. I can kill this buck.”

Behind every successful hunt is the strategy, planning and hard work that

- PURE ATTRACTION SCORES BIG BUCK

Say shot this 154-inch trophy using Pure Attraction, which is a mix of Oats Plus and forage brassicas.



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PLANT IT AND THEY WILL COME

Say has been planting food plots for 13 years, and he said his story is typical: A guy starts by planting one or two plots and sees the positive effects it has on attracting deer and holding them on the property, and it grows from there.

“You know, I got addicted early on, and that passion has just grown,” he said. “We do have a strategy when we plant our food plots, and it’s been absolutely instrumental in me turning this strip mine property around. There have always been a lot of bucks here, but it’s super thick, there aren’t a lot of large trees around and it’s difficult to hunt. And there’s not a lot to eat up there. So, by planting these food plots, we’re able to draw them out of the thick stuff to eat. The biggest problem is that it just gets mowed down. It looks like they’re chewing on the ground almost — but that’s a good problem to have. The food plots have been extremely beneficial, to not only draw and hold more deer but helping us kill more deer, because now we don’t have to go into that thick stuff. We can leave that alone, and we can draw them out in the food plots and kill those deer.”

Say’s daughter plays basketball and can only hunt weekends, but he really wanted to get her a buck.

“So, on opening day, Saturday, I sat with her, and sure enough that buck was there, and I got pictures with my camera,” he said. “We were in a ground blind hunting a Whitetail Institute Imperial No-Plow plot, and a real nice 8-pointer came in, but she wasn’t able to get a shot.”

Say couldn’t hunt the stand again until Monday.

“I got in there, and it was a train wreck of a night,” he said. “I never did see that buck. I had some does get in behind me, and they winded me and there were deer blowing out everywhere. I was really dejected because I know with a big buck like this — especially in a high-pressured state such as Pennsylvania — you get only so many chances. So, I’m thinking, man, it might be over. I said to myself, ‘I’m going to do everything I can to try and get rid of my scent in case this buck shows back up.’ Well, the next night, my phone buzzes, and sure enough, he was back in there. So, I’m going, all right, I’m going back in there, but we had real high winds on Wednesday, and I didn’t want to risk it, so I decided to wait because the forecast for Thursday looked better.”

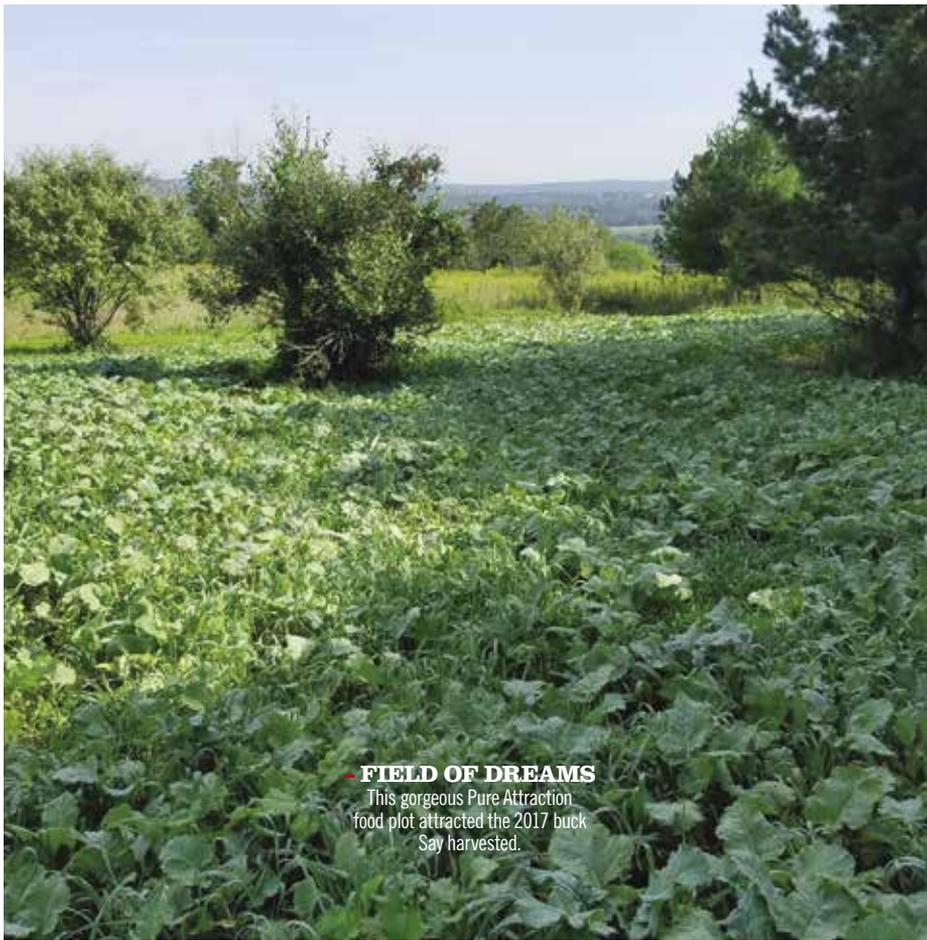
Say returned to the plot Thursday and had deer all around him.

“It was nerve racking,” he said. “I had a 10-pointer come in, and it was everything I could do to not shoot him, but I knew I wouldn’t see that big one if I did. I think I had four other bucks in there that evening and a bunch of does, and then, sure enough, right before dark, I see a couple of little bucks come busting out like something pushed them, and I can just see this huge rack underneath the tree beside me, and I knew right away it was him. I was filming myself, and I wanted him to come out a little more to get some footage, but I had some does in behind me, and they started stomping, so it was now

put the odds in a hunter’s favor, and that setup had challenges.

“This was one of those stands, quite frankly, where there weren’t a lot of options,” Say said. “I knew I wanted to get a food plot up on top of this hill, but this is an old strip mine, and there are not a lot of big trees [suitable for a tree stand] up there. There’s a reason there’s lots of deer up there: It’s difficult to hunt it. It’s difficult to get to it. It’s thick, thick, thick stuff. I knew that wherever we put a food plot in it was going to attract deer, but we needed to find a place where we could actually hunt it.”

Say’s solution was to put in the plot next to a stand of small pines — not tall enough for a tree stand, but where he could jam a tripod stand back in them and have some cover.



FIELD OF DREAMS

This gorgeous Pure Attraction food plot attracted the 2017 buck Say harvested.

or never. I kind of leaned out over my tripod stand and let it rip — and made a perfect shot on him. He ended up going about a hundred yards and piling up, and I had my second big buck from northwestern Pennsylvania — Oct. 1, 2020.”

For Say, tagging his second big Pennsylvania buck in three years was extremely rewarding.

“There’s nothing quite like matching wits with a big, mature buck — when you actually get it done and put that deer on the ground,” he said. “If that doesn’t excite you, then there’s something wrong, and you shouldn’t be hunting. To shoot two bucks like these on my home ground here in Pennsylvania — where I did the work, where I put in the food plots, where I put in the stands and where I developed the strategy — it was extremely gratifying when all of that hard work paid off.”



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ESTABLISHING FORAGES IN FOOD PLOTS: REDUCING THE RISK OF FOOD PLOT LOSS

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

These basic guidelines will significantly lessen the chances of experiencing stand establishment problems.



A grain drill is the ideal implement to seed cereal grain forages such as Oats Plus. Using the correct implement and seeding technique is an important step in successfully establishing of food plots.

sic or foundational. This is the case with poor forage stands in food plots. Poor stands are common in food plots, and my interest in this topic is the 100 percent correlation between poor forage stands and severe weed infestations. Accordingly, we need to discuss the basic processes of forage seeding development to help explain steps to lessen the risk of poor forage stands.

FORAGE SEED GERMINATION

Quality forage seed is the obvious starting point to establish food plots. Whitetail Institute seed products are produced from crops grown the previous season by experienced seed producers (seed production is their niche in the agriculture business), inspected for weed seed contamination and tested for germination when bagged for sale. That information is on the tag attached to each bag of seed and affirms that quality seeds are being planted.

When seed are planted, there are three basic requirements for germination: adequate oxygen to start metabolic processes inside the seed, water for the same reasons and temperature regimes to break dormancy, which are genetically unique for each crop species. Some forage species have broad requirements for germination, but some are very specific. Care went into developing each multispecies product to combine forage crops that have compatible seed germination requirements and are not haphazardly thrown together. What does that mean? A poorly composed forage blend of incompatible species with differing germination requirements will often result in one or two species dominating the site while other species in the blend struggle.

In a rare demonstration of efficiency, I wrote the first draft of this article during March 2020, which coincided with the beginning of the pandemic. The terms COVID-19, social distancing and sheltering in place became part of our everyday lexicon. When I started writing this article, the COVID-19 pandemic was a chaotic nightmare, and none of us knew what to expect. Every aspect of our society was affected. From the beginning, messages from the medical profession consistently reminded us to use three basic

(foundational) preventative measures to reduce risk of infection: social distancing, fastidious hand washing and wearing face coverings. These foundational practices did not guarantee immunity but reduced risk of infection. Disruptive and annoying as they were, those basic steps were instrumental in lessening incidence of COVID-19 and saved lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us countless lessons. One of the understated lessons is that a solution to a complex problem often begins with something ba-



A well-prepared seedbed helps ensure optimized soil-seed contact, which is needed for forage establishment success, particularly with small-seed forages such as those found in multispecies products such as Destination.

FORAGE SEEDLING EMERGENCE

After germination, the next step is for the seedlings to journey from where the seeds were initially placed to the soil surface. Forage seedlings are tiny and fragile as they emerge from the soil, making them vulnerable to many environmental hazards. For example, in my region in southern Georgia, sandy soils are the norm and quickly become droughty. The worst planting condition in sandy soils occurs when soil moisture is barely adequate for seed germination and then it quits raining. The tiny forage seedlings, freshly emerged, have a poorly developed root system that loses access to the quickly vanishing soil moisture. As the soil surface dries, the seedling dies. This can happen with any soil, but sandy soils are particularly prone to this condition.

A common food plot production hazard is to unintentionally seed the forages too deep. During most conditions, small-seeded forages such as clover and alfalfa are best seeded from 0.25 to 0.5 inch deep, although those measurements can be a bit misleading because of variations among soil types. For example, forages planted on fine-textured soils (loams and clays) need to be seeded on the shallow end of that range. The opposite is true in sandy soils, with forage seeds placed on the deeper end of the range. This is nearly academic, because it's very difficult to measure differences in the depth of seed placement between 0.25 and 0.5 inch. When you add the effects of a fluffy, fresh-

ly tilled dry soil, it's easy to see the difficulties in controlling the depth of seed placement. Focus on the big picture: Do not bury small forage seeds. Keeping it simple, the closer to the soil surface the better for small-seed forages, provided there is adequate contact between the forage seed and the soil. The term agronomists use is adequate soil-seed contact.

There are other hazards related to seeding too deep. Assuming that oxygen, moisture and soil temperatures trigger the seed to germinate, deeply placed forage seed might consume all stored carbohydrates in the seed and have no reserves to sustain the seedling immediately after emergence. Research has shown that seedlings from deeply placed clover or alfalfa seeds are less vigorous compared to properly planted forages, and the weakened plants might not survive.

Have you watched a road being constructed? The general process involves sequential harrowing interspersed with applications of water to pack the soil. While not intentional, repeatedly harrowing a food plot when the soil is wet will mimic road construction techniques and create a packed and crusted seedbed, particularly if the weather is hot and sunny afterward. The crusty and compacted soil surface becomes a physical barrier to seedling emergence. This is especially true if you have heavy clay soils with low organic matter. Avoiding this problem comes with experience in managing your food plot soil, which is difficult to verbalize. The best ex-

planation I can offer is to remember this construction analogy and avoid tillage when the soil is wet. Otherwise, you make a roadbed out of a food plot. This makes it almost impossible for young, tender seedlings to penetrate the soil surface.

POST-EMERGENCE FORAGE SURVIVAL

Assuming the forage seeds have germinated and the tiny seedlings emerged, the next hurdle is for the young seedlings to survive long enough to become photosynthetically active and generally tolerant of normal environmental fluctuations. At this point, the young forage plants are no longer dependent on carbohydrates stored in the seed and are relying on photosynthesis for their food production. Additionally, the young root system is now developed enough to provide soil moisture to sustain plant growth.

If the food plot soil is acidic (low pH) or nutritionally deficient, these issues become evident after forage seedlings emerge. Nitrogen fixation is the process by nitrogen-fixing *Rhizobium* bacteria in the soil to colonize legume forage roots and convert atmospheric nitrogen to forms usable by the plant. If soils are acidic, the bacteria cannot function, and the plant becomes nitrogen deficient. Acidic soils also create deficiencies by altering the chemical form of other essential plant nutrients, making them unavailable to plants (Table 1). Finally, acidic soils create aluminum toxicity that affects forage growth after seedling emergence.

Table 1. Effects of soil pH on fertilizer use efficiency.

RELATIVE NUTRIENT AVAILABILITY (%)

Soil pH	Nitrogen	Phosphorous	Potassium	Average fertilizer wasted %
4.5	30	30	33	71.3
5.0	53	53	52	53.7
5.5	77	77	77	32.7
6.0	89	89	100	19.7
7.0	100	100	100	0

Environmental conditions also directly affect survival of young forage plants. These factors are obvious: drought, flooding, freezing temperatures and excessive heat. There are also secondary effects that might be equally devastating. For example, short-term drought after seedling emergence might not kill young forages but would stunt early season growth and allow weeds to infest the food plot. After all, weeds are opportunists, and slowed forage growth because

of environmental stresses (in this example, drought) gives weedy invaders an opportunity. That secondary effect is a common contributing factor to hopeless weed infestations in food plots.

BE PROACTIVE

Linking successful food plot establishment with COVID-19 is a bit of a stretch, but managing both involves a proactive approach built around the basics. This is a punch-list of crucial food plot tasks reduce

to the risk of stand establishment failure:

- Take a soil sample, and fertilize/lime according to recommendations.
- Choose a quality forage product that's suitable for your location and land-use pattern.
- Avoid planting during extremes (too dry, wet, hot or cold).
- Avoid seeding too deep.

These basic guidelines do not guarantee food plot success but significantly lessen the risk of stand establishment problems. Similarly, social distancing, hand washing, face coverings and newly developed vaccines (early in 2021) did not guarantee immunity from COVID-19, but those practices collectively lessened risk of infection.



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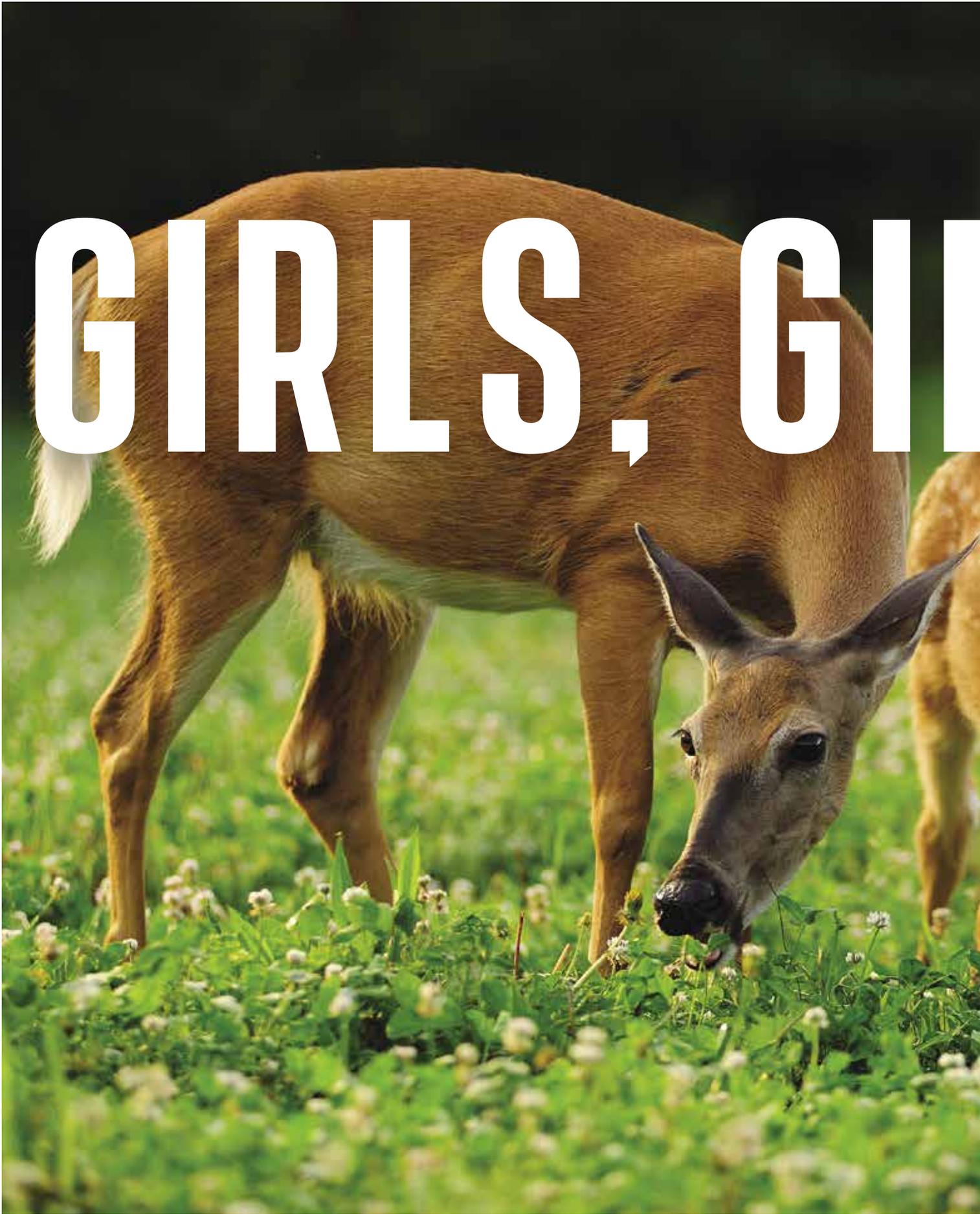


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GIRLS, GI



Land managers should understand the critical importance of doe nutrition and how it contributes to overall herd health and vitality.

RLS, GIRLS

■ by *Matt Harper*



PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Those of you who glanced at the title of this article but breezed over the subtitle might be disappointed that this is not an exposé on a legendary '80s hair band.

For many of us who grew up in that era, Motley Crue was a go-to during Saturday night cruises around town. But this is not *Rolling Stone*. It's a deer magazine. And we're not here to discuss the exploits of Tommy Lee but rather something far more useful: the importance of doe nutrition.

How many of us have sat in a tree stand, glimpsed a deer gliding up a trail and thought, "It's only a doe." I'm not saying the opportunity to shoot a doe and experience tasty cuts of meat is not exciting or fulfilling. But for someone seeking a mature buck, there's some disappointment when you discover those footfalls come from a doe and not a big buck. You might think, "Great, another article telling me that I shouldn't be so focused on the pursuit of mon-

cus on the nutritional plane of the doe from breeding to weaning to help ensure the herd remains strong and healthy year after year.

BREEDING

Doe nutrition is important year round, not merely when does are pregnant or raising fawns. In the same way that bucks require high-quality nutrition throughout the year to encourage maximum body and antler growth, does also need a consistently high nutritional plane for maximum proliferation. By late summer to early fall, does are weaning off the previous spring's fawns. At this time, does can appear to be in very poor body condition, having been "sucked down" by their fawns. Look at trail camera pictures of does with twins and triplets in August and you will often see their ribs showing. This is especially true when they lack quality nutrition.

