

WHITETAIL News



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BORN TO HUNT

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Whitetail Institute Seed Coatings

A vital part of product performance

Story On Page 18

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Wilson Scott Senior Advisor **Steve Scott** Senior Advisor

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John White Senior Product Consultant **Brandon Self, Tyler Holley, Chase Duncan** Inside Product Consultants

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Gerald Almy, Tracy Breen, Matt Harper, R.G. Bernier, Michael Veine, Dr. Carroll Johnson, III, Scott Bestul,

Craig Dougherty, Jeremy Flinn, David Hart, Kristopher M. Klemick Contributing Writers

Susan Scott Copy Editor **George Pudzis** Art Director **Wade Atchley, Atchley Media** Advertising Director



A Message from RAY SCOTT

Founder of the Whitetail Institute of North America

I'm very proud the Whitetail Institute helped lead the way to stage 6 for many whitetail hunters and land managers. And that journey may have begun with the planting of a single Imperial Whitetail product.

The Path to Stage 6

As someone dedicated to outdoorsmen professionally and personally — especially in the field and on the water — I am always interested in the psychology of hunters and anglers in particular. So David Hart's article on "the sixth stage" caught my attention.

Hart's article on page 56 outlines the five stages that most hunters experience in their hunting careers. Now this is no armchair hypothesis that popped out of a buck-fever brain. On the contrary it was put together by two professional psychologists who are also hunters.

They make a lot of sense and I imagine we can all recognize ourselves at some stage at some time — and maybe every stage.

Who doesn't remember that first amazing thrill of success with a pull of the trigger or the release of an arrow (stage 1); then the fixation on limits as skills increase (stage 2); then the interest in quality over quantity (stage 3); followed by the challenge of hunting with a unique tool (stage 4).

Then comes the fifth stage where we care more about friends and fellowship and cherishing the whole experience and passing skills and wisdom down to the next generation.

However Hart's article discusses a 6th stage — the stewardship stage where we come to care even more about the management of the whitetail herd and the habitat. To protect. To preserve. To enhance. And not just for ourselves but for future generations as well. That is the essence of stewardship.

I firmly believe as the Whitetail Institute provided the tools — our products — and accompanying education over the last 30-plus years, more and more hunters were encouraged to understand and practice quality deer management and embrace the very best of stewardship philosophies.

I'm very proud the Whitetail Institute helped lead the way to stage 6 for many whitetail hunters and land managers. And that journey may have begun with the planting of a single Imperial Whitetail product.