It takes an extreme amount of energy, protein and minerals to produce milk,

ing season, does begin about a 200-day gestation period. In most of the country, that means prenatal fawn growth occurs during winter, which is typically the most nutritionally stressful time of the year for white-tailed deer. When daylight hours decrease and temperatures drop, plants stop growing, which means that whatever exists at that point is the total amount of food deer must live on until spring. Think of it as a pantry of food you must live on for several months without going to the grocery store. At first, food might be in ample supply. But deeper into winter, more food sources disappear.

Winter produces some of the harshest climate conditions deer must endure, and it's a pretty stressful time in a deer's yearly cycle. Meanwhile, fetal growth is occurring inside gestating does. As you would expect, does require additional nutrients to grow the fetus or fetuses in addition to what they need for her maintenance and condition. All nutrients are

But if you look beyond procreation, you discover that does are also vital for the health and vitality of the herd.

ster bucks." This article has nothing to do with hunting altruism. We know we must hunt bucks and does to manage the deer herd. This piece won't say you should or shouldn't focus on hunting trophy bucks. That's up to you. Rather, we'll discuss how the nutritional management of female deer is equally important to that of males.

WHY ARE DOES IMPORTANT?

That question seems ridiculously obvious considering it's impossible to perpetuate the species without does. But if you look beyond procreation, you discover that does are also vital for the health and vitality of the herd. Of course, bucks are involved in the production of offspring, but after they have finished their role in the breeding process, their relevance to the next generation is essentially zero. That responsibility falls on the doe, and her nutritional health throughout the reproductive and rearing process is highly influential on the overall success of herd proliferation. Land managers should fo-

and with so much of a doe's diet going toward lactation, there's little left to maintain body condition. After a doe weans her fawns, she must quickly regain body condition to prepare for the upcoming breeding season. The level of body condition is influential for breeding success, as does in poor condition are less likely to become pregnant. In general, it's a natural mechanism to protect the doe and the herd. A doe in poor body condition might not withstand gestation, especially during winter. For the herd, a doe in poor body condition can be a sign of overall lower nutrient availability for the entire herd, so adding more mouths to feed is counterproductive. Therefore, biological mechanisms kick in to slow down reproductive success to protect the herd. These mechanisms can include unsuccessful copulation, delayed or absent estrous cycles, or decreased likelihood of multiple viable embryos.

GESTATION

Immediately after a successful breed-

important during pregnancy, but energy is especially critical considering a doe needs it to maintain body condition during winter.

Nutritional demands remain high during the entire gestation period, but they're particularly high during the final trimester. That's because most fetal growth occurs during the last third of gestation. During the first few months of pregnancy, fetal demands are less, so nutrient availability, or the lack thereof, will have less impact on fetal survivability. That is, however, unless the doe is already in poor body condition. Even if a doe mates successfully, if she is in poor condition and continues to have limited nutrition, fetal reabsorption of one or more prenatal fawns can often occur. In general, during early- to mid gestation, a doe's health takes precedence over fetal development. But in the final stages of gestation, fetal development tends to be physiologically prioritized.

If a doe is in poor condition or in a habitat with subpar nutrition, several

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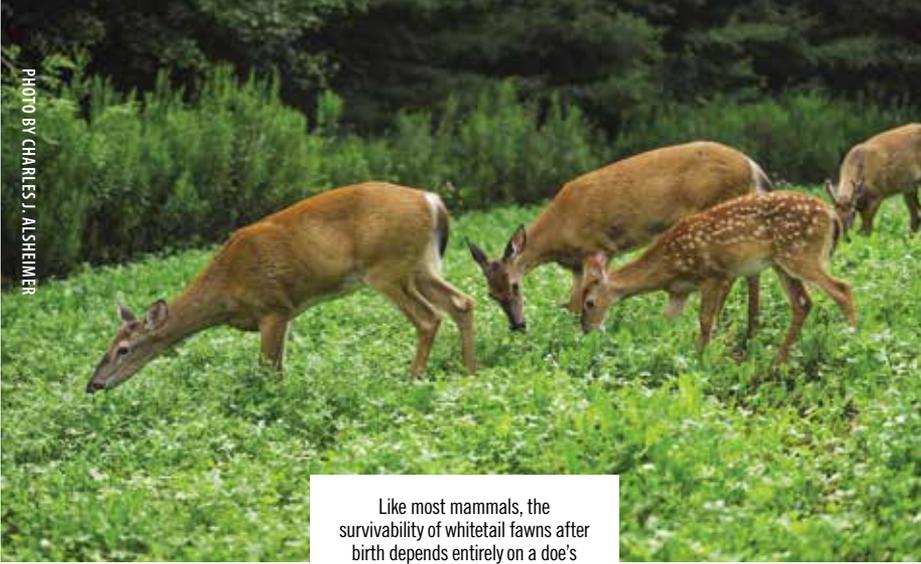


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Like most mammals, the survivability of whitetail fawns after birth depends entirely on a doe's ability to produce milk. Proper nutrition is vital.

things can occur. In extreme conditions, one or more of the fetal fawns can be aborted. More commonly, fawn birth weights can be below average, which correlates to lower fawn survivability, especially in the first few days of life. With April and May composing most of the third trimester of gestation, food sources typically begin to become more prominent. However, in years with late springs and slow green-up — particularly when preceded by a long, cold winter — it's not uncommon to see a high incidence of fawn mortality because of low birth weights.

LACTATION

Like most mammals, the survivability of fawns after birth depends entirely on a doe's ability to produce milk. Yes, a fawn can die from predators, be hit by a car or die from a disease or birth defect. However, if they can't eat enough, they will not live. Compared to other species, whitetail fawns only have a short time when they rely completely on their mother's milk. In a little more than two months, they can survive without nursing. But within those two months, doe milk supply is critical.

Fawns grow quickly and require adequate amounts of nutrient-dense milk to support that growth. Doe milk is far more nutrient-dense than cow's milk, specifically in fat and energy content. Lactation demands a high nutritional plane to produce enough milk to optimize fawn growth, especially when raising multiple fawns. In fact, doe nutrient requirements are highest during lactation, with protein needs ranging to and even exceeding 18 percent. Likewise, en-

ergy and mineral needs are extremely high during lactation. If a lactating doe lacks nutrition, it doesn't necessarily change the nutrient makeup of the milk but rather affects the quantity produced. In other words, the percentage of fat in the milk might stay roughly the same regardless of the doe's diet, but the total amount of fat available to a fawn or fawns will change.

So what happens if a doe does not have adequate nutrition to produce enough milk for normal fawn growth? The worst-case scenario is increased fawn mortality. This can usually be seen in twins and triplets when one or more of the fawns receives inadequate amounts of milk and grows increasingly weak and more susceptible to predation and disease. Even if a fawn survives, lower levels of nutrients can result in stunted growth, which can persist even as an adult. In short, making sure does have access to high-quality nutrition will positively influence the survivability and quality of the fawn crop.

RAISING TOMORROW'S WALL-HANGERS

I love hunting big, mature bucks. I manage my farm to make sure bucks have access to the nutrition they require to maximize health, body weight and antler growth. But that doesn't mean I forget about does, as they are the deer that produce the buck fawns I'll be chasing in four to five years. However, simply producing fawns doesn't fit into a management strategy that involves maximizing every nutritional aspect of the deer herd. I want to ensure good levels of fawn recruitment and also make sure those fawns can achieve maximum growth po-

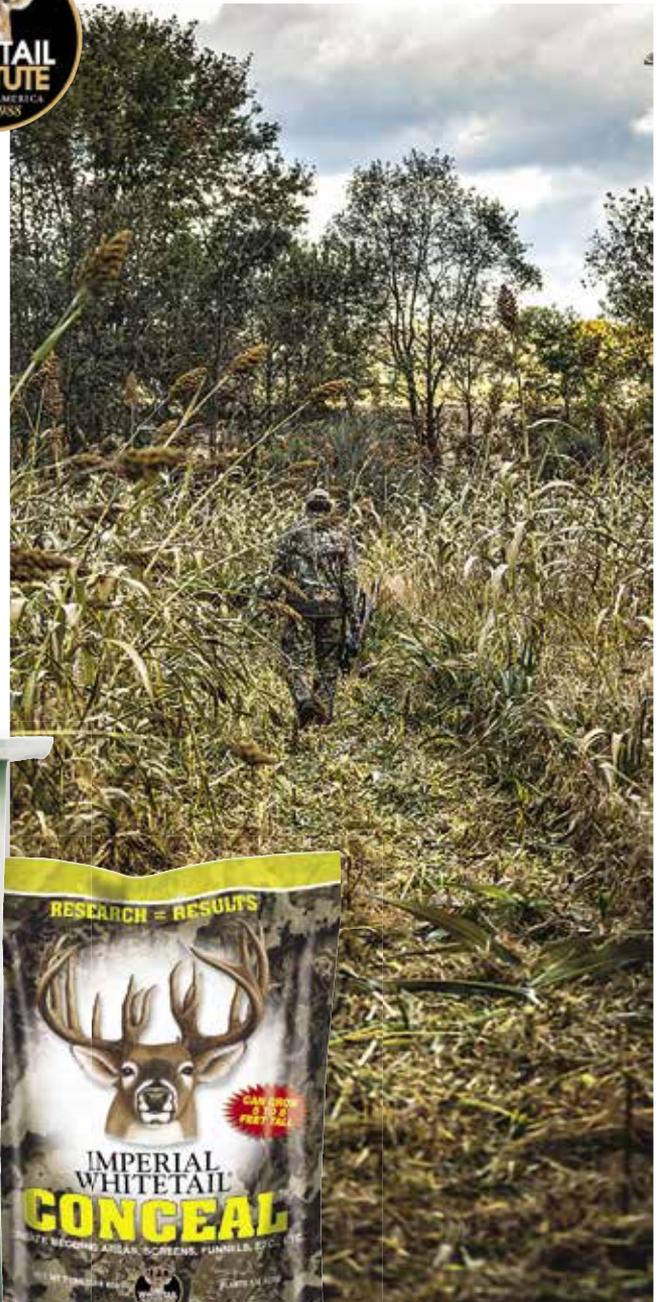
tential. Honestly, this is true regardless if a fawn is a buck or a doe. The desire to maximize buck fawn growth is self-explanatory, but I also want to maximize doe fawn growth, because the bigger and healthier the doe fawn, the better chance she will be a high-producing adult doe. Essentially, that philosophy echoes the ultimate deer management goal: to produce the healthiest, highest producing, highest quality overall deer herd. If you do that, you've greatly increased your chances of chasing big, mature bucks year after year.

CONCLUSION

The good news concerning nutritional management practices for does is they align with those of managing bucks. During fall and winter, when breeding and gestation occur, having high-energy food plots such as Whitetail's Winter-Greens or any of the company's fall/winter plots will help ensure that does have access to the energy they need for body condition and pregnancy. Where legal, supplementation with products such as Thrive will further increase their nutritional plane. In spring and summer, perennial plots that are highly digestible and high in protein and energy, such as Imperial Whitetail Clover, provide a perfect supplement to native vegetation for the nutrition needed for lactation and fawn development. Mineral supplements (where legal) such as 30-06 and 30-06 Plus Protein round out the nutritional profile by providing vital minerals and vitamins.

So if you see a group of does in your food plot during a summer evening or notice trail camera pictures of does with fawns at a mineral site, don't pass it off like they're a nontarget species. Think a bit deeper, and you will see that you are helping to produce an overall better deer herd and greatly improving the odds of having trophy bucks down the road. After all, that little fawn that trots out with a doe to nibble and pick at a lush food plot might be the deer that takes your breath away a few years later.





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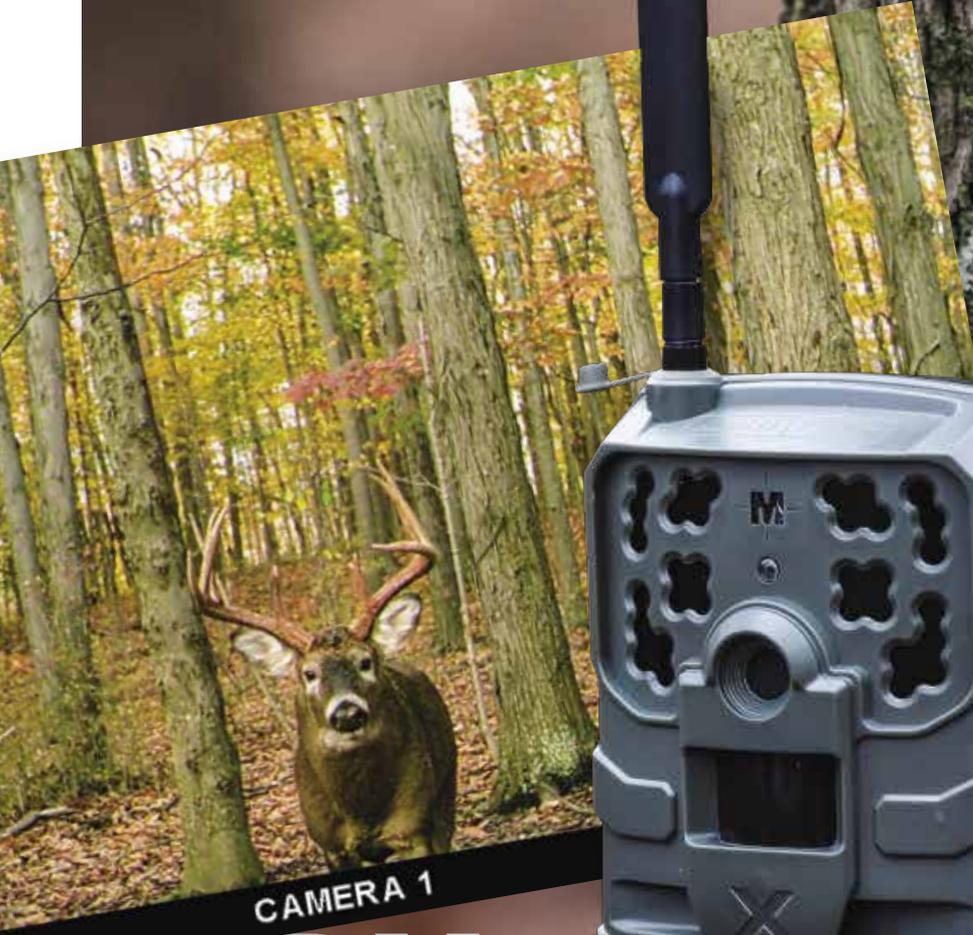


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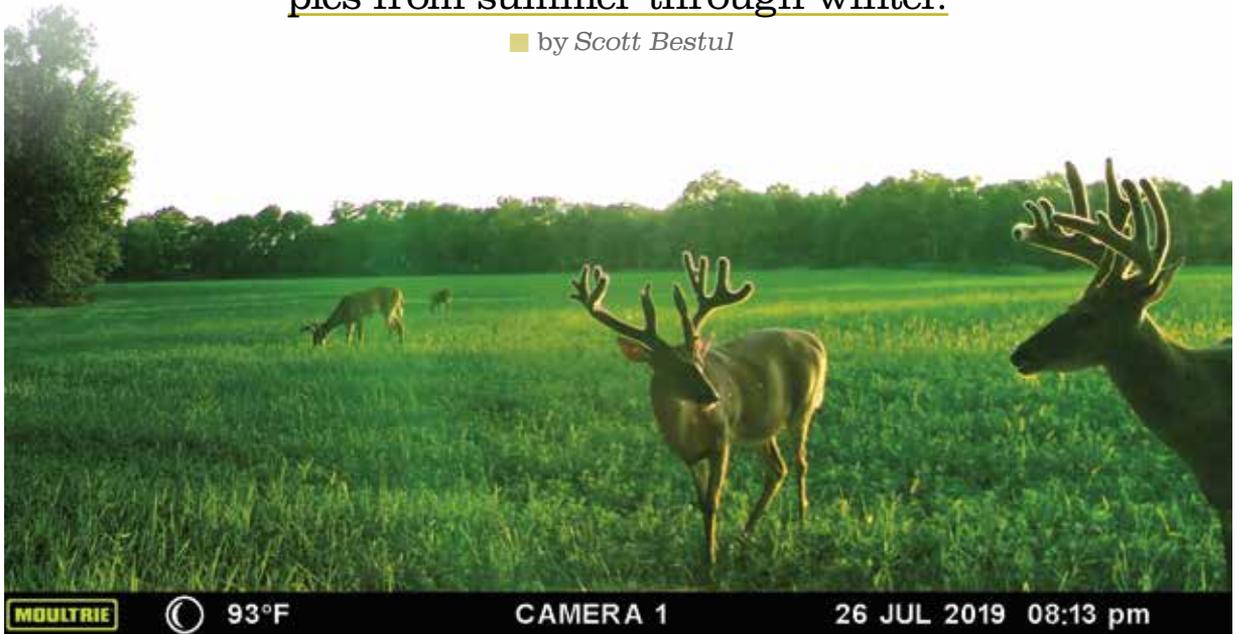
CAMERA 1



SPY GAMES

This four-step plan will help you acquire better trail-cam pics from summer through winter.

■ by *Scott Bestul*



It's no secret that trail cameras have changed the face of modern deer hunting. Before their appearance, so much of what we "knew" about whitetails was simply guesswork: where deer lived, when they moved, what they ate, how they behaved with other deer — the stuff of speculation and old wives' tales.

Remote scouting cameras flipped all that on its head. Suddenly, the answers to so many unanswered questions could be revealed, and hunters/managers could become better at what they were. Make no mistake, cameras have been hugely responsible for upping our knowledge about the deer we hunt and the best methods for managing them.

Despite the popularity of trail cameras, there's still plenty of mystery about how to run them correctly and the best times and locations to use them. What follows is a seasonal guide to trail cams and the best methods for deploying them in a typical year.

SUMMER VELVET

I started deer hunting when dinosaurs roamed the earth, and back then, the whitetail opener was the Saturday before Thanksgiving. These days, I consider the opening of the whitetail season to be the first day I hang a trail camera that year. Although I've placed cams in almost every month of the year, I get truly serious in summer. Here in the upper Midwest, bucks are getting a good start on antler growth about the last week of June into July 4, so this period marks opening day for me.

Mineral licks create an excellent trail cam opportunity and are typically the site of my opening day setups for several reasons. First, whitetails crave mineral from spring into late summer. Obviously, bucks are the focus of that camera effort, but lactating does and their fawns also flock to mineral sites, their bodies reminding them of the constant need for essential macro and trace minerals along with vitamins A, D and E, as well as sodium — found in Whitetail

Institute's 30-06 Plus and Plus Protein mineral — and the simple fact that mineral tastes good.

I also love mineral licks for trail-cam setups because deer are the most relaxed they'll be all year. That means it's usually easy to get several quality pictures of bucks — often the same bucks — during many days or weeks. I've watched some bucks grow up on camera, thanks to their annual return to their favorite licks. These summer pics also offer an important glimpse at a buck's potential, as it's often possible to watch his velvet-covered antlers grow, change and max out as summer progresses.

One often-overlooked opportunity with summer cams is they can reveal nuggets about a buck's personality. Summer bucks typically travel in bachelor groups, and if your pictures and videos include several bucks in the same shot or clip, it can become apparent which bucks are dominant, and which are shy or aren't fighters. These personality clues can be a huge advantage when hunting season rolls around.

For example, I don't hesitate to call or rattle to a buck that's revealed himself as a bully. Conversely, I'll typically stow my calls if I encounter a buck I know to be shy or non-confrontational. Summer cameras have granted me this edge on several bucks I've hunted.

Although it's easy to focus on growing antlers, don't forget to pay attention to does and fawns at your licks. Pics and video clips can reveal the health of your does and the number of fawns they're carrying into the year. This can help you judge herd health and adapt harvest strategies accordingly. I pay particular attention to the presence of fawns. If they're not showing up in healthy numbers, I intentionally back off on doe harvest for the coming hunt.

EARLY SEASON MOCK SCRAPE

As summer gives way to fall, the attraction of mineral licks gradually declines. Now's the time to start switching cameras to mock scrapes, as all members of the deer herd — especially bucks — visit scrapes to communicate with each other. Ideally, you've started your mock months before, but if not, late summer and early fall is a great time to get them going. Peak scraping activity obviously occurs as the rut approaches, but deer hit scrapes throughout the year. In my experience, early fall and the weeks leading to peak breeding are the best time to get fantastic buck pics over mock scrapes.

If you haven't started mock scrapes, my favorite tactic is to find an existing scrape (bucks start making them as soon as they shed velvet) and then add a couple of my own in the immediate vicinity. I call this "blowing up" a scrape, and it seems to drive area bucks crazy. Their home ranges are relatively small, and they know the sight, sound and scent of area bucks, so the sudden presence of a strange or intruding buck is highly irritating.

To pull this off, find an existing scrape, pace off a few feet from the original and create a pair of mocks on each side of the original. These need to include the same overhanging branch as the original. If that branch doesn't exist, you need to create one. Take a limb from a cedar, pine or other softwood and staple or zip-tie it to the tree you need. It doesn't matter

if the tree you're attaching it to isn't the same species. Deer aren't smart enough to figure that out. They just like to have a soft, aromatic limb to rub against their glands and antlers. I like to add scents to the scrape and the overhanging limb to increase the attraction. I'll probably irritate scent makers when I say I don't think it makes a lot of difference what the odor is. I've used the hottest new scent, outdated doe pee or even my own urine-based scent (created from frequent pulls on a bottle of Mountain Dew) and had equally positive results.

Checking trail cams hung at these scrapes can be dicey. I never hesitate to frequently check mock scrape setups on field edge or transition areas. I know if I go in midday and with the right wind direction (read: from the bedding area to me), I can swap out SD cards, freshen scents and get out without disturbing a nearby buck. If I don't have those advantages, it's probably best to keep the area undisturbed by using a cellular unit, such as the Moultrie Mobile, to monitor scrape activity.

It's important to note the presence of any target bucks in your hunting area. Then judge their vulnerability to harvest by their frequency of appearance and the amount of daytime visits to your scrape. Any buck hitting your mocks during shooting hours is vulnerable somewhere nearby. Bucks that visit the scrape often but at night are highly active, but to arrange a daylight visit, you'll probably need to search for other areas in his home range where he might be vulnerable.

RUT FUNNEL

As breeding activity heats up and bucks pay less attention to scrapes, it's time to devote some camera attention to funnels. These are terrain features that bucks follow as they seek estrous-ready does, and some of my favorites are creek or ditch crossings, saddles or benches on a ridge, and wooded or brushy fencelines that connect blocks of timber in farm country.

Cameras at these funnels are important because they reveal where resident bucks are moving and if any foreign bucks have wandered in from other areas. Research has shown that some bucks make excursions

that take them out of their home range as they search for does. Some of those excursions are pretty amazing and result in treks of several miles, which means that Booner your neighbor was getting pics of on a distant farm could wind up on your place sniffing for action. That's the good news. The bad news is that those excursions rarely last more than a handful of days, so if your cameras reveal a whopper cruising your property, you'd better jump on that information and hunt him before he returns home.

Rut-funnel cams are somewhat tricky, as deer are not likely to pause or linger there as they do at mineral licks or pre-rut scrapes. One way to slow down a traveling buck is to make a mock scrape in the funnel. Unless he's following a hot scent or a doe, the wanderer will likely pause to check out the scrape and get his mug shot taken. Another trick for rut-funnel cameras is to mount the cam at a 45-degree angle to the trail. Bucks often move through funnels quickly, and a camera mounted perpendicular to the trail might get only a partial pic or video of a buck.

Because the rut is a dynamic and fast-moving event, rut-funnel cams need to be checked every few days. Obviously, if you have a cellular model, these are perfect spots. The camera sends you the most recent information, and you won't waste time checking cams when you should be hunting. And of course, cell-cams eliminate the intrusion required to check a conventional model.

POST-RUT FOOD SOURCE

The weeks after the rut close out the trail-cam year. It's time to focus on what whitetails are most concerned about: food. Although I frequently preach against attempts to oversimplify deer hunting, this is not one of those examples. With peak rut in the tail lights and cold temps and snow across much of deer range, you focus on food sources or eat your tag. It can get worse. If you don't have quality late-season whitetail feed, you might not even see deer, and I have lived that scenario. Fifteen years ago in my neighborhood, there were few winter sources for deer. When the combines finished, the fall plows were

right behind them, and food plots were a distant dream. Deer migrated out of the area, seeking south-facing slopes miles away where they found natural browse to make it through winter. I could go from early December into mid-March without seeing a deer track in my area.

So, food is important. In ag country, focus on farm crops where fall tillage hasn't occurred. Obviously, any late-season food plots, such as Winter-Greens or other high-protein annuals, are an obvious choice. Deer will flock to those plots as temps cool and they're eager to replenish fat reserves wiped out from the rigors of breeding activities. Find these spots and you might get some of the best camera setups, as well as hunting opportunities, of the year.

Trail cams set up near post-rut food sources will reveal the bucks that made it through a long hunting season, including those that might need a pass until the next fall or those that deserve some hunting effort, regardless of the uncomfortable hunting conditions. Case in point; My neighbor Alan killed a great mature

8-pointer in December when cam pics revealed the buck was hitting a late-season plot with frequency in daylight, but only when temps were 10 degrees or colder. Alan hunted two nights in brutal conditions before tagging this awesome late-season trophy.

Entry trails leading to post-rut food plots are an obvious site for trail cams during this period. But I only place a cam in such a spot if I believe the entry is broad enough so a wary buck won't get spooked by a flash or the shutter-noise of a nearby cam. Whenever possible, mount a camera in the food source itself. I like to use a tripod I can tuck into standing corn, along a brushy fencerow or even on the legs of an elevated blind or shooting house. In my experience, cameras in those open areas don't seem to disturb deer as much or are at least less frightening than they are in tighter quarters.

Because deer frequently bed close to post-rut food sources, it's important to be uber-careful when monitoring them. I wait for a perfect wind, go at mid-day and make as little noise as possible

during my quick visits. It's important to get fresh batteries in late-season cams, as cold temps can quickly sap them. I study these pics soon after collecting SD cards, as I've learned patterns of bucks that have helped arrange encounters. The most memorable was a pretty 10-pointer that hit a late-season plot in the morning rather than afternoon, when other area bucks fed. I set my buddy up for a morning hunt immediately, and sure enough, the buck showed up on schedule and was 50 yards from the stand — when a trio of does distracted him and led him off.

CONCLUSION

Trail cams have extended the deer season and increased our knowledge of whitetails and our enjoyment in chasing them. This four-step approach has helped me become a better hunter and manager, not to mention providing endless fun and excitement. Instead of a one-week frenzy in November, deer season now lasts from July to January — and I have trail cams to thank.



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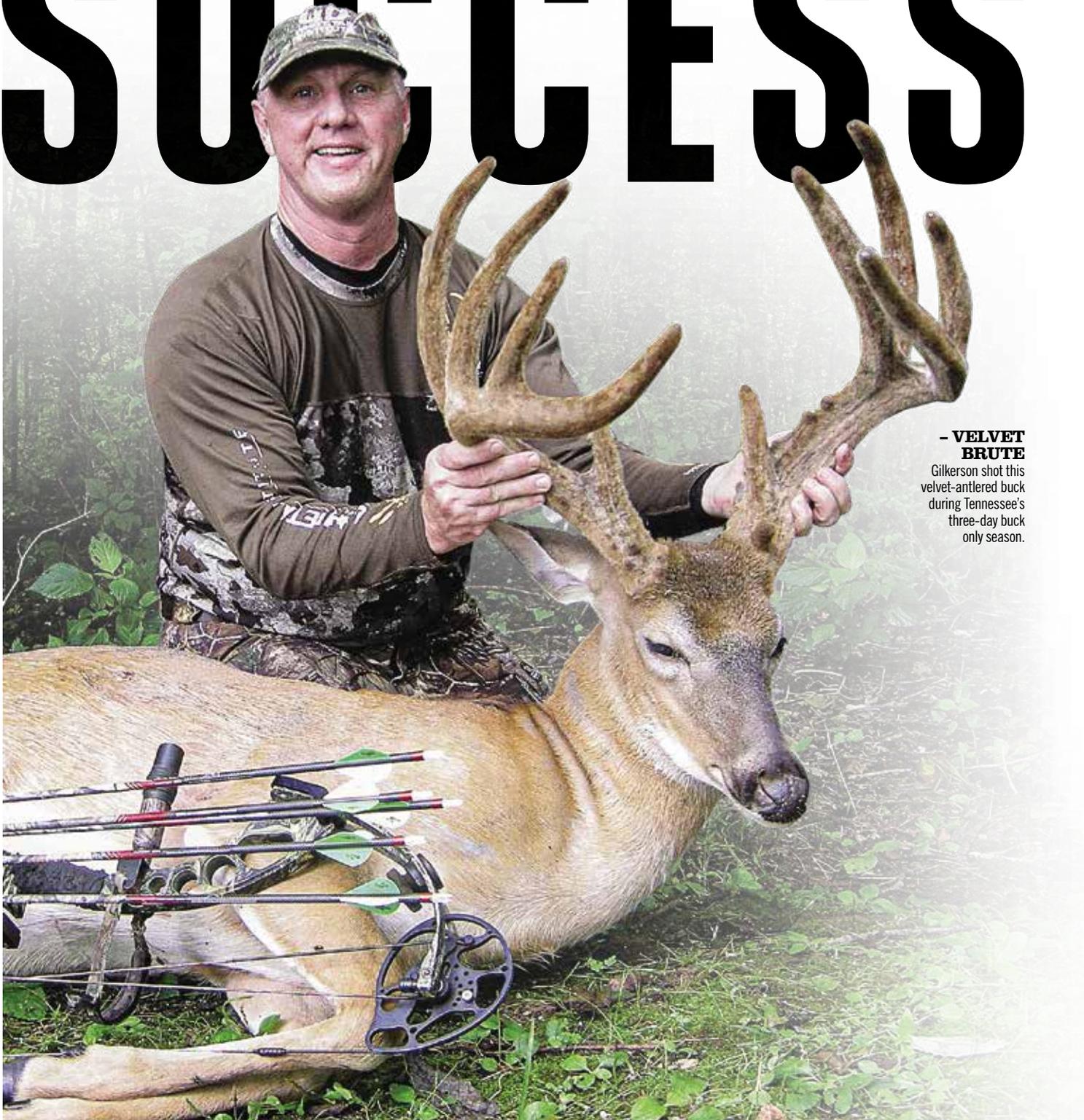


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■ by Drew Gilkerson

NO-PLOW

SUCCESS



- VELVET BRUTE

Gilkerson shot this velvet-antlered buck during Tennessee's three-day buck only season.

Imperial No-Plow was the key to attracting this Tennessee buck.

My 2020 No-Plow success story started in 2019, when I planted Whitetail Institute's Secret Spot in an area of woods where deer were traveling between bedding and feeding areas. I wanted to hunt the spot in a ground blind with my 8-year-old grandson in hopes of him taking a deer with my crossbow. We were blessed that season, as he shot a great 11-point buck in that food plot the opening day of Tennessee's 2019 archery season.

Even with the success my grandson had with Secret Spot, I wanted to create a test plot during Spring 2020 using Imperial No-Plow, so I purchased a couple of bags from a Whitetail Institute dealer to begin an experiment. No-Plow is an annual, and I typically plant it during fall. However, I wanted to try it in spring to see the results. It worked, as deer continued visiting the plot throughout spring and early summer until it had basically been eliminated from overbrowsing.

I sacrificed one bag of seed, but it was worth it to establish the plot and keep deer visiting the same place consistently. I found that to be an effective method. On Aug. 1, it was easy to return to the plot with little disruption and rake out debris, reapply lime, broadcast a second bag, hang a Moultrie trail camera and set up my ground blind where I had the previous year.

When I returned a couple of weeks later to exchange SD cards in my trail camera, I saw the first picture, from the morning of Aug. 2. It showed a great buck cruising the edge of the plot, where I had been just the day before. Overall, the SD images revealed seven bucks and a few does and fawns nibbling on the emerging new growth of No-Plow during that two-week period between exchanging the cards. During that mid-August visit, I saw the No-Plow was growing well, and the plot was laden with deer tracks. The pictures indicated most of the deer activity was occurring during the morning, when deer were going to bed. Knowing the Tennessee buck-only season

opener was only a couple of weeks away, I didn't return to the No-Plow plot until it was time to hunt. I had all the information I needed to know that a good buck was nearby and that the No-Plow would likely keep him visiting the plot, and I didn't want to risk spooking him.

I've hunted in Kentucky the past few years during the early bow season, trying to harvest a buck in velvet, but I haven't had any luck. In 2018, Tennessee opened its first three-day buck-only season, and I knew I would have more opportunities. However, the first two seasons passed, and I struck out during both. I saw a few small bucks with velvet, but there were no opportunities for the one I wanted to harvest as my first velvet buck. But I believed my third 2020 Tennessee buck-only season would be the charm.

I practiced shooting my bow from inside a ground blind in my backyard that summer in hopes of keeping my shooting form. I believe that practice helped me a lot as the hunt unfolded and the buck entered the plot.

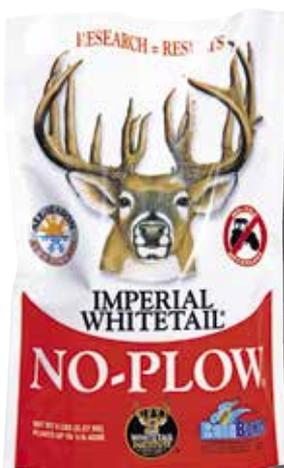
The buck was the first and only deer I saw opening morning. I had my blind set on the opposite side of the plot from where I'd captured his picture, and as it became daylight, I imagined him entering the plot and crossing in front of me, and then I'd make the perfect shot.

My hunts normally don't go that way, but unbelievably, as I daydreamed of that scenario, I saw movement between trees about 50 yards away. When I looked through my binoculars, I was stoked to see it was him, and he was coming directly to the No-Plow plot. As he walked along the plot edge, I

began drawing my bowstring and focused, just like during practice. But when I reached full draw, I didn't shoot, even though the buck was broadside at 17 yards. He stopped to browse, but his closest front leg was back and covering his vitals more than I liked, so I waited to shoot. Instead of stepping forward and continuing on that path, he unexpectedly turned and offered me a hard quartering-away shot. But at that distance and with my practice, it was easy to remain steady while keeping my sight pins lined up on the opposite front leg. I placed my top pin on his last rib and squeezed the trigger on my release. Although I lost sight of the buck as he ran off, I waited an appropriate amount of time and made a brief recovery.

I harvested my first whitetail in 1981 and have been a fanatic about the animals since that first little 4-pointer. The Whitetail Institute started the food plot industry in 1988 and has constantly been an innovative outdoor industry leader during the ensuing three decades. I'm fortunate to work in the hunting industry. God blesses me every day, and one of those blessings is that he granted me the opportunity to combine my love for hunting whitetails with my job.

No-Plow works exceptionally well in wooded areas with filtered sunlight, and you don't need much equipment to be successful. I used a leaf blower and a rake in 2019 to clear that spot. In 2020, I used a rake to clear debris. Combining No-Plow and a little work afforded me the best bow kill during my 39 years of chasing whitetails.



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

NO-PLOW

- Includes specially selected exclusive clovers, brassica, WINA 412 Radish and other forages
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- **Soil Type:** Virtually anywhere good seed-to-soil contact can be attained
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- **Soil pH:** 5.5-7.5
- **Sunlight:** 3-4 hours of broken, filtered or direct sunlight a day
- Can be planted in spring or fall

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MY TROPHY WHITETAILS

COLEMAN GRIMMETT | MISSISSIPPI

RAVISH RADISH DRAWS IN MISSISSIPPI TROPHY

■ Some hunters would say that it takes a lot of acreage to grow big bucks. While I would not argue that this certainly helps, not all of us have been blessed to have such expansive (and expensive) parcels. For many of us, we must make the most of the small acreage that we have to work with. And for me, this is a tiny 7.2-acre property along the edge of the Mississippi Delta in Leflore County that I call home. In jest, we call our home place the GR3, short for Grimmnett Ranch 3, although it is far from a true ranch.

Even so, we make the most of the acreage by planting trees, creating habitat improvements, providing abundant nutrition, experimenting with new products and trying to minimize pressure and stress on the white-tailed deer. This past fall I read about Whitetail Institute's Ravish Radish, and I was eager to give it a try. Everything got off to a great germination and grew vigorously, in spite of hot and dry Mississippi weather conditions. I was actually quite surprised that the radishes could continue to grow with the less than ideal rainfall and sustained hot days.

I was fortunate to take a 215-pound 10-point buck with archery gear in early October, as a bachelor group of three bucks came into the radish plot and fed toward my tree stand. Later, in the first Mississippi firearm season, I also harvested a fine 225-pound 8-point in the center of the food plot early one morning. The excellent forage in the plots had bucks showing up on trail cameras just about every day.

It was quite remarkable to again have a great hunting season on such a micro-sized property. I am very thankful for Whitetail Institute's development of quality seed products that work well in my area of the country, where sometimes soil composition and weather elements can be quite harsh.



IMPERIAL CLOVER KEY IN OHIO

JIM KUNSMAN | OHIO

■ I planted Imperial Whitetail Clover four years ago. Before that, deer activity on my property was slow. I harvested a few decent bucks and usually put a doe or two in the freezer every year. More times than not, I wouldn't see a deer when I went out.

About a year after planting Imperial Whitetail Clover, I started to see more deer activity. Early archery season proved to be hot in the evenings as deer came to my food. I then started getting trail-camera pictures of some nice bucks.

On Nov. 10, I was hunting by some white oaks about 100 yards from my clover field. This bruiser came up from the creek. I shot him at 20 yards with my crossbow.

I have no doubt Imperial Whitetail Clover has had everything to do with the deer activity on my property.



PENNSYLVANIA BUCK SHOT USING IMPERIAL CLOVER

JOHN YANEK | PENNSYLVANIA

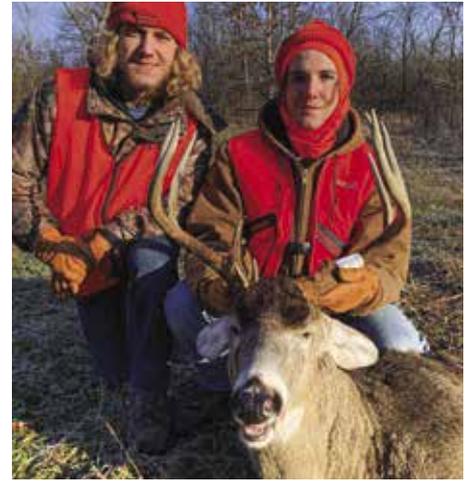
■ I am an avid Pennsylvania deer hunter who always had a desire to grow big bucks. My lifelong dream was to have my own hunting property. The dream became a reality when my wife and I purchased 125 acres of mostly wooded property in northeast Pennsylvania. The first year, I planted 3 acres of Imperial Whitetail Clover. Once the clover came in, the deer showed up. It was like a magnet. I would see deer in the food plot almost any time of the day. As I monitored the herd, I would see the bucks getting bigger each year. I passed up on deer in the photo the year before. He grew quite a bit until the next season. He scored 161-5/8 B&C, which is a very good deer for a northeast Pennsylvania timber buck. I'm a firm believer in Imperial Whitetail Clover.