Ray Scott

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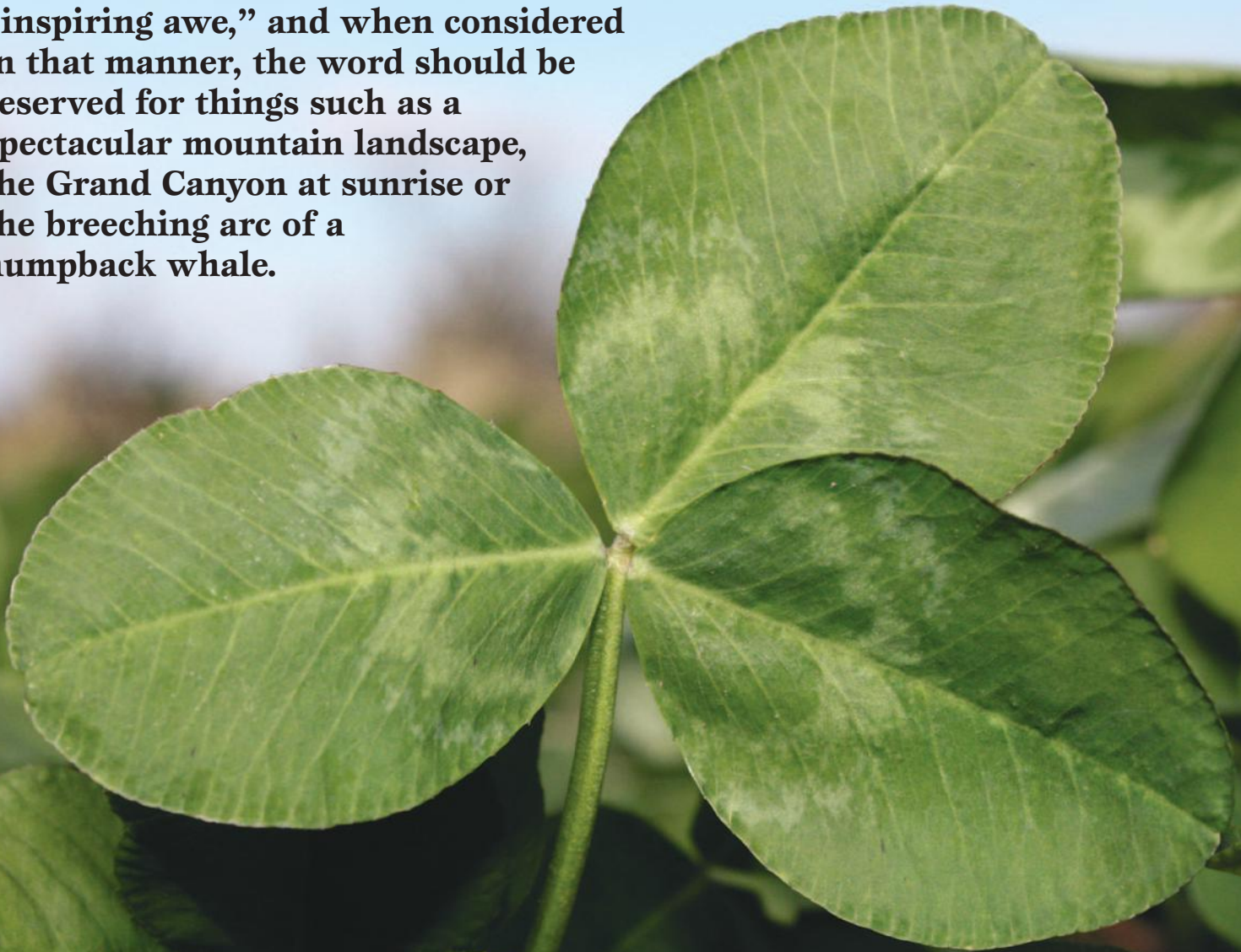
The Clover that Started It All — and Still the Best

By Matt Harper

In today's marketing-gone-wild world, it's little wonder powerful words that were once used discretionally are now overused, diluted and common. Consider the word awesome. Webster's defines it as "inspiring awe," and when considered in that manner, the word should be reserved for things such as a spectacular mountain landscape, the Grand Canyon at sunrise or the breaching arc of a humpback whale.

Yet you might see an advertisement refer to a deep-dish pizza as awesome. Does the pizza really inspire awe? I like pizza as much as the next guy, and a good pizza might inspire uncontrollable salivation, but I would struggle to say it's awe inspiring.

And then there's the phrase "one of a kind." You might see an advertisement for a farm for sale that says, "This is a one of a kind." Is it honestly unique? Granted, there might be no other farm exactly like it, but I would guess there's a plethora of similar properties.



To spice things up and differentiate something from like items, people will throw in truly to the description, as in “truly, one of a kind.” Does that assure that it must be one of kind?

Revolutionary is another word that has been diluted. It’s defined as bringing about a fundamental or major change. That means revolutionary describes something completely new, which has not been seen or experienced before. The word is used frequently to overdramatize a description, as few things are actually revolutionary. The wheel, gunpowder, trains and computers were unquestionably revolutionary because they brought about fundamental change in the way people lived their lives. They also created industries that did not exist before their invention.

Using that logic, it’s unarguable that Imperial Whitetail Clover was revolutionary. Unquestionably, Imperial Whitetail Clover started the food plot industry and deer hunting has been forever changed for the better.

OK, you might say people planted wheat, rye and oats in green fields long before Imperial Whitetail Clover. True, but green fields and Imperial Whitetail Clover differ significantly and fundamentally. First, Imperial Whitetail Clover was genetically developed specifically for whitetail deer, which had never been done with any other forage. Green-field plantings were simply agricultural forages designed for cattle but used in deer plots. Green fields were planted to attract deer but food plots planted with Imperial Whitetail Clover not only attract more deer but provide high-quality nutrition as well.