RYLAN HEWETT | NEBRASKA



MARK AND NOAH HEWETT | NEBRASKA



MASON HEWETT | NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA HUNTER'S TRAVELS TO SOUTH-CENTRAL IOWA FOR FAMILY SUCCESS

■ Nebraska's Mark Hewett has 500 acres in southern Iowa that he hunts with his family. He called the Whitetail Institute of North America three years ago because he had heard good things about their products. After working with one of the professionals at Whitetail, he took soil tests to determine which products to plant and how much lime and fertilizer he needed to use. Hewett now plants about 13 acres in Imperial Whitetail Clover and Fusion. He also uses products like Beets & Greens and Tall Tine Tubers between the rows of the soybean fields.

"I'm a part-time land manager who drives from Omaha to south-central Iowa," Hewett said. The Whitetail Institute makes it real easy. First, take a soil test. If I follow what the instructions tell me to do their products are low maintenance and they grow — which is important because I am not there a lot."

The photos show the success his family has enjoyed. "It's a family affair from my boys, niece, father-in-law and brother. I love the products," Hewett said.



WINSTON GRAVES | VIRGINIA

DESTINATION PLOT WORKS IN VIRGINIA

■ "I set up in the Redneck blind for my evening hunt after seeing lots of trail camera pictures of does feeding just before dusk. Sure enough, about 30 minutes before sundown a group of three does headed straight for the Destination food plot. One of the smaller does was browsing but kept looking back into the tree line. I knew the buck was nearby.

"I heard him walking down the creek and then come out of the tree line for the does. He didn't give me the best shot, as he was quartering towards me, but I knew that if I placed my shot correctly he wouldn't go far. I only had to track him about 50 yards. Definitely a great muzzleloader season in Virginia."



JON FOY | WEST VIRGINIA

GETTING HIS SONS INVOLVED EARLY

■ I have been using your products for a few years. I just want to say thanks for making great products and thought maybe you would enjoy these pictures of my boys "planting" Imperial Whitetail Clover in "their" food plot. I had some extra seed and thought I would let them have some fun. They had a ball! They had a great day! The oldest one boy is John Foy. The younger son is Jett Foy.



Continued on page 67

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THE KEY IS

DIVER

DIVERSITY

Deer are called concentrate selectors, edge animals and many other names. The reason? They need a diverse landscape to thrive.

■ by *Josh Honeycutt*

The whitetail is one of the most adaptable animals on the planet. They inhabit not just North America but reach across the world. Even countries such as Bolivia, Finland, New Zealand, the Czech Republic and others harbor wild populations.

And just as deer are diverse in their ability to adjust, they also need diverse habitat within their home ranges. That holds true for bedding and food sources.

UNDERSTAND DEER DIGESTION

To grasp why optimal deer habitat offers diversity, you must first fathom how deer digest food.

“Deer are considered concentrate selector ruminants,” said Levi Jaster, big-game coordinator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. “They have the prehensile lips and tongue with a narrow muzzle that allow them to select the most nutritious and easily digestible parts of plants.”

PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Although most deer only eat about 200 plant species on any landscape, scientists have recorded about 700 as viable food sources throughout the whitetail's range. That's a lot of cud to chew.

Of course, deer swallow food upon intake only to regurgitate and chew it a few hours later. Because of that process, deer can fill up quickly and then ruminate while bedded. This is safer than spending more time on their feet, as they aren't as exposed to hunters and predators. When habitat is poor, they spend more time searching.

As a ruminant, the whitetail has four stomach chambers, including the rumen, reticulum, omasum and abomasum. The first two compartments — rumen and reticulum, respectively — work in close harmony with one another. Lightly chewed food is stored in the rumen until it's time to ruminate.

"It also has an immense population of bacteria, protozoans and a few fungi that do most of the digestion for deer," Jaster said. "Deer can't digest at all without this microbiology since the microbes are the way food is broken down. A deer, when ruminating, fully masticates the food and then it mixes with the microbes in the reticulorumen, where fermentation takes place. The kinds of microbes and the quantity of each varies based on the diet the deer is eating and change as the diet changes, which usually takes several days. The reticulum filters smaller particles into the omasum, while larger particles stay in the rumen for further digestion."

After being ingested, matter passes to the omasum, where water (and some nutrient) absorption takes place. Afterward, what's left passes on to the abomasum, which is the compartment most similar to a nonruminant stomach.

"This is the chamber where acid is pro-

duced, along with other enzymes for digestion, and where proteins are prepared for uptake in the intestines and fats are broken down," Jaster said.

As noted, because deer are concentrate selectors and choose only the best parts of many plants, it's necessary to offer plenty of options. Still, there is another dimension to why diversity is so important to white-tailed deer.

ACKNOWLEDGE WHITETAIL BEDDING BEHAVIOR

Security cover is of the utmost importance to whitetails. Deer don't like to bed in big, mature timber or mowed fields. They prefer — and need — an area that offers a high stem count. This usually comes in the form of briars, young trees, tall native grasses and other low-level thickets.

Of course, diversity isn't a direct synonym with early successional habitat, but they are linked. Generally, when a property has one, it has both. That offers lots of food and bedding cover.

Not all properties offer enough early successional habitat, though. Logging, hinge-cutting timber and other timber management practices will eventually produce the higher stem count deer love, but that doesn't address fields and open areas that could be optimized more quickly.

"We have a fairly new mix called Conceal (whitetailinstitute.com/conceal)," said Whitetail Institute General Manager William Cousins. "It creates cover, and in those areas where you don't have enough cover for deer to feel comfortable, this is so easy to use. It creates a jungle that they'll bed in."

Planting Conceal provides security and makes deer feel like they aren't out in the open. Although Conceal is great for creating blocks of bedding cover, it's also ideal for establishing travel corridors between bedding areas and food sources, as well

as soft edges and screens around food plots. These are also important parts of the land-management process.

MANAGE FOR DIVERSITY

When managing a property, it's vital to approach it with a plan. Consider forethought. This includes having the right food-to-cover ratio. Getting that ratio correct optimizes the land's whitetail carrying capacity. That's why Cousins likes to have about 3 to 10 percent of hunting grounds in food plots. However, he said it's difficult to pick an exact number, because it depends on the lay of the land and soil.

"If everything is there for them, they're going to stay in that area (other than the rut)," he said. "You can certainly hold them in an area. There are things they like and things that cause them to feel more comfortable on a tract of land."

Food sources change throughout the year, and most of those are only viable for a brief period. That further influences the need for a diverse management plan. Failing to acknowledge that can leave your property void of food at various points throughout the year.

"Understanding what foods deer prefer at what time and how deer move related to foraging and digestion will help hunters put themselves in the right place at the right time," Jaster said. "Knowing deer nutrition and digestion can also help hunters lay out habitat and choose species of plants to assist deer."

Part of that planning includes a balance of annuals and perennials.

"Sometimes, I hear people rant and rave about perennials," Cousins said. "I love perennials, but in a diverse plan, you also want annuals. Some people prefer 50 percent annuals and 50 percent perennials, but the annuals really give you that diversity."

BE DIFFERENT. BE GREAT

Entrepreneurs — successful, failed or otherwise — know well that you must be first, best or different. To attract customers, you must satisfy one or more of those categories. The same concepts hold true for attracting and holding wildlife on your property.

Providing the best comes with premium forage. Being the first to do it in your area increases the odds of attracting deer and keeping them from straying. And being different is all about offering variety, especially things



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- Annual: Outstanding early fall through late winter attraction.
- Fast germination and emergence; develops quickly; improves overall soil structure.

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- Soil pH: 6.0-7.5
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deer aren't getting elsewhere. Of course, we usually don't know what's going on at adjacent properties, but encouraging a buffet of natural vegetation and establishing numerous food plot plant species will increase the odds of planting something deer can't get on neighboring tracts.

Cousins is currently conducting a forage research project in partnership with colleagues at a major ag university. The fields are divided into patterns with various food sources, and deer can eat in whichever of the squares that they choose.

"We're doing this trial in three different geographic locations," Cousins said. "It's absolutely remarkable. It's uncanny how deer absolutely have preferences. I feel that selecting a premium forage that will do well in your area based on your soil type is the most important. It just gives you a leg up over most neighbors. Research projects are a part of everyday life at Whitetail Institute and one of the most enjoyable and satisfying parts of the job."

One thing is certain: If deer can't find what they need and want on your property, they'll find it elsewhere.

"Digestion and nutrition dictate much of the habitat used, as deer will move around to find the plants that are needed for nutrition," Jaster said. "Deer focus on the most nutritious palatable forage that's available and meets their needs physiologically. They adjust as different forages become palatable. Understanding what is nutritionally limiting to deer will allow hunters to focus habitat improvements on releasing deer from those limits."

GROW THE GOOD STUFF

Whitetail Institute seed blends offer uniqueness and variety. Choosing several options will help reach that goal of offering a diverse range of forage. That's the most important aspect of fostering a healthy deer herd.

Start with a proven perennial base, such as Imperial Whitetail Clover (<https://whitetailinstitute.com/imperial-whitetail-clover-perennial/>) or Fusion (<https://whitetailinstitute.com/fusion-perennial/>), which is a clover and chicory mix. Then, supply a healthy dose of annuals, too. Beets & Greens (<https://whitetailinstitute.com/>

beets-greens/) includes kale, radishes and turnips. Ravish Radish (<https://whitetailinstitute.com/ravish-radish/>) provides several varieties, too. You also can't go wrong with a premium cereal grain, such as Whitetail Oats Plus.

"I'm a huge fan of Pure Attraction (<https://whitetailinstitute.com/imperial-pure-attraction-annual/>), which is our proprietary oat and Winter-Greens," Cousins said. "It's super high in sugar. If you're using some perennials, such as Fusion, and you're planting some [Beets & Greens] and Pure Attraction, you have a pretty diverse plate out there."

Land managers have many choices. But, aside from the negative effects of disease and injuries, age, genetics and nutrition are the consistent influencers on antler growth. As land managers, we can only control age and nutrition. And as Cousins commonly says, an antler is the barometer of the nutrition available to deer.

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SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

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

MAKING INTEGRATED WEED MANAGEMENT WORK

These basic guidelines will significantly lessen the chances of experiencing stand establishment problems.



Mowing is a form of mechanical weed management that's immensely valuable and commonly recommended in food plots

In a previous issue, I wrote about the principles of integrated weed management and its importance in overall food plot health. Integrated weed management is essential since the herbicide choices in food plots are limited and there are many weeds that are simply not controlled with the herbicides available. The earlier article was conceptual. I will now describe examples of integrated weed management based on customer discussions during the 2019 season.

Mowing. Mowing is a form of mechanical weed management that's immensely valuable and commonly recommended in food plots. Mowing shreds weed tops and allows sunlight to penetrate to the low growing forages. For tall weeds, mowing is an indispensable tool and recommended dozens of times this past summer to provide salvage control of tall weeds, par-

ticularly common ragweed. (The common ragweed example is also representative of several other troublesome weeds.) Slay marginally controls ragweed, but it assuredly will not control knee-high ragweed. As a salvage short-term fix, repeated mowing from late summer through autumn can save a ragweed-infested food plot for use later that hunting season. Granted, the ragweed problem will return the following summer, but mowing saved the food plot for short-term use that hunting season. After all, one of the purposes of food plots is to enhance the hunting experience, and that objective was fulfilled — at least short-term.

Mowing is not a stand-alone solution to ragweed infestations in food plots. The rest of the ragweed management system is a uniform forage crop stand, precisely timed applications of Slay (based on the forage

species) and a weed-wiper to selectively apply glyphosate to tall weeds. The point to this example is none of these individual weed control practices stand alone for managing ragweed in food plots. The solution is a balanced system of these practices woven together.

Altered planting dates. Knowledge is a valuable commodity, and knowing the likelihood of a troublesome weed infestation allows forage planting dates to be slightly tweaked to create gaps in crop planting and opportunities to aggressively control weeds during

the fallow period. This form of cultural weed control requires flexibility and forward planning. On several occasions during the spring of 2019, I recommended delayed forage planting until mid-summer and keeping the food plot site fallow for the first half of the summer. During the fallow period when no crops are planted, aggressive tillage (mechanical weed control) and applications of systemic non-selective herbicides (chemical weed control) suppress populations of troublesome weeds, particularly perennials. The fallow period created by delayed forage planting made this weed control strategy possible.

This approach works, but it requires a comprehensive plan developed in advance and a significant time commitment during the summer fallow period to implement the repeated tillage and herbicide regime. Translated, that means additional cost to manage a troublesome weed. To address that concern, I pose this question: Which is more costly, fallow weed management

to gain the upper hand on a troublesome species or losing the food plot to an uncontrollable infestation? To me, the cost of food plot failure far exceeds the cost of fallow weed control. To that end, it is important to never lose sight of why we have food plots; to enhance the hunting experience and improve the health of the herd through better nutrition.

Supplemental seeding. The longer I work in this capacity, the more I am convinced that often we become victims of our own food plot successes. Early in the life of a perennial food plot, deer can snatch young forage seedlings completely out of the ground, and that plant is forevermore gone leaving a void in the stand. Established forages are also vulnerable to continuous and heavy browsing. Leaves are constantly nibbled, and the crop never flourishes. The degree to which browsing mortality occurs in forages is influenced by seasonal availability of other food sources. If other food sources are absent, the food plot will be constantly browsed.

If you suspect this is happening in your food plot, use an exclusion cage to create a comparison of browsed versus not browsed. Thin forage stands are also caused by seeding errors, poorly prepared seedbeds, drought, and any other environmental factor that prevents forages from establishing or surviving. Regardless of the cause, the result is a thin or sporadic forage stand. Weeds are opportunists, capitalizing on the voids in the forage stand and creating a weedy mess in the food plot. When this happens, there is no herbicide that will restore food plot productivity to the full potential. Stated another way, herbicides do not replace absent forage plants. The answer is to thicken the forage stand, fill the voids and improve forage ability to compete with weeds by supplemental seeding.

Overseeding with additional perennial forage seed is typically a late-winter task. Universally, winter is when rainfall is plentiful, which helps new forage seedlings survive and troublesome summer weeds are not a factor. In southern latitudes,

overseeding is best accomplished with a no-till grain drill or a scaled-down version designed for food plot use. In either case, forage seeds are placed into narrow slits in the soil cut by fluted coulters mounted on the implement. These carefully placed seeds now have optimum soil-seed contact for germination.

In northern latitudes, where snowfall is reliable, an over-seeding technique called frost seeding is commonly used to rejuvenate an existing forage stand. Frost seeding is simply sowing forage seeds directly over residual snow, usually in March. As the snow melts, forage seed are carried downward into the soil through cracks or naturally occurring fissures for the required soil-seed contact. Pastures and hayfields throughout the country are commonly overseeded using either of these techniques to supplement the existing forage stand. This is a standard production practice in conventional agriculture and is equally useful in food plots to repair a thin forage stand and help suppress weeds.

On the surface, the recommendation to overseed a food plot seems like an expensive solution. Yes — there is obviously an additional cost to overseeding. When discussing the merits of supplemental seeding, I keep going back to the cost to overseed versus cost of food plot failure, especially when the cost of the failed food plot is considered in the context of not having an effective food plot for use during the upcoming hunting season. I challenge readers to try seeing the big picture — the true cost of food plot failure due to weeds.

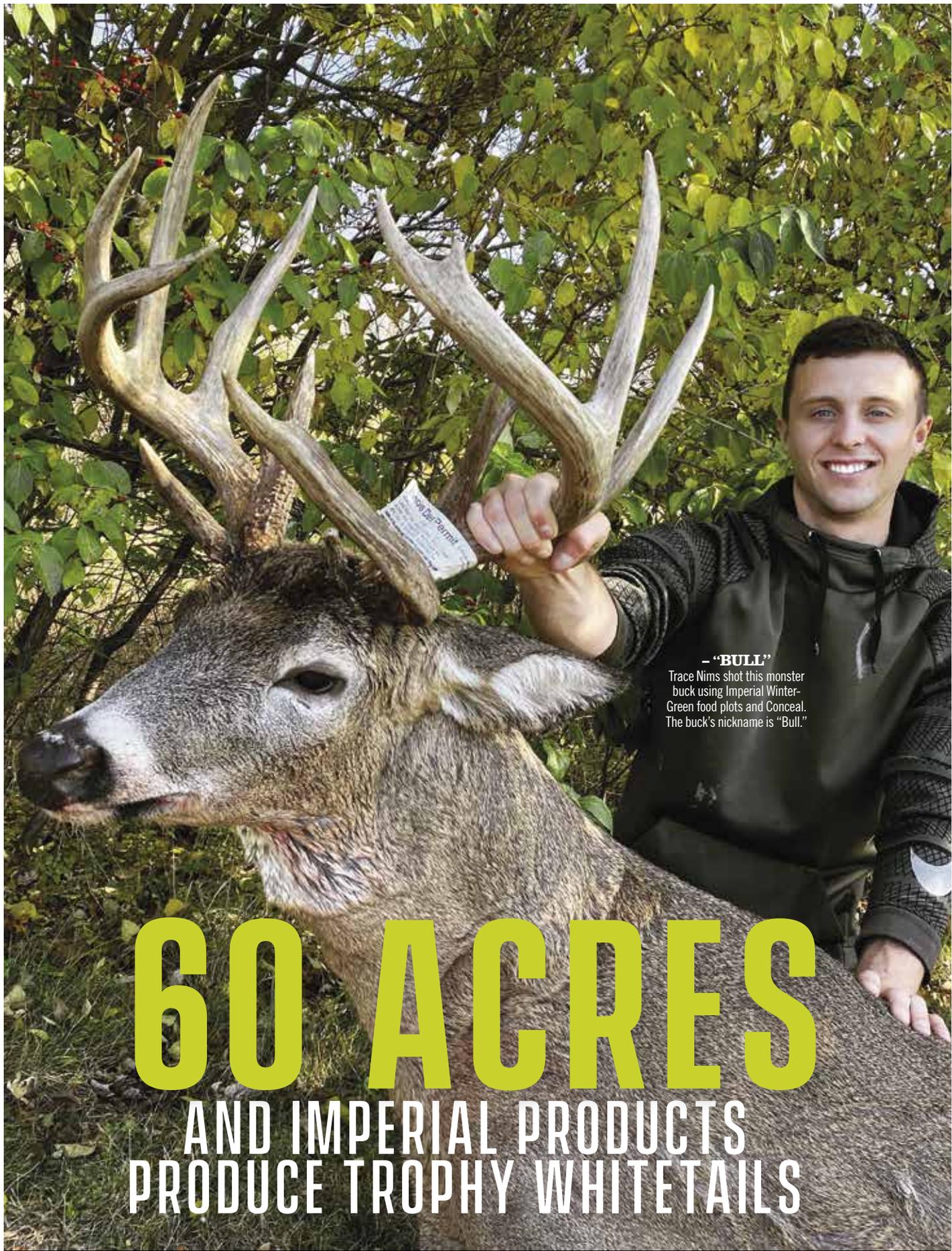
Time, management and brainpower. August 2019 could have been called the Dark Month based on the large number of customer emails I received about tall ragweed or pigweed infesting a food plot. Weed control questions received during late summer often equate to food plots that are hopelessly weedy and the weeds very large. When weeds are waist-high in August, they did not suddenly appear that tall. They achieved that height by growing unimpeded all summer. Ignoring the food plot all summer will result in a weed con-

trol disaster. Boots on the ground is the solution to that managerial oversight.

Where I live in southern Georgia, the prime time to control warm-season weeds is mid-April through early June. In northern latitudes, that generalized time period is May through June. That is the rough time period when troublesome warm-season weeds emerge and when they are typically at a size that can be controlled with herbicides like Arrest Max and Slay. By late summer, the window of effective weed control using herbicides has passed and those weeds are usually too large, continuing to grow. The point to this example is to encourage active inspection of food plots during late-spring and early-summer months to monitor weed infestations and be poised to treat when conditions are ideal for maximum herbicide performance. Consider the time to regularly inspect food plots for weeds to be an investment that pays great dividends, not an expense.

Finally, the rhetorical question needs to be repeated: Why do we do this? Food plots enhance the hunting experience and improve the overall health of the deer herd through better nutrition. To achieve those broad goals, additional investments are often needed to manage weeds. I outlined a few examples of how integrated weed management is implemented when managing troublesome weeds. We need to assume the mindset of a farmer when managing food plots. Modern agriculture has forced farmers to have a working plan, short-term and long-term, and be attentive to detail. Otherwise, their farming enterprise bleeds money, loses productivity and eventually fails. The same conditions exist for food plots, but for different reasons. In the context of integrated weed management in food plots, develop a proactive and comprehensive plan based on cultural, mechanical and chemical weed controls, and be attentive to detail when implementing that plan.





- "BULL"
Trace Nims shot this monster buck using Imperial Winter-Green food plots and Conceal. The buck's nickname is "Bull."

60 ACRES

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A common-sense system and four well-managed plots have paid big dividends for this hunting family.

■ by *Bart Landsverk* – Senior Editor

Chasing trophy bucks starts long before opening day for Trace Nims and his brother-in-law, Jon Kaeb. Preparation and work in the off-season are critical to set up their property for success during the coming season and future years.

They purchased 60 acres of Illinois timber that hadn't been managed properly for 15 years. The family has used Whitetail Institute products since and has seen proven results that have kept them hooked. They have more deer on their property and have taken monster bucks because of the Whitetail Institute's products.

"Every year starts the same way — scouting," Nims said. "Finding the most efficient area to utilize Whitetail Institute's products on our land. We have used tons of different products from Whitetail Institute and have in the back

of our heads what we think will do the best in each given location. We mark on a map of where our potential food plot location will be and then continue onto the next step."

After clearing brush, they decide first where the best spot for a tree stand or blind would be — not on the food plot but farther back on travel corridors. After marking the area, they continue to the next step of testing the soil using Whitetail Institute's soil test kits.

"Using this kit is simple, and results come back very quickly," Nims said. "This allows us to add things such as lime to optimize our chances of producing a great food plot."

After working the ground and planting their chosen seed, Nims said his family uses trail cameras to keep track of deer using travel corridors toward the plot. Having a data analytics back-

ground from the University of Illinois, Nims then adds information to an Excel program that helps them keep track of bucks and then find when they will likely be in a certain area during specific moon phases and weather patterns.

"Although this is a great way for us to organize information on bucks, they still have a mind of their own and often do not follow exact patterns that they had in the past," Nims said. "One thing we love about Whitetail Institute is that once we have the product planted and sprouted, we no longer need to check on the location in person. By using cellular trail cameras, we allow the area to have zero human pressure."

Nims said his group has two large main food plots and two small strip food plots where they have consistently taken great bucks. The first large plot uses Fusion.

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“Fusion is a great choice, as it’s a perennial, and we have had no problems with it coming up year after year,” he said. “This is a larger area in a bowl shape tucked in the middle of thick timber. We had deer in this plot every day. We found that one buck was pretty much running this food plot. He would pass through this area during the early season multiple times a day. The aggression of this buck protecting what he felt was his food plot was quite interesting. Jon and his son, Keaton, took a trophy buck on this plot. We love Fusion plots.”

Kaeb agreed. “The buck Keaton is holding had been shot off a Fusion food plot,” he said. “He was an aggressive buck that was coming out during the daylight a ton, which we found odd for a buck his size. Although he was a bit sporadic in how he was moving in and out, we were able to pattern him. The buck came in about 35 yards from the stand, running in. The best part is that Keaton was able to be involved in the entire process. He didn’t actually shoot the buck but was right there and ready to get down and grab him as soon as the shot went off. It was a good test to teach him some patience.”

The other large food plot is on a slight hill between a field and a small CRP strip. The family used Alfa-Rack Plus on that plot.

“The food plot is a very long strip and exploded up quickly and consistently,” Nims said. “I did find that I had mainly does that were in the strip, possibly because there was less cover around it, but come rut, where there are does, you’ll find the bucks.”

The first small food plot was planted with Imperial Winter-Greens.

“This is my favorite food plot,” Nims said. “We also used Conceal to create three travel corridors and allow the Winter-Greens to be hidden. The results were amazing, and we harvested a trophy buck from it. This buck had two bull-like horns coming out from the base of his antlers and was seen by neighbors throughout the entire year. With gun season coming up, I was nervous he would be taken by a neighbor, because



Keaton helped his father, Jon, harvest this great buck on a Fusion food plot. Keaton was able to be involved in the entire process.

the buck was quite aggressive and out during daylight hours.

I knew he was already chasing does hard and had been hanging around and using these travel corridors during the day. The great thing about three travel corridors using Conceal is that does and bucks use our property more than neighbor’s.

“However, the tough thing is choosing which corridor to hunt that day. I chose the corridor that had consistently had mature does coming from bedding areas toward the Winter-Greens. I hadn’t been out hunting yet because of farming, so the area was untouched by human pressure thanks to cellular trail cameras. I ended up getting out late, and just as I sat down, three does came rushing into the food plot. Not long after came this great buck. I stopped him at 25 yards — perfect for a bow shot. He ran about 60 yards. Thanks to the Winter-Greens and Conceal, we had the does, which meant he was soon to follow.”

The last food plot consisted of Winter Peas Plus. This is a small plot that also was hidden using Conceal and was deep in the timber. The family decided not to pressure that stand unless they were sure a buck was coming to the plot, so they had the stand right next to the plot looking down a small clearing. Conceal let them get to the stand efficiently by providing cover. A buck with a turkey-foot

antler had been using this plot frequently. However, the only shot would be in a small opening. Everything lined up when Kaeb took the great deer.

“We did not actually know he had that turkey-foot side from the few pictures we had of him,” he said. “We had made a small Winter Peas plot in a clearing deep in the timber. The mindset was to not even hunt it unless we knew we would have a good chance to see a target buck. We did use Conceal the best we could. We planted Conceal around the plot and cleared some brush and branches above to make somewhat of a corridor. This was the right place at the right time. The buck came walking in off this corridor type area we made. This was pretty much the only shot from this stand. I was able to take him at about 20 yards.”

Nims said other food plotters shouldn't be afraid to use Conceal. He was hesitant to plant it but now believes otherwise.

“I understood the idea, but I was not so sure if it would be effective,” he said.



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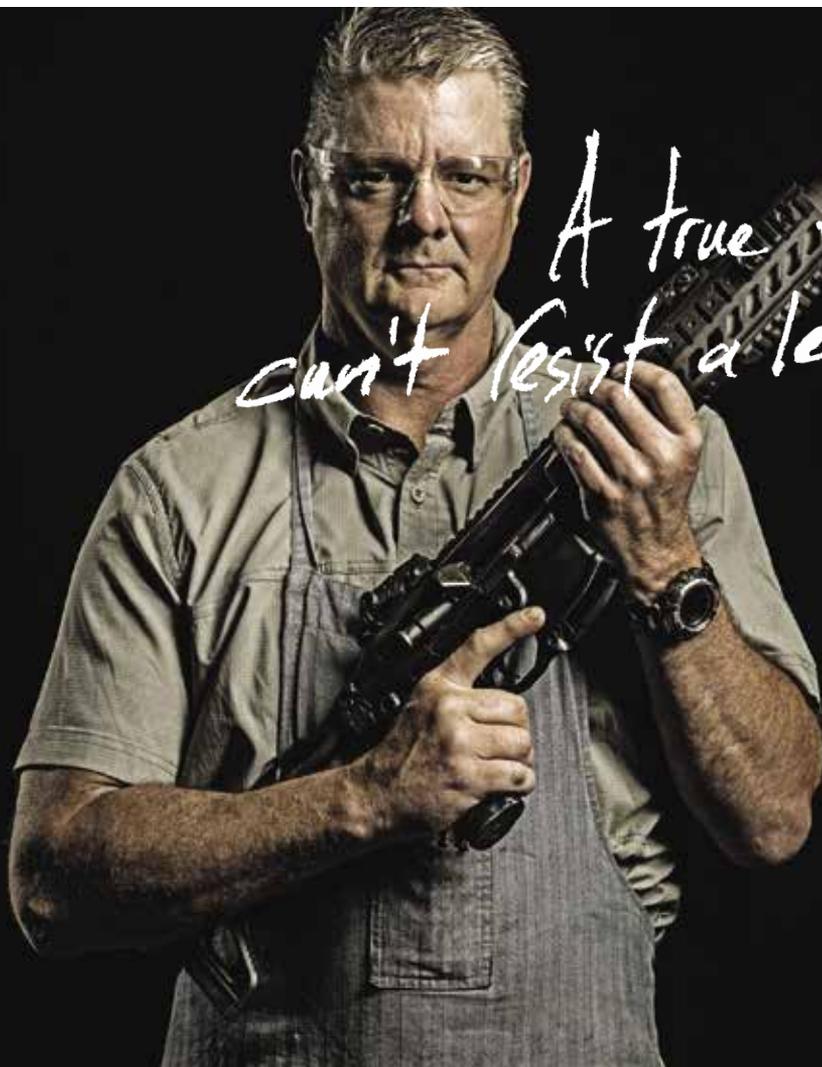
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“After using it, though, I recommend it to everyone. This stuff comes up pretty quick, it grows tall, and the deer love using it. Without creating those travel corridors using Conceal, I believe deer would have chosen to stay on neighbor's property more.

“The Whitetail Institute is unmatched. This stuff really works, and my family and I are huge believers and fans of all the Whitetail Institute's products. From giving our youngest 5-year-old hunter a chance at a big buck to being able to manage the property efficiently, this stuff should be used by all.”

Kaeb agreed that planting food plots and managing land is a great way to get family and friends together.

“Overall, the biggest thing for us is the family aspect of it,” he said, “whether it's me taking my two sons out to hunt or them going with Trace. They (younger children) may not be able to necessarily shoot anything yet, but just having them involved is great. If they can't be on the actual hunt, they will be sneaking out to the shop to help with cleaning or even processing the deer.”



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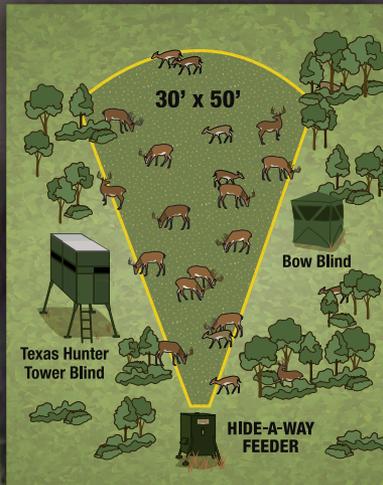
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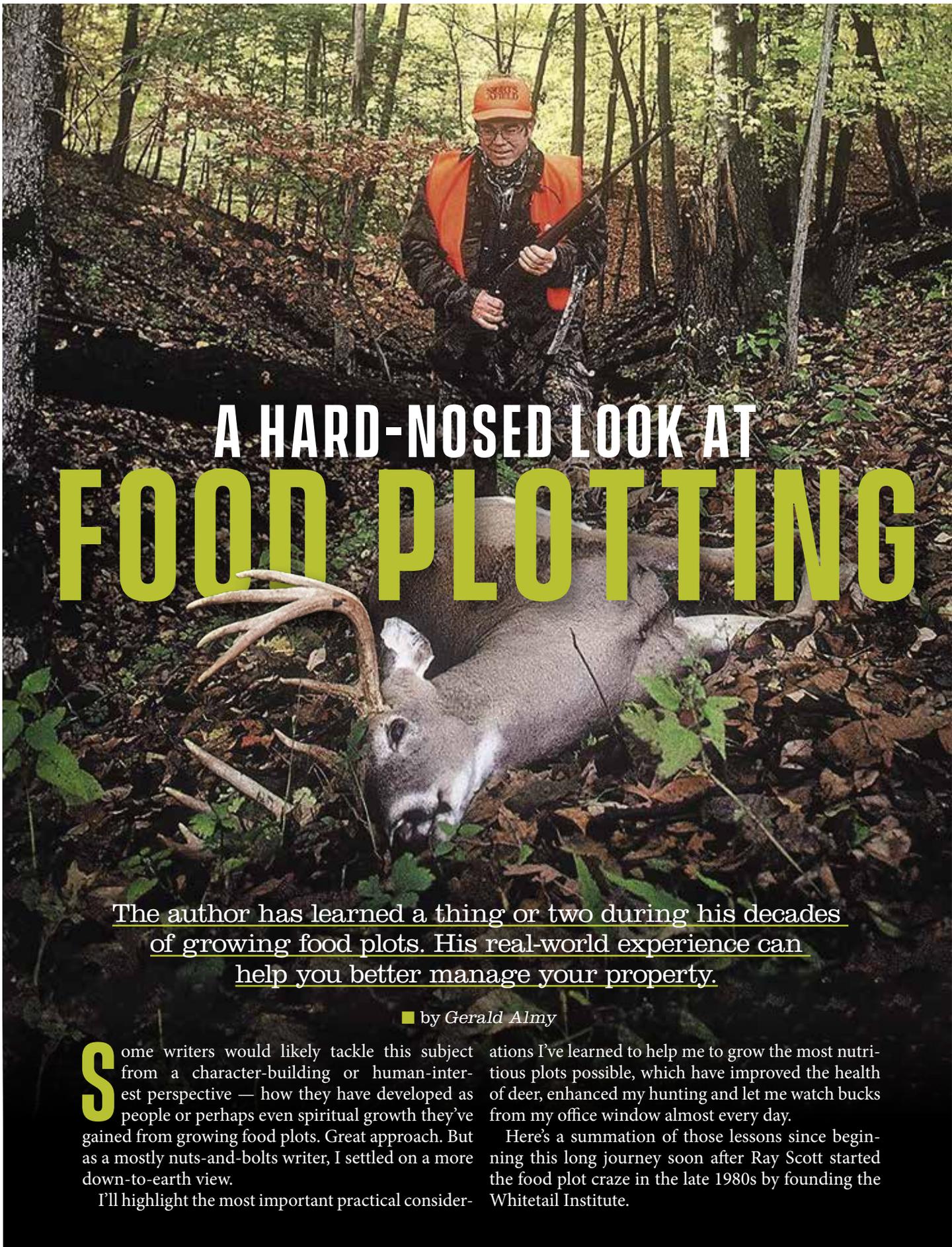
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A HARD-NOSED LOOK AT FOOD PLOTTING

The author has learned a thing or two during his decades of growing food plots. His real-world experience can help you better manage your property.

■ by *Gerald Almy*

Some writers would likely tackle this subject from a character-building or human-interest perspective — how they have developed as people or perhaps even spiritual growth they’ve gained from growing food plots. Great approach. But as a mostly nuts-and-bolts writer, I settled on a more down-to-earth view.

I’ll highlight the most important practical consider-

ations I’ve learned to help me to grow the most nutritious plots possible, which have improved the health of deer, enhanced my hunting and let me watch bucks from my office window almost every day.

Here’s a summation of those lessons since beginning this long journey soon after Ray Scott started the food plot craze in the late 1980s by founding the Whitetail Institute.

YOU MUST BE A DECISION MAKER

You will need to make choices almost every day in the world of food plotting. These decisions will affect how well your food plots grow and how well they fill the role you want them to play in the wildlife management plan for your property — what to plant where, when to plant, what equipment you need, when to mow, when to apply herbicides and where to carve out new plots.

YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES

Learn from them. Through the decades I've grown plots, I've probably made every mistake possible. But thankfully, I've learned from them. By seeing what I did wrong, I've learned to take the right approach the next time a similar situation arose.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING ADVICE

Yes, you can learn from mistakes. But you can also avoid many mistakes through careful research and, more important, by getting input from the experts at the Whitetail Institute. In the long run, if you're a good listener and heed the advice, you'll save time, money and wasted effort by following these pros' recommendations.

THE NEED TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

This is a corollary lesson to the previous consideration. If you follow the directions on the bag of seed carefully and don't skip steps, you'll probably find you don't need much advice. The people at the Whitetail Institute have covered every detail about how to successfully plant each of the many seed types offered. Follow them. You will be surprised how well your plots turn out and how few mistakes you commit.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WEED-FREE PLOT

This is one of the biggest challenges food plotters face. First, use Roundup or a generic glyphosate herbicide. Till repeatedly, and then spray again if needed. Till again if green shoots still appear. Then hit the problematic vegetation as it crops up in the plot with Arrest Max for grasses and Slay for broadleaf weeds.



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



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Nothing can ruin a plot quicker than allowing weeds to overtake it. Sure, you'll have some, but keep them to a minimum. Also, soil testing and following the recommendations creates an ideal environment for your desired plants to flourish and out-compete weeds.

IT'S VITAL TO WATCH YOUR TIMING

Deciding when to plant specific forages is one of the most important decisions you'll make. But again, if you follow the charts in *Whitetail News* or the information included on each bag of seed, you'll be sure to hit that window of opportunity when you can grow the best plot possible.

For example, when planting a brassica mixture such as Winter-Greens or Tall Tine Tubers, there's a danger of planting too early or late. If you sow the seed too early, it might die in hot, dry late-summer weather or go to seed and be unpalatable. If you plant too late, the crop won't have time to reach full potential in size and tonnage of forage produced. As admitted, I've made plenty of mistakes in food plotting, and that was one I've committed on both sides of the pendulum. I've eliminated that mistake by keeping a planting calendar, which highlights in colored markers when each type of food plot must go in the ground in my area of the country, the mountains of western Virginia. There's usually a window of several weeks, and I make sure I get the seed in the ground during that time.

VARIETY IS IMPORTANT

In my early years of food plotting, I was so wildly impressed with Imperial Whitetail Clover that I was reluctant to use any of my small acreage for other

plants. Eventually, as I saved and purchased more land, I began broadening my offerings to include a wide variety of Whitetail Institute products.

I realized that although Imperial Whitetail Clover could be the backbone of my food plot program, I needed other forages that would thrive and reach peak palatability through various time frames, including the heart of winter, and hot, dry spells in summer. And there was a need for other plants to attract other deer. Some bucks prefer one type of food, but others go nuts about another forage.

It's foolhardy to buy cheap seeds and generics. Living on an outdoor writer's income, it was tempting to buy generic or cheap brand seeds occasionally. But time and again, I would see the dramatic difference between plots sown with those and Whitetail Institute products. When you consider other expenses in food plotting, hunting, wildlife management and life, the minor extra cost for the best seed available is well worth it.

THE REWARD

You can keep mature bucks on small properties, but you must do two things. You must provide them with ample forage and other crucial things, such as water, a sanctuary, thermal cover, native foods, dense security cover and protection from trigger-happy neighbors. You also need to avoid having those mature bucks feel pressured by resisting the temptation to overhunt plots. An old buck that's not pressured will often spend most his time on a small parcel. Give him what he wants, including great food plots, and that could be your land.