The groundbreaking Imperial Whitetail Clover research led by the late Dr. Wiley Johnson centered on selecting specific characteristics desirable for a whitetail forage. Researchers tested over 100 clover varieties for traits such as attractiveness, protein content, seedling vigor,

digestibility, seedling survivability, and tolerance to drought and cold. The clovers exhibiting the best of those traits were cross-pollinated to produce a hybrid offspring. That process was repeated many times over several years, with the result being Imperial Whitetail Clover. No other forage had those collective traits, making Imperial Whitetail Clover the first and only deer-specific clover variety.

Second, there had never been a food plot variety designed for not only attracting deer but to provide beneficial nutritional content as well. Green-field plantings were designed to attract deer to fields but gave zero consideration to whether the forage improved the nutritional plane of deer or would improve the quality of deer. Nutrition was one of the main considerations in the early design of Imperial Whitetail Clover, because the intention was to provide a food source that supplied nutrients to produce larger body weights, increase doe lactation, grow bigger antlers and essentially produce a higher-quality deer herd. So, Dr. Johnson’s selection process led to the creation of Imperial Whitetail Clover, not only the first food plot product but the most nutritious and attractive food plot product available.

From the day Imperial Whitetail Clover was introduced, researchers continued to look for genetic improvements. Through the years, that has led to the production of newer and even better clover varieties. The Whitetail Institute research team led by Dr. Wayne Hanna, started a project several years ago that focused on genetically selecting for longevity and vigor while maintaining the other desired characteristics. He collected samples from clover plots that exhibited extreme longevity and vigorous growth from 16 states across the country from Wisconsin to Texas. With those samples, he began a multiyear cross-breeding program to find offspring that would consistently show those traits without sacrificing other critical traits, such as protein content,

The new WT-177 clover variety developed by the Whitetail Institute raises the bar again and makes Imperial Whitetail Clover even better.



Photo by Charles J. Alsheimer



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digestibility and attractiveness.

The result was Whitetail Institute's newest proprietary variety, WT-177. The addition of WT-177 makes Imperial Whitetail Clover more cold and drought tolerant. It grows more vigorously and has a longer lifespan while maintaining exceptional digestibility, attractiveness and nutrient content. WT-177 raises the bar again, setting another new standard in the food plot industry.

The Cornerstone

With more than a million acres planted in the past 30-plus years and thousands of trial and field results, Imperial Whitetail Clover is undoubtedly the No. 1 food plot product in the world. Testimonials from across the country report not just satisfactory results but vast improvements in the quality of deer and hunting that far exceed expectations. But Imperial Whitetail Clover's impact goes beyond just being the leading food plot forage. Imperial Whitetail Clover trailblazed the research path that has led to the development of its many cousin products.

In many cases, Imperial Whitetail Clover is the cornerstone and foundation of other Whitetail Institute seed blends. One of the first examples is Imperial Alfa Rack Plus. Imperial Whitetail Clover is extremely drought tolerant, but like most clovers, it performs best in heavier soils that hold moisture. Because food plots are not always planted in that type of soil and sometimes planted in more well-drained soils, researchers began testing forage blends containing other forage types suited for well-drained soils. They found a highly attractive and nutritious X-9 Technology grazing alfalfa that excelled in well-drained soil and, when combined with Imperial Whitetail Clover, became Imperial Whitetail Alfa Rack Plus.

The unique characteristic of the product is its ability to adjust to varying soil moisture conditions. Food plots don't always contain the same type of soil in a specific field, such as a field that's part ridge transitioning into a bottom. Although clover and alfalfa are typically found throughout a plot such as that, the grazing alfalfa will be more prominent on the ridges and slopes and the clover more prominent in the bottom or anywhere soil moisture is higher.

Imperial No-Plow is another development from the Whitetail Institute that followed the introduction of Imperial Whitetail Clover. No-Plow is the original minimal-tillage food plot blend and is widely used across the country.

Knowing that not all food plotters had tractors and heavy tillage equipment, and that some areas could not be accessed with bigger machinery, Whitetail Institute researchers developed a seed blend that would grow with minimal or no tillage. All No-Plow needs is adequate seed-to-soil contact and some sunlight. A more recent newcomer to the Whitetail Institute line is Imperial Whitetail Fusion, which is a combination of Imperial Whitetail Clover and WINA-100 chicory. With a similar concept to Alfa Rack Plus, Fusion is even more drought tolerant and will grow in soils that might not support alfalfa.

Whitetail Institute does offer food plot blends that don't contain Imperial Whitetail Clover, but that does not mean it did not have major influence on those products. The design methodology that went into the development of Imperial Whitetail Clover focused on rigorous testing in both controlled and field settings and done so in all regions where the product would be grown. Further, it had to be the best on the market, and if testing proved it wasn't, it was tossed back into the research bin until researchers were certain there was no better prod-

uct of its kind. Also, the new product needed to meet an unsatisfied demand of food plotters. In other words, it had to be a unique blend with unique varieties that met a previously unmet need.

All those factors went into developing Imperial Whitetail Clover and became the research method that led to products such as Imperial Whitetail Winter-Greens. Winter-Greens is a blend of specifically selected brassica varieties designed for fall and winter food plots. It took more than six years of research and hundreds of varieties tested before researchers found the exact blend of varieties that consistently outperformed other brassica products.


The development criterion that calls for a product to be unique and meet unmet needs was the driving force behind the development of Imperial Whitetail Extreme. Extreme contains Persist Forb, a Whitetail Institute proprietary forb that can grow with limited rainfall and in soils with a low pH. Persist is combined with Whitetail's WINA-100 forage chicory to produce a blend that is highly attractive and nutritious yet grows in extreme conditions — hence the name Extreme. Recent product development has produced a sibling to Extreme called Imperial Whitetail Edge. Edge contains the same components as Extreme but also incorporates a special variety of sainfoin, which is highly attractive to deer and grows in tough conditions.

I could reference many other Whitetail Institute products that were spawned from the same mindset as Imperial Whitetail Clover. Suffice to say, Imperial Whitetail Clover has left a permanent mark on the thinking that goes into new product development at the Whitetail Institute. If it doesn't live up to the developmental standards set by the originator and leader, you will never hear of it, because it will never be introduced.

Imperial Whitetail Clover and the Culture of Whitetail Institute

It's impossible to separate Imperial Whitetail Clover and the Whitetail Institute, because they are intertwined in their culture. Imperial Whitetail Clover is the revolutionary innovation and Whitetail Institute the revolutionary innovator. Before Imperial Whitetail Clover, there had never been a food plot product designed specifically for deer. Before Whitetail Institute, there had not been a food plot industry. Whitetail Institute and Imperial Whitetail Clover were the leaders and originators of both. Whitetail Institute continues to make Imperial Whitetail Clover even better, never resting on the laurels of past success, which is the way Whitetail Institute treats all of its business.

There is no compromise in quality of product or quality of service. Whether it's the steadfast assurance in the performance of its products or the commitment to be the industry leader in customer service, the Whitetail Institute's culture is second to none in commitment to their customers. You won't see highly paid celebrities in Whitetail Institute's advertisements, because like Imperial Whitetail Clover, there is no need for superfluous marketing. The results realized in the past 30 plus years by tens of thousands of everyday hunters speak far louder than a paid endorsement.

It's the culture of Whitetail Institute that created Imperial Whitetail Clover, but it's the culture around the development of that product that continues to drive Whitetail Institute. They cannot be separated, nor should they, for the connection goes beyond a company and product. Simply, they are the leaders and set the industry standard, and that's the culture: Always be the best. 



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Food Plot Life Lessons:

WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM TWO DECADES OF PLAYING IN THE DIRT

By Matt Harper

Photo by the Author

When I was asked to write this article, I first thought it would be impossible to fit all my experiences, successes and lessons learned from failure into a few paragraphs. It would take a book; one of those thick, massive books you dread reading.