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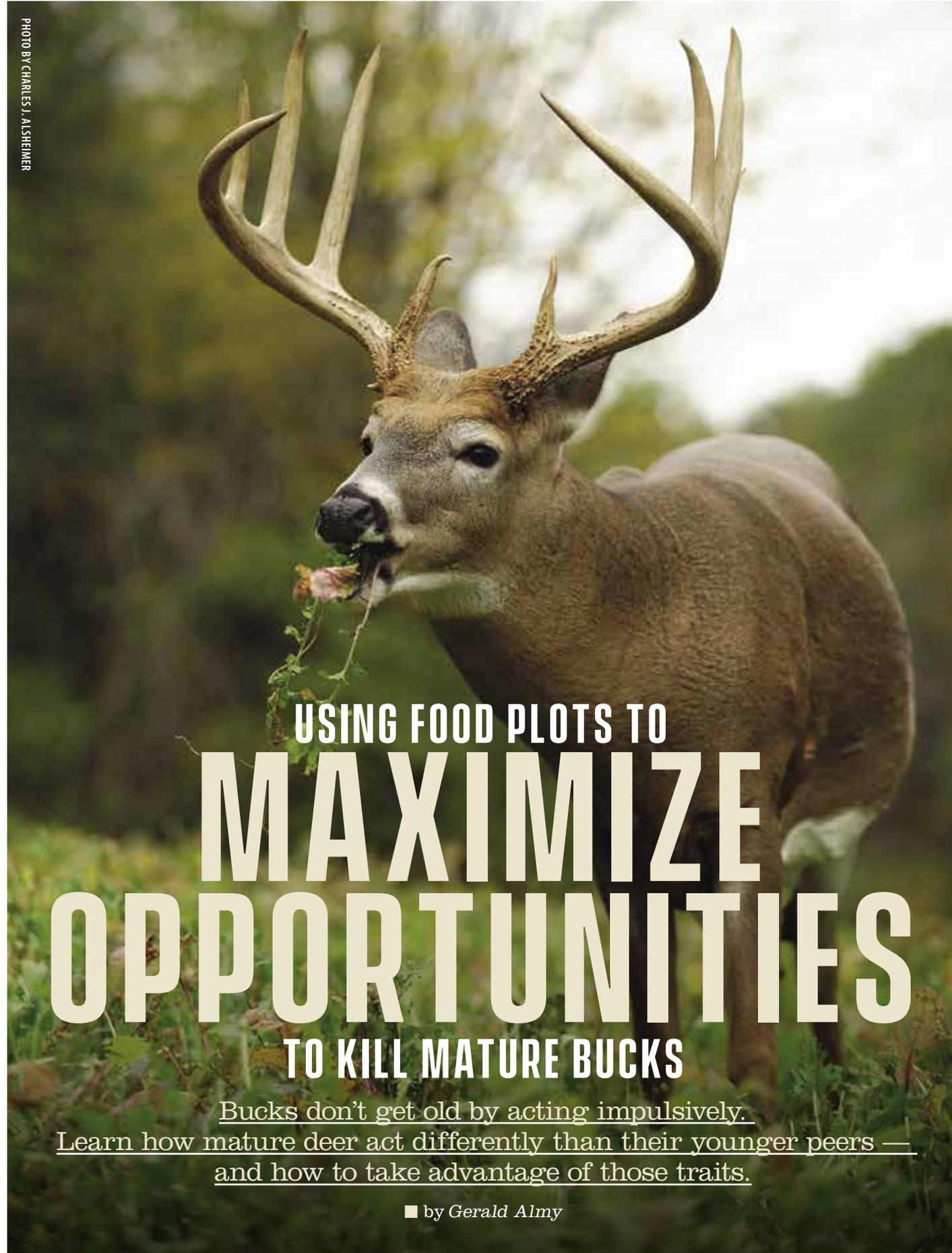
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USING FOOD PLOTS TO
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Bucks don't get old by acting impulsively.
Learn how mature deer act differently than their younger peers —
and how to take advantage of those traits.

■ by *Gerald Almy*

Old bucks are different. That's a common statement from veteran hunters. But truthfully, few novice hunters and food plotters really understand how profoundly different mature bucks are from 1- to 3-year-old deer.

Animals 4 and older are like a separate species. After a whitetail reaches that breakoff-point, it becomes reclusive, super-wary, often nocturnal and maddeningly difficult to hunt. But knowing how old-timers behave differently from younger deer, and how they use the land and its topography and vegetation, can provide solid clues about how to manage your food plots and surrounding habitat to improve your success on these senior citizens.

Let's look at some examples of behavioral and personality differences between young bucks and mature animals. Then, we'll discuss how being constantly aware of these differences as you plan, lay out and maintain food plots can help increase your chances of wrapping your hands around the bases of a few of these boss bucks — or trying to, if those bases aren't too massive to grip.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OLD AND YOUNG BUCKS

For a mature buck, survival is the No. 1 goal — even more important than sex and eating. That information will go a long way toward guiding how you approach food plot planning, location and execution.

Mature bucks move out of their beds later in the day, usually just before dark, or when hunters aren't in the woods, often about noon. They can become nocturnal quickly. Old bucks are on a hair-trigger to move mostly at night or hunker down in remote, inaccessible areas if they feel the slightest pressure at food plots or other food sources.

Mature bucks make the earliest rubs and mark the largest-diameter trees. They make the earliest scrapes. They often travel harder physical topographic routes (steeper, with thicker cover) than females and young deer if it will keep them out of sight of hunters or provide security. They choose routes based on cover and a sense of safety.

Old bucks bed in remote areas, often

in elevated terrain. They can spook when one of their senses detects danger — a snapped twig (hearing), a hunter moving through an opening in the woods or across a field (vision) or a whiff of human odor blowing toward them (smell). A younger deer will be alarmed by one sense but might continue its activities after pausing. An old buck will vanish like a wisp of fog if one sense of danger is activated.

Though increasing testosterone levels in fall urge them to chase does, they often forgo that courting act, hanging out in cover during the pre-rut and only moving in to mate after does go fully into heat.

Some mature bucks take that step farther, forgoing breeding. Wildlife biologists have documented some old, reclusive bucks that opted out of mating to avoid the dangers of exposing themselves to hunters.

THE HUNTER'S OPENING

Although they live cautious, secretive lives and are easily spooked, old bucks have an Achilles' heel: They have to eat. And they are inordinately fond of lush, tender forage in a food plot. That's our route to harvest these wary bucks. But it takes great care and prudence to not spook or alert them that they're being hunted. Here are some ideas on how to do that, based on 35 years of growing food plots and managing the surrounding habitat to attract and shoot old bucks. The steps involve many facets, including planning, plot layout, habitat manipulation, plot maintenance and other factors.

AVOID PRESSURING THEM

This is one of the most crucial steps to harvest older deer. Mature bucks bed in some of the roughest areas possible, with steep terrain and thickets of briars and tangled brush. Never pressure those areas, which you can locate via spring scouting and studying aerial photographs and topographic maps.

Similarly, you don't want to pressure mature bucks when they visit the plots you grow to attract and help nurture those deer. However, you want to mon-

itor them when possible, to see when bucks visit the plot and where they enter. Game cameras serve that vital purpose and let you study the racks and bodies of bucks to make sure they're mature. You can monitor some plots (those used mainly for nutrition) with trail cams using SD cards, but wireless setups let you keep tabs on smaller, remote plots you hope will attract mature bucks without human pressure.

"Our cellular system gives hunters 24-7 access to their trail camera images without ever stepping in the woods to retrieve SD cards," said Mark Olis, content director for Moultrie Mobile. "You can be sitting in your home, truck or at work — wherever — and view your trail camera images from the field. This is not only convenient, but it keeps you from disturbing your best hunting areas.

"Older bucks are reclusive and will not tolerate much, if any, disturbance in their home area, which hopefully includes your food plot. A cellular camera positioned near the feeding area is an ideal setup to keep pressure low while continually gaining insight into his movements. Then, when the buck begins showing a daytime pattern on your cell camera, you can enter the area to hunt and hopefully harvest him."

DON'T HUNT THEM TOO OFTEN

This is related to the aforementioned advice. Only hunt a plot when a mature buck is using it and conditions are favorable. Hunting too often or when conditions aren't perfect can ruin your chance of killing a monster buck. Some people pride themselves on doggedly hunting stands "all day every day for weeks." That shows stamina, but it's usually a poor formula for killing a wary buck.

Use your trail cameras, and note the barometer conditions, and wind direction and speed when a keeper buck visits the plot. Plan your hunt for similar conditions. Make that first hunt count. If you don't succeed, don't go back the next day unless conditions are perfect again.

I learned that lesson again recently when I saw a heavy, symmetrical 8-pointer out of bow range one afternoon. Pumped up by the big deer, I tried

again the next day, overlooking a change in weather conditions. And I paid the price. I did not see the deer that day, and I might have spooked him. I never saw him again the rest of the season. Fortunately, he returned as a 9-point-er the next fall. Remembering to keep a low-pressure approach, I was lucky to kill him with my muzzleloader near the same plot.

OFFER SOMETHING SPECIAL OR DIFFERENT FROM SURROUNDING CROP FIELDS

This is easy in most cases with Whitetail Institute products, as the main crops farmers grow are usually soybeans, corn and alfalfa. Ag soybeans can be susceptible to overbrowsing. By the time corn appeals to deer, it's usually being harvested. And the alfalfa farmers grow becomes more tough at maturity compared to browsing alfalfa varieties making them less palatable, digestible and attractive to deer.

Offer Imperial Whitetail Clover, Fusion, Extreme, Alfa-Rack Plus or some of the Institute's annuals, and they'll attract deer. They're highly palatable and stand out from surrounding ag fields with more tender forage than field corn, bean leaves and hay alfalfa. The company's fall and winter brassica products are especially good choices because brassicas are seldom grown on surrounding farm agricultural fields. Imperial Winter-Greens, Beets & Greens and Tall Tine Tubers are good selections that offer something different from farm fields. Ravish Radish, a recent addition, attracts deer in early season even before frosts convert starches in these plants to sugars.

AVOID TIME GAPS IN FORAGE OFFERINGS

If deer encounter periods when they don't have thriving forage on your land — or preferably several types — they might move to adjoining properties where they find a buffet. After Whitetail Oats Plus and Winter-Greens start fading in spring, make sure you have Imperial Whitetail Clover, Fusion or Alfa Rack Plus available.

Those perennials cover late winter



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through early spring. After that, you can add a summer annual offering. I've yet to find anything that tops Power Plant. It includes select cowpeas and forage soybeans, plus sunn hemp and sunflowers that serve as nurse crops and add structure for beans and peas to climb, as well as offering additional food. As Power Plant starts to fade in fall, clover and alfalfa plots, and new fall plantings of brassicas and oats, will take over. You can even mow trails into Power Plant and sow those with a brassica such as Winter-Greens to bridge the transition from summer forage to fall crops. Offering those forages prevents gaps in your food and offers variety, which is important because some deer prefer one type food to another.

MAINTAIN YOUR PLOTS

If nearby properties have well-kept food plots and yours are run down, choked with weeds or lacking nutrients, can you guess where deer will go? Recently, I was laid up for a while after major back surgery. Unwilling to risk damaging my rebuilt back, which included three titanium rods and seven fused vertebrae, while it healed, I let my plots deteriorate.

That fall, I paid the price and saw fewer mature bucks, because I couldn't mow the perennial plots regularly, spray them with Arrest Max and Slay for grasses and weeds, or conduct other maintenance chores. Seeing fewer bucks as I recuperated was bad enough. Worse was hearing that my neighbor harvested an impressive 4-year old I had watched on my plots the previous year when I was taking care of the forage. Sure, part of me was happy for him. But another part wished that deer was still around, and I

would have liked to see what he looked like at 4.

Always conduct a soil test before planting, and add necessary lime and fertilizers. Lime is especially important if your pH is less than 6.5. With soil that's acidic, many nutrients and fertilizers in the ground become bound together, and growing plants cannot absorb them. You're wasting money if you pour on N-P-K but fail to get pH in the 6.5 to 7 range ideal for most food plot products.

After forages are strongly established and growing well, maintain the perennial plots of alfalfa, chicory and clover with periodic mowing when the plants are going to flower or weeds stand taller than the forage. But never cut them shorter than 5 to 6 inches. Spray with Arrest Max and Slay if mowing can't control weeds and grasses.

Finally, consider adding nitrogen, such as 34-0-0 or 46-0-0, to your brassicas a few weeks after they emerge. That extra shot of urea makes those plants more palatable and boosts growth, making them especially attractive to an old buck.

PROVIDE MATURE BUCKS WITH SECURITY

A mature buck bedding in a remote, thick spot will typically not approach a food plot in daylight unless he has cover as he nears the plot and moves into it. If the plot is surrounded by woods, hinge-cutting or completely cutting some low-value trees along the approach route can help. You can even channel the buck's movement to approach upwind of a stand in shooting range by how you pile brush and cut trees.

If there's an open area deer must cross, you can plant shrubs or native warm-season grasses. But those are slow growing. Whitetail Institute recently re-



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leased a great product for that situation: Conceal. It's a blend of sunn hemp and proprietary sorghums you can only get from the company. It grows thick and tall quickly to offer a screen for you to sneak into a plot or for older bucks to feel comfortable approaching in daylight. Having strips and blocks of Conceal will make deer travel more freely in daylight and arrive at food plots earlier. You can even plant strips that run right into the plot, luring deer into bow range.

NEVER HUNT A PLOT DURING POOR CONDITIONS

We covered this to some extent, but it bears repeating. The key to avoid using a stand under unfavorable conditions is simple: Have enough other food plots and stands that lend themselves to hunting during various wind or hunting pressure conditions. Have some that hunt well during winds from any direction.

You're fooling yourself if you try to cheat the wind. I've tried that several times, but one of the biggest nontypicals I've ever seen caught my scent when I thought an iffy wind was good enough to hunt a stand near an Alabama food plot. The unique buck approached the

plot and was almost in the clear for a shot when that wind revealed itself as bad. Vamoose.

Don't break that rule like I did, costing me a chance at a remarkable deer. Never hunt a plot when conditions are unfavorable. When the wind, weather fronts, nearby hunting pressure or other conditions are wrong for a mature buck to use a plot in daylight without scenting you, or without your scent blowing toward him as you approach the plot, dismiss the temptation to hunt it. Or if it's a weekend with good weather but you expect lots of hunter activity at surrounding areas, hold off on hunting your best spot. Bucks tend to move nocturnally during those high-pressure days.

Sometimes, you can overcome bad winds by having two stands on opposite sides of a plot. Choose the one that blows your scent downwind from where trail cameras show a buck is using the area.

Don't abandon locations that seem unhuntable. They're still valuable for keeping deer on your property and helping their nutritional needs. And the next time you plan and lay out a plot, consider where bedding areas, likely buck

approach routes, the angle of the sun, prevailing wind conditions and whether the site is secluded enough for a mature buck to use. If you address those initially, you should be able to hunt every plot you create.

Also, you can hunt travel routes to and from unhuntable plots. A cellular trail camera can help you locate good spots without pushing deer off the area by constantly checking SD cards.

CONCLUSION

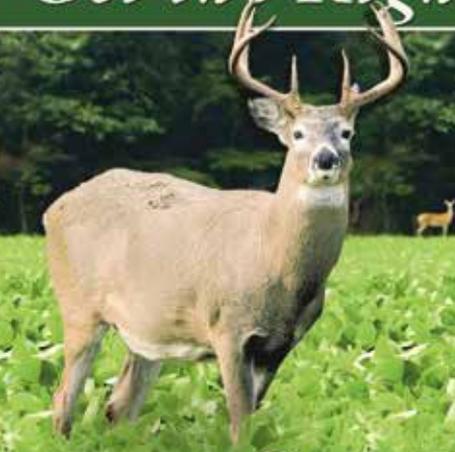
Try these tips for planning, creating, fine tuning and managing food plots for mature bucks. Hopefully, they will help you lure an exceptional buck into range for a clean shooting opportunity.

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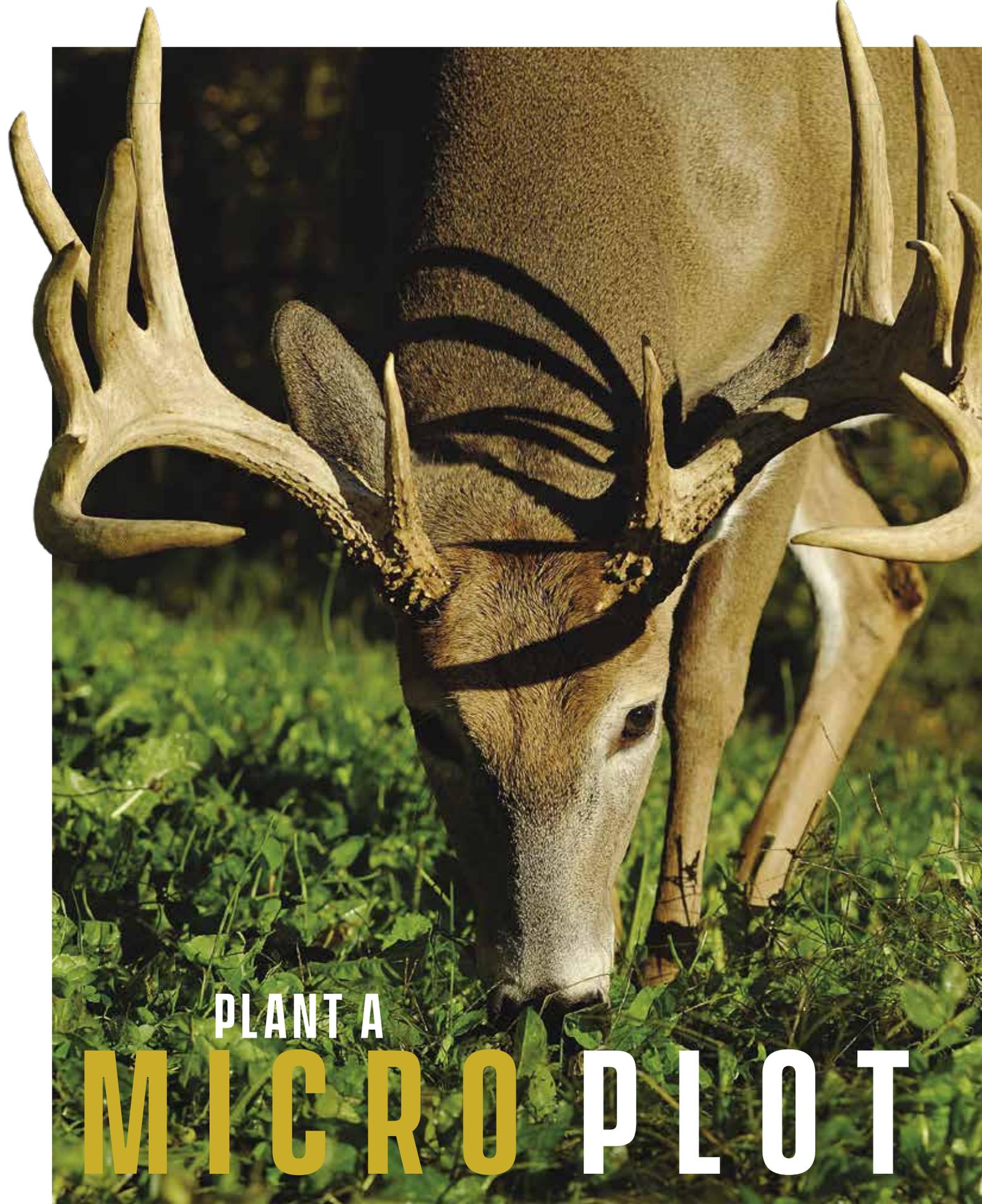
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PLANT A
MICRO PLOT



PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Don't own hundreds of acres? No sweat. Some handiwork and several Whitetail Institute products can yield great bowhunting on small properties.

■ by *Darron McDougal*

What working-class deer hunter hasn't dreamt of owning hundreds of acres for hunting? You know, the type of property no one else hunts and that has all the necessities plus multiple openings ideal for planting large food plots.

We long to ride that big green tractor and let fancy implements do the work behind us, and then watch the seeds become luscious deer forage and hunt for a 180-inch buck nicknamed "Skyscraper," whose sheds we found the previous spring.

Wake up. Most average bowhunters, regardless of how hard we work, aren't fortunate enough to get keys to the gate of our own whitetail hunting paradises. That's reality. Conversely, many bowhunters who live in the country have a home on just a few acres. And although many experts who manage large properties would suggest that you're wasting your time trying to hunt deer on your small property, don't be fooled. You don't need hundreds of acres or expensive equipment to make productive food plots where you can hunt deer.

During the past several years, many world-class bucks have been taken on small suburban acreages, and it's because forward-thinking folks see big potential in small places. And if you live at a small acreage where bowhunting is legal, it's time to roll up your sleeves and consider the possibilities outside your back door.

PROPERTY SIZE

Many people view small acreages negatively because most small properties don't hold deer.

"Are you going to hold deer on your small acreage?" said deer nutrition expert Matt Harper. "No. But you'll be able to attract deer to your property and hunt them."

How small is too small? That depends. At least 10 acres is ideal, but your prop-

erty could be just an acre. Regardless, you must understand that even a fatally shot deer might hop onto another property. Connect with neighboring landowners, and discuss your plans. If you obtain permission and their blessing to trail a deer if one leaves your property, you can plant a plot on a 1/2-acre parcel without concern of losing a deer. The smaller the property, the more important it becomes to have trailing permission from surrounding neighbors.

PLOT SIZE, SHAPE AND LOCATION

Many might ask, "How big should I make the plot?" First, consider possible planting sites. Existing openings are ideal, especially if you have little equipment.

"The plot size doesn't really matter other than consumption rate," Harper said. "Overbrowsing is the concern. The reality is that, in this context, you have only a small amount of acreage to work with. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's like a small but reputable barbecue joint. It's the best barbecue joint in town, and they only have four tables in there. Still, everyone flocks to it because it has really good food. The same concept applies to your small food plots. If you provide a food source that's very attractive to the deer, they'll come to it."

"To temper the overbrowsing concern, make the plot as big as you can manage with the equipment you have. Also, make sure that your soil is in good condition. I also like to choose a seed that grows vigorously and that has good regrowth after foraging. We'll talk more about that later."

Harper also noted that shape and design is important.

"When folks ask me how long to make a plot, I ask them how far they're able to shoot their bow," he said. "I try to incorporate some feature that will pinch deer through an area and then place my stand there. An example is a bend in the plot

that the deer have to walk around to get to the other end. If 30 yards is your maximum range, make that bend no wider than 30 yards across.”

Whitetail Institute’s Brandon Self suggested that if you have any latitude on plot location, you should place it relative to a destination farm field and an adjacent bedding area. This can be difficult to navigate, as most small-property owners don’t have access to neighboring properties. Basically, you can’t tromp around in spring to determine where deer are bedding and where their destination food source is located. That’s where the onX Hunt app is highly beneficial. It will help you predict where bedding areas and food sources are via satellite view. Again, though, if you have only several acres, your locations are likely limited, and you’ll have to do the best you can with what’s available.

TOOLS AND SITE PREP

Most small-property owners have minimal tools for soil preparation and planting. This isn’t your cue to start pric-

OPTIMIZING YOUR MICRO PLOT

Improvements to deer habitat naturally improve hunting potential, so although a small micro plot is attractive to deer, why not make it more attractive? There are many ways to do this, but we’ll discuss three inexpensive and fairly simple ones.

1. WATER Besides food, deer also need water. If you don’t have water on or near your property, you can inexpensively add water to your plot with a hard-plastic kiddie pool. You could also get a watering trough at a feed-supply store. If your food plot is right out your back door, you could even fill it from your home’s outdoor water faucet.

2. EDGE COVER Obviously, stepping into an opening to feed makes deer feel vulnerable. That’s why they’re constantly scanning as they eat. Building or cultivating edge cover around the plot can add vital security. It’s also good cover during spring and summer when fawns are young. You can achieve edge cover by stacking treetops and brush around the edge, but don’t block entry and escape routes.

3. MINERALS (WHEN AND WHERE LEGAL) “A food plot usually covers the nutritional aspects of protein and energy, but deer can also benefit greatly from minerals and supplements,” Harper said. “In other words, it gives deer another reason to visit your small plot. For early spring, summer and early fall, Whitetail Institute’s 30-06 Mineral/Vitamin Supplement complements any food plot. As fall turns to winter, 30-06 Thrive or 30-06 Tall Tine are the ideal choice.”

Self agreed that minerals and supplements are a good add-on to a micro plot.

“Definitely add a mineral site if you can,” he said. “It will be very helpful to deer, especially if deer in your area are deficient in minerals.”

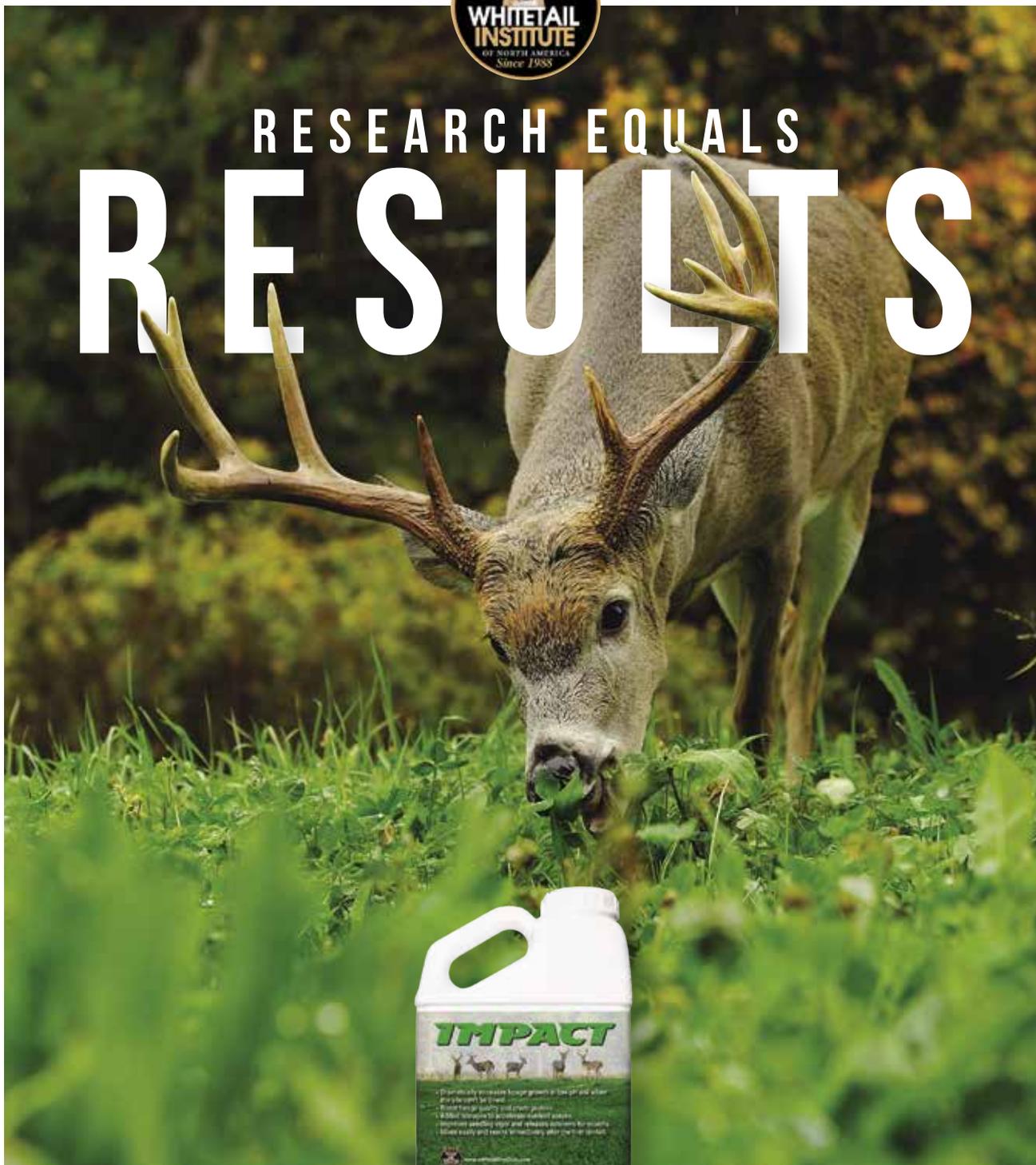


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ing a consumer-sized tractor or even a four-wheeler and tow-behind attachments. You might already have what you need in your garage or garden shed. A few of Whitetail Institute's seed offerings make planting as easy as seed-to-soil contact, and often, that can be achieved with a rake.

Depending on your property and plot location, other tools that might prove valuable include a chainsaw and weed-whacker, which will help you clear impediments. Also, a round of herbicide applied from a garden-sized pump sprayer can effectively kill weeds and other plant life. Work diligently to clear the ground as much as possible, and then let an appropriate Whitetail Institute product take root.

IDEAL PLANTINGS

As Harper mentioned, regrowth after foraging is a great seed attribute when planting a micro plot.

"Soybeans would be a poor choice," he said. "Good choices are Imperial Whitetail Clover or Alfa-Rack Plus. These are actually stimulated and will thicken af-

ter browsing or mowing. But for the best results with these two products, you'll need a disk or tiller and drag implement."

If you don't own these items, Self suggested one of three annual plantings that require far less soil prep. And they also have great regrowth rates.

"The first two are Secret Spot and BowStand," he said. "Both are similar and will work in limited sunlight and with minimal ground preparation. They're ideal for tough-access spots or for folks with limited equipment or even just hand tools. Then we have No-Plow. It will grow nearly anywhere, but Secret Spot and Bow Stand are really tailored for small plots."

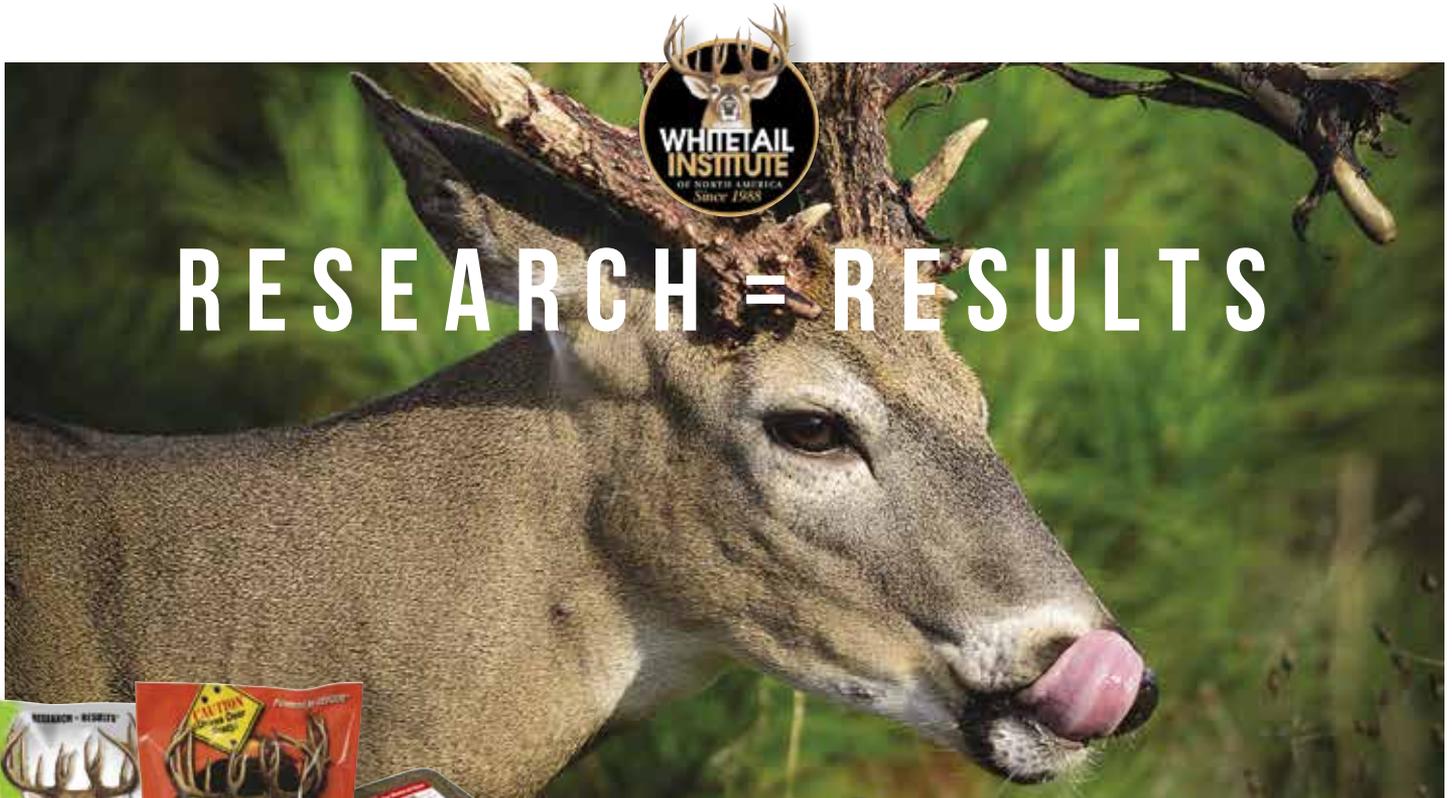
Although BowStand and Secret Spot will grow where other seeds struggle or fail, Self said some planning is involved to ensure a productive plot.

"We always recommend doing a soil test," he suggested. "These annuals are easier to grow than some perennial blends, but if you're able to soil test, do it. As far as ground preparation, the better seed-to-soil contact you achieve, the

greater your germination rate will be. You'll also need to fertilize and lime it. Our Secret Spot has a lime coating in the bag, which helps with pH. Fundamentally, though, the better you prepare the ground, the more productive your plot will be."

READY. SET. PLANT

You can daydream about owning hundreds of acres, which might not become reality in your lifetime, or you can consider more realistic options. If you own a small acreage where bowhunting is legal, look at the potential out your back door. You can make excuses not to improve your small property with a micro plot, or you can roll up your sleeves and plant one. Who knows? Maybe that 180-inch buck you've dreamt of hunting isn't as far away as you think.



WHITETAIL INSTITUTE ATTRACTANTS

Attractants contain multiple scent and flavor enhancers, including an ingredient that appeals to the sugar craving of deer delivering an unequaled attraction that can pull deer from surrounding properties and help hold them on your property. These attractants have been researched for unrivaled attraction their flavor enhancers and nose stimulating capabilities are what sets them a part.



MY TROPHY WHITETAILS

Continued from page 37



HANK ZAKOSKI | PENNSYLVANIA



MARK ZAKOSKI | PENNSYLVANIA

FATHER/SON DUO SCORE USING AMBUSH AND BEETS & GREENS

by *Bart Landsverk*

■ Mark Zakoski and his father, Hank, were not experienced hunters or land managers when they both took a hunter's safety course in 1982. They were starting from scratch, but a passion for the sport took hold early and built each year.

"We were truly beginners and had no mentors, no family farm to hunt, just a desire," Mark said. "By 2006, I had saved up enough to purchase some land, 43 acres nestled in an agricultural area of northeastern Pennsylvania."

The land was primarily hardwoods with acidic soils and pH of around 4.5. Mark and Hank were not having great success, so in 2010 Mark decided to start food plotting. He recalled he received a chainsaw as a Christmas gift and "got to work."

"I knew nothing about soil testing at the time. So, with the low pH the first few plantings were not what we had hoped for. I eventually learned about the soil health through my own experience and information provided to me by Whitetail Institute," Mark said. "Initially we tried perennials, but we have significant invasive weed problems, namely smartweed, which took over the plots. Because we did not have the time or equipment to properly maintain the perennials, we decided to switch to annuals."

Zakoski used Whitetail Institute's Ambush and Beets & Greens as his annual choices. "There were three bucks that we would be thrilled to harvest, all nine pointers with distinct antlers using the plots," Mark explained. "I studied their activity and found they were visiting the plots mainly between 4 p.m. and

6 p.m. Knowing that bucks usually change their patterns in early fall, I wanted to get out there as soon as possible. Opening day could not come fast enough."

Mark said he used a new strategy by staying off the plots in the morning and hunting on them in the afternoon.

"As the day progressed, several bucks appeared, getting larger as the day went on. I stayed patient, knowing what was on the trail camera," he said. "Nearing 6 p.m. I noticed a much larger deer, one of the target bucks, coming into the plot at 40 yards. I steadied the scope of my crossbow and took the shot. The buck whirled around, headed down a slope, and I heard a crashing noise, a good sign. Shortly afterward I retrieved the 9-pointer, my biggest archery buck to date."

The following Monday was Hank's turn. Again, their hard work proved fruitful as Hank shot a monster buck, his largest buck to date.

"My father is 80 years old now, and hunting gets a little tougher every year, so this was a special moment for both of us," Mark said. "We had finally achieved something that had eluded us for 39 years, both harvesting the best bucks or our hunting lives. Coming from humble beginnings, I firmly believe that it was through the grace of God and the attractiveness of these Whitetail Institute products that we were able to accomplish this feat."

"This was the best year ever!" Hank added. "These products really work."



ADVANCED FOOD PLOTTING

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

■ by Joyce Allison Tredaway – Agronomist and Weed Scientist

SPRAYER CALIBRATION

What do these numbers mean, and why does it matter?

Correctly determining sprayer calibration might seem intimidating, but it's critical for proper herbicide application.



As you begin to think about putting in food plots or trying to make your perennial food plots better than the previous year, you might ponder how you could have done things differently. This is often true with everything in life, not just food plots. You might have planted just right and applied the appropriate herbicide at the right time but ended up with a weedy mess. You ask, “How could this happen?” This brings me to the topic of sprayer calibration.

Sprayer calibration is determining the output of the sprayer in gallons per acre when configured for use in your food plot. Gallons per acre will help you know how much total spray is needed to spray your food plot and how much herbicide to add to the spray tank. Many variables directly affect the sprayer output, and we'll discuss these later.

If a sprayer is not properly calibrated, the herbicide will not perform like it should. Simply, sprayer calibration is making sure that the right amount of herbicide is put

in the correct amount of area, leaving no spray left to dispose. If you apply too much of a herbicide, you will waste money and can risk damage to your food plot. Applying too little can result in the start of herbicide resistance as well as poor weed control. There are many real-world reasons to calibrate your sprayer that benefit your wallet and food plot.

This can be like using a medicine incorrectly. Your doctor tells you to take all your antibiotic, but after a few days, you start to feel better, so you stop taking it although

half remains. A few weeks later, you start feeling bad again, and your infection returns. Medicines are similar to herbicides. They have a prescribed dose and are to be used exactly as directed. Similarly, herbicides must be applied as directed to optimize performance.

Sprayer calibration can be done in several ways. There are four main components that go into calibrating a sprayer, whether it's a pump-up type, self-propelled sprayer or four-wheeler- or large tractor-mounted type. If you keep those components in mind, it will make sprayer calibration much easier. The components in sprayer calibration involve ground speed, nozzle flow rate, spray volume and nozzle spacing (or width of the sprayed area). Let's explain each of these components, discuss their importance and illustrate how you determine each.

Whether you're walking or driving a four-wheeler or tractor, ground speed must be constant to effectively spray a herbicide. However, you also must know the ground speed you are traveling. It might sound difficult, but this is easy to determine with a

Spraying speed (miles per hour)	Spraying speed (miles per second)	Time to Travel (100ft.)
<u>2</u>	<u>2.9</u>	<u>34 sec.</u>
<u>2.5</u>	<u>3.7</u>	<u>27 sec.</u>
<u>3</u>	<u>4.4</u>	<u>23 sec.</u>
<u>3.5</u>	<u>5.1</u>	<u>19 sec.</u>
<u>4</u>	<u>5.9</u>	<u>17 sec.</u>
<u>4.5</u>	<u>6.6</u>	<u>15 sec.</u>
<u>5</u>	<u>7.3</u>	<u>14 sec.</u>

50- to 100-foot tape and a stopwatch (or phone). Measure 100 feet (this would be appropriate on a four-wheeler or tractor), or you can use 50 feet if walking. Determine how many seconds it takes for you to travel the measured distance. For example, if it takes you 23 seconds to travel 100 feet, your calculated ground speed is 3 miles per hour. The accompanying chart can be used to convert your feet per second to miles per hour.