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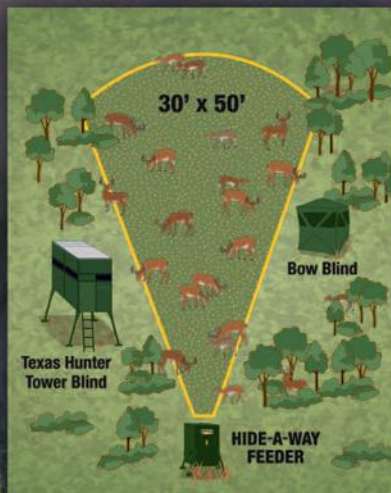
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But the more I reflected on two decades of food plotting, I realized the pieces formed chapters, each filled with experiences revolving around that chapter title. The chapters are not necessarily in chronological order, nor do they have a clear ranking of importance. Rather, each is significant in its own way, some based on technical knowledge and strategy, and others covering something more philosophical. These are not all the chapters in the food plot book, but I believe they're the most relevant to share.

Planting and Seeding

Having grown up on a farm, I was familiar with planting techniques and strategies to maximize forage and crop production. But when I started food plotting, I mistakenly believed planting food plots involved little more than just throwing seed out and watching a glorious field spring out of the ground — so perfect it seemed to glow in the morning dawn, dripping sugar from leaves so lush that deer would flock to it as if it were some kind of drug. So far, I have not found that Eden of food plots that requires no work but produces record-breaking results.

However, I have planted some plots that produced crazy good results. First, the variety or product you plant must be top-notch. It must be researched and field proven, contain attributes that set it apart from its counterparts and, of course, produce results. It must also be planted in the soil where it will perform best. That soil must be healthy and productive, with no shortcuts taken to accomplish those things. Test the soil, balance the pH and fertilize to optimal nutrient levels before doing anything else. If you don't, you're short-changing yourself or at worst wasting your time. Prepare the seedbed properly, because it's the seedling's nursery. You wouldn't half-heartedly build your baby's nursery, so why half-heartedly prepare your seedbed? Take care of the plot when it's growing. You have too much time, effort and money invested into it to let it be taken over by weeds or have nutrient-deficient soil reduce its attractiveness and nutrition or have productivity reduced.

The Strategy of What and Where to Plant

"Any old seed will do; it's just a food plot." I heard that a lot from the neighboring farmers. Of course, they wouldn't think that when it came to the variety of corn they planted and the fields they planned to plant it in. Certainly, food plots can be planted haphazardly with no regard to variety or location, but one of the critical lessons I've learned is the importance of strategically and intelligently deciding what you're going to plant and where.

Considerations for your choice of food plot varieties should include:

- **Nutritional choices:** What nutrients are you trying to provide and when?
- **How will plot be used:** for nutrition, hunting or both?
- **Timing:** When do you want deer to use the plot?
- **Tillage level:** How much seedbed preparation can you do?

If you want to provide high protein for your deer herd, don't plant something low in protein. That seems simple, but you would be amazed at how many folks don't consider this or do enough research. Where you plant is equally as important as what you plant. A hunting

plot planted with a good product but at a bad location can produce poor results, but when a good product is planted in the right spot, great results happen.

A Caretaker Not an Owner

People say they own a farm or piece of property. They really own the rights to what that land produces. The land will be there long after they're gone. You can cut down every tree, rob the soil of its wealth and rape it of its resources, but it will still be there when you have moved on. We're not owners but rather caretakers, whose job is to leave things better than we found them. The land and caretaker should work harmoniously. The caretaker nurtures the soil, and the soil provides bounty for the caretaker. Those whose lives depend on what's grown at a farm understand this relationship intimately. In the past and still today in many parts of the world, the caretaker lives or dies based on how they care for the land. The land is the foundation that produces growing things which support the things that eat them and the next level that eats them. We must care for the soil to grow food plots and all other plant life, which deer then eat to become bigger and healthier. We, in turn, harvest and eat the deer.

Growing Things

In a world seemingly fascinated with tearing things down and addicted to the adrenaline rush of destruction, it would seem odd that something as innocent as growing a seedling could bring satisfaction. Is it the kind of satisfaction that will make you pump your fist? Maybe, but likely not. It's the feeling of being part of God's great work of growing something from nothing. It's the perfect picture of a sunset that glows over a beautiful food plot that you produced through labor and sweat. It's the ache in your back after long hours on a tractor, the smell of freshly turned dirt and the agonizing hope that you will get rain or that it will stop raining. Most of us are hunters, and we will not stop loving the thrill of the chase. Growing things doesn't stop