NOZZLE FLOW RATE (OUTPUT)

Nozzle output, or your nozzle flow rate, is expressed in gallons per minute. This is the amount collected from a single spray tip. If multiple tips are used on a boom sprayer, it's important to check them all and calculate an average output. This will ensure that they are spraying the correct amount and will detect any wear in the nozzle. Typically, you would use 30 seconds to measure the nozzle output from each tip (in ounces). This would then be converted into gallons per minute. The accompanying chart contains some useful conversions from ounces collected for 30 seconds to gallons per minute.

Ounces Collected (per 30 seconds)	Calculated gallons (per minute)
6.2	0.096
9.3	0.144
12.3	0.192
15.4	0.240
18.4	0.288

NOZZLE SPACING

Nozzle spacing will give you the effective spray width. Regardless of whether you're using a single nozzle or a boom sprayer, you will always have nozzle spacing (that is, effective spray width), which is used to calculate your gallons per acre. For all sprayers, nozzle height needs to be consistent, steady and at the level recommended by the nozzle manufacturer. A backpack sprayer with one nozzle will give you an effective spray width of the number of inches

the pattern sprays at the recommended height. If you have more than one nozzle, your nozzle spacing will be the distance from the center of one nozzle to the center of the next nozzle, measured in inches.

SPRAY VOLUME

Spray volume is typically thought of in gallons per acre. It's calculated after you find your ground speed, nozzle output and nozzle spacing. The gallons per acre are important because each herbicide that's recommended has a certain range of gallons per acre to be applied for optimum herbicide performance. If you're not within the recommended spray volume, a herbicide cannot be guaranteed to perform as advertised. For example, most herbicide labels recommend a spray volume between 10 to 20 gallons per acre. That's the spray volume where the herbicide has been tested and performs as it says on the label. Further, the spray volume is used to calculate the dilution (how much herbicide to add to the spray tank) when preparing to spray.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

To properly apply any material through a sprayer, the components of ground speed, nozzle output, nozzle spacing and spray volume must work together properly. For this to occur, you must look at the components that can be easily adjusted and those that cannot. Obviously, spray width on a boom sprayer is not something you want to start adjusting, so we can omit that. Ground speed, though, is a component that can be easily changed. We normally have a target gallons per acre — for example, 15 or 20 — which makes it easier for us to calculate, so that's something we would usually not want to change. That leaves us with nozzle flow rate, which is also very easy to change. Nozzles come in a variety of sizes (called orifice sizes), and the orifice sizes can be changed to adjust the flow rate. For example, a 11003 orifice means that the spray angle is 110 degrees with a 0.03 gpm (gallons per minute flow rate at 40 pounds per square inch. We can adjust the flow rate

and the ground speed to target a certain gallons per acre with our given effective spray width.

LET'S MAKE THIS EASY

$$\text{gpm} = \frac{\text{gpa} \times \text{ns} \times \text{mph}}{5940}$$

gpm = gallons per minute (nozzle flow rate)
 gpa = gallons per acre (spray volume)
 ns = nozzle spacing or effective spray width (inches)
 mph = miles per hour (ground speed)

You can use this equation to find any of the components you're missing and then plug in your numbers to find what you need. For example, if you want a gpa of 20, you have nozzle spacing of 19 inches and your ground speed is 3 mph, you can find your gpm by doing this:

$$\text{gpm} = \frac{20 \times 19 \times 3}{5940}$$

gpm=0.192

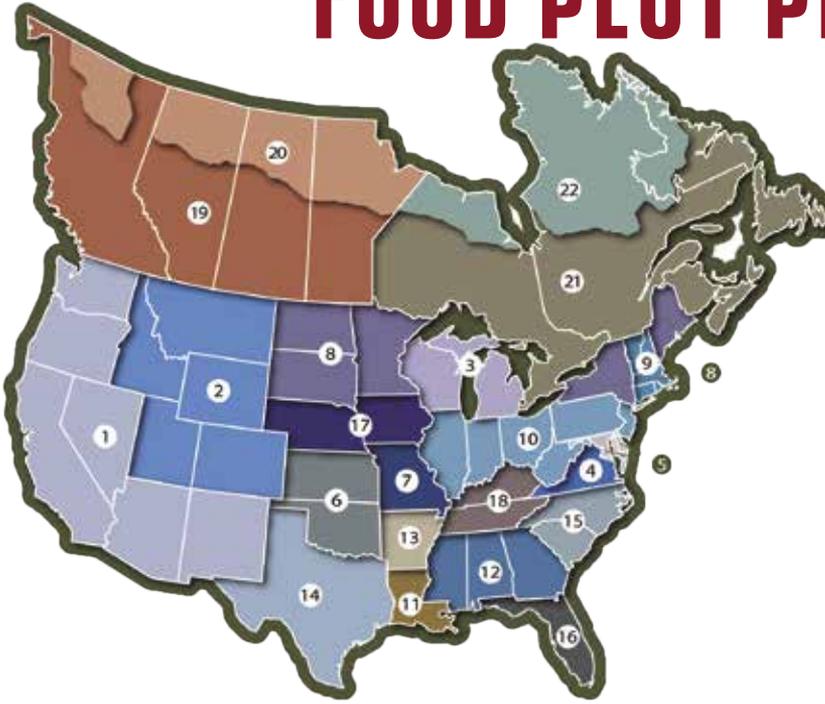
This equation, expressed in a different manner, can also be used to find the gallons per acre if you know your nozzle spacing (inches), ground speed (mph) and nozzle flow rate (gpm).

$$\text{gpa} = \frac{\text{gpm} \times 5940}{\text{ns} \times \text{mph}}$$

When using this equation, it's important to remember that the units of each component in the equation must be correct for it to work. The ground speed must be in miles per hour, and the nozzle spacing must be in inches. Sprayer calibration can be very intimidating, but it can also be one of the most important components to proper herbicide applications. With a little time and practice, it can become a routine part of preparing your fields for your food plots. It might seem like a dentist appointment that you know you probably need but would rather skip, but in the long run, the rewards will be plenty and the regrets few.



FOOD PLOT PLANTING DATES...



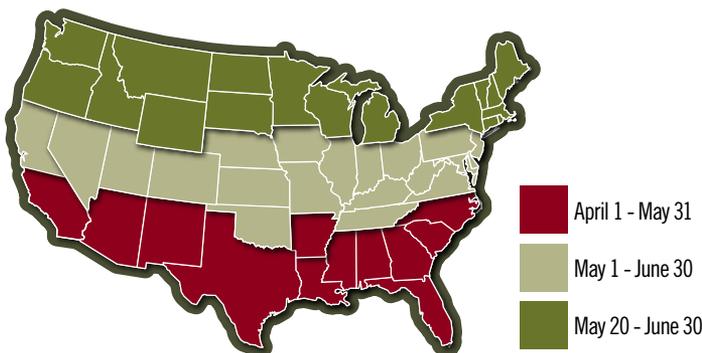
PLANTING DATES FOR IMPERIAL CLOVER, ALFA-RACK PLUS, EXTREME, NO-PLOW, FUSION, CHIC MAGNET AND EDGE

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



PLANTING DATES FOR WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



FIRST DEER



SMILE TELLS THE STORY

Virginia youth shoots first deer using Imperial products ■ by Kyle Cafferty

My taxidermist, Donny Briggs of Whitetail Creations Taxidermy in Wakefield, Virginia, told me about two products from which he's obtained great results: the Whitetail Institute's Tall Tine Tubers and Whitetail Oats Plus. I had been using another product but decided to give those a try. They paid off when my daughter, Kenzie, shot this 8-point buck from our 100-acre farm, Krazy Acres, in Accomack County on Virginia's Eastern Shore. It's a nice buck for a 9-year-old and the first deer she's ever taken.

Krazy Acres is 90 percent forested wetlands, and with many hunters and clubs in the area, it naturally becomes a safe haven for deer. Four acres are dedicated to a food plot, which features a large shooting blind we call The Gramps Stand. Only the children hunt from that stand. We planted Tall Tines Tubers

close to the wood line with Whitetail Oats behind them. Our food plot has flourished since using these products.

We planted hundreds of eastern red cedar and loblolly pine saplings along the road behind the shooting house. Because it will take years for the trees to mature and offer the necessary coverage, I also planted Whitetail Institute's Conceal. This has established more than adequate coverage, resulting in deer not being spooked and letting them feed more comfortably in the food plot.

My daughter, Kenzie, has been hunting with me since she was 2-1/2 years old, soon followed by her two younger brothers. All the children play travel as they play soccer and race in BMX. This doesn't allow for much time in the woods until the end of hunting season.

Kenzie had her first real opportunity to take a deer more than two years ago.

We had several does within shooting distance in the food plot when we spotted a buck stepping out of the wood line. Kenzie got nervous and wanted me to shoot. I told her if she didn't want to shoot, she could pass on the deer and maybe one of her brothers could take it later. She looked at me and said, "No way, Daddy. I can do it." She put the cross-hairs on the crease behind the front shoulder like I had taught her and pulled the trigger.

I saw the buck take off and knew it was hit hard, but we decided to wait an hour. When we looked, the deer had only gone 60 yards. She harvested the 8-point buck with her Savage .243, leaving her brothers as jealous as can be. I'm beyond proud of her and will remember this moment for a lifetime. Thanks again for some great products.





DISCOUNT COUPONS

ORDER TODAY!

SAVE A FEW DOLLARS WITH WHITETAIL NEWS

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER

YOU SAVE \$51.98

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

Please send _____ 36 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Clover

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL EXTREME

YOU SAVE \$61.98

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

Please send _____ 46 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail EXTREME

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CONCEAL

YOU SAVE \$31.03

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

Please send _____ 28 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Conceal

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL FUSION

YOU SAVE \$61.98

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

Please send _____ 27.75 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Fusion

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL POWERPLANT

YOU SAVE \$24.02

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

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL PURE ATTRACTION

YOU SAVE \$33.98

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

Please send _____ 52 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Pure Attraction

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL WINTER-GREENS

YOU SAVE \$62.98

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

Please send _____ 24 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Winter-Greens

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL "CHIC" MAGNET

YOU SAVE \$50.95

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

Please send _____ 9 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail "Chic" Magnet

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL TALL TINE TUBERS

YOU SAVE \$52.98

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

Please send _____ 24 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Tall Tine Tubers

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL OATS PLUS

YOU SAVE \$8.97

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

Please send _____ 45 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail OATS Plus

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL ALFA-RACK PLUS

YOU SAVE \$61.98

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

Please send _____ 33 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Alfa-Rack Plus

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL NO-PLOW

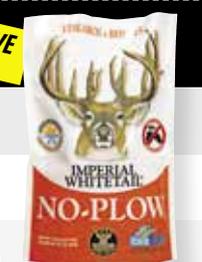
YOU SAVE \$38.98

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

Please send _____ 50 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail No-Plow

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL WINTER PEAS PLUS

**YOU SAVE
\$11.04**

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

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

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL 30-06 MINERAL/VITAMIN

**YOU SAVE
\$31.07**

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

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

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

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL RAVISH RADISH

**YOU SAVE
\$28.00**

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

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

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL KRAZE

**YOU SAVE
\$65.03**

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

Please send _____ 6-pak Kraze @ \$54.96

Please send _____ 3-pak Kraze @ \$29.94

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL IMPERIAL DESTINATION

**YOU SAVE
\$23.04**

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

Please send _____ 36 lb. quantities of Imperial Destination

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL APPLE OBSESSION

**YOU SAVE
\$66.05**

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

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

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

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL 30-06 THRIVE

**YOU SAVE
\$25.01**

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

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

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

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL IMPACT SOIL AMENDMENT

**YOU SAVE
UP TO
\$20.01**

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

Please send _____ 4.25lbs of Impact \$29.99

Please send _____ 25.5lbs of Impact \$149.94

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL 30-06 BLOCK

**YOU SAVE
\$81.92**

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

Please send _____ 2-Pak blocks @ \$57.98

Please send _____ 1 block @ \$29.99

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

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



ARREST MAX HERBICIDE

**YOU SAVE
UP TO
\$11.98**

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

Please send _____ pint(s) of Arrest Max Herbicide

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

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

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



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL MAGNET MIX BLOCK

**YOU SAVE
UP TO
\$11.98**

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

Please send _____ 2-Pak blocks @ \$57.98

Please send _____ 1 block @ \$29.99

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

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



SLAY HERBICIDE

**YOU SAVE
\$20.97**

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

Please send _____ 4 oz. of Slay Herbicide

Please send _____ pint(s) of Slay Herbicide

TOTAL (Add 7% Sales Tax) \$ _____

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



IMPORTANT: SHIPPING & PAYMENT INFORMATION

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

SHIP TO: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____
(No PO Boxes)

City: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Payment: Check or Money Order enclosed

Charge to: Visa Mastercard Discover AMEX

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

Signature: _____

Whitetail Institute

MAIL TO: 239 Whitetail Trail, Pintlala, AL 36043

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BACK-40 NOTEBOOK

■ **Brian Lovett**—Whitetail News Editor



WAR (OF THE WHISTLE) PIGS

When destructive varmints threaten your food plots and outbuildings, you'd best be prepared. If not, hilarity might ensue.

Food plotting presents many challenges, not the least of which involves maintenance. But when that task evolves into maneuvers and then all-out war, things can get interesting.

None of that entered my mind when my wife and I purchased our little property almost three years ago. Initially, we focused on fixing up the cabin and getting the food plot in working order. Then we focused on fun stuff, such as planting trees, placing trail cameras and setting stands. But soon, the visitors arrived.

The first popped its head up from an unseen hole near a small hilltop shed. Soon, others announced themselves, sometimes even scurrying over a rock retaining wall overlooking the garage. Groundhogs. Woodchucks. Whistle pigs. Whatever you call them, they weren't going away. And when I tripped on a fresh hole along the southern edge of our main food plot, that did it. Echoing Bill Murray, I fell back, acquired superior firepower and hoped that would be all she wrote.

During our next visit, I set up a nifty sniper's nest on the cabin deck, complete with a comfortable chair and a steady rest. And when the groundhogs began to emerge one rainy morning from under our woodshed, I was ready. I felt almost guilty picking them off with the .223 at 70 steps, but then I reminded myself that I couldn't tolerate their destructive ways. After about 15 minutes, I was satisfied that I'd eliminated the group and called a halt. For the rest of that summer, peace again ruled the food plot.

This past fall, however, another interloper appeared. This woodchuck was

different, though — secretive, wary and uncannily clever. It would only show itself now and then, and it seemed to time its movements to catch me off guard. So as time passed, its network of tunnels increased, and I never got a clear shot at it. Well, actually, I had it in the cross-hairs at 65 steps one hot July morning, but the shot angle would have damaged or at least sullied my wife's she-shed, so I waited for a better opportunity. Instead, the whistle pig hopped over a small rise and disappeared.

I didn't see the little varmint much this past fall, but a quick walk around our place during March revealed it had overwintered under the woodshed. Vowing to clean up the problem, I made a mental note to bring the rifle during our next visit — and then promptly forgot.

Perhaps that spurred the little critter to be more daring. Or maybe it was just tired of hiding under the shed. Either way, it was pretty active during our most recent visit to the cabin, even running across our yard and popping up from under several buildings as we watched. Kicking myself for having left the .223 at home, I forged a battle plan with the only weapon on hand — my 9mm pistol.

I can hear you laughing already. Sure, the 9mm has more than enough firepower to end any whistle-pig-sized threat. However, getting within range to actually place a bullet in a groundhog-sized target would take some doing.

My first clumsy stalk attempt sent the woodchuck racing for cover, and it holed up tight the rest of that day. The next morning, however, it slipped out for a bite from under the woodshed, and I plotted

strategy. I could easily slip out on the deck or out of the basement window and get the drop on it. However, that would entail a 60-plus-yard shot — not exactly solid handgun range. No, I'd have to sneak out of the cabin, traipse around the building, slip through the edge of the woods and use a brushy point to hide my approach. Then, with luck, I might get within 20-some yards of the target.

The first attempt went well until I neared the shed. Then, peeking around the point, I realized that brush and weeds around the foundation hid the critter. So, I returned to the cabin, glassed the area again and glimpsed the woodchuck hunkered down right next to the outer wall. Using that info, I made my second run.

It went well, too, until I got almost within range. Then, a visitor to our cabin slammed his truck door, and I saw movement as the whistle pig dove into his hole and disappeared. Argh.

The situation regressed after that, as the woodchuck only popped its head out of the hole every five to 10 minutes but never left the security of the shed. And because my wife and I had to return home, I declared a cease-fire and packed the 9mm away.

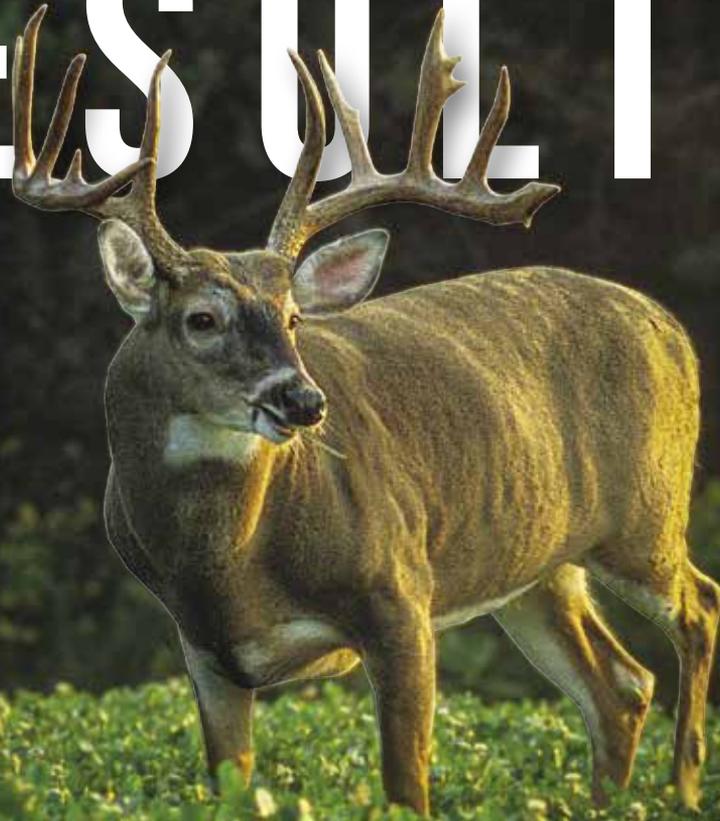
I'm not sure which tunnel the little devil is using now. I probably need to put a few cameras up to pattern its movements and form a plan to return with the .223.

Then again, cameras might be a bad idea, as I really don't relish capturing images of a groundhog laughing.





RESEARCH EQUALS RESULTS



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER

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

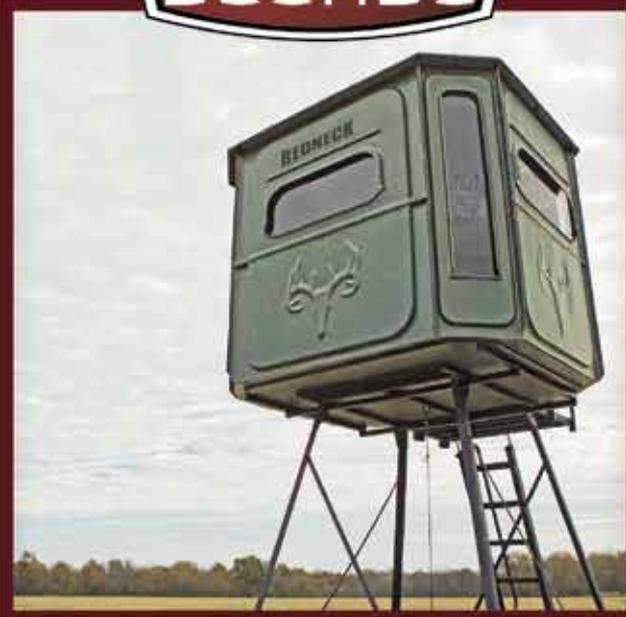
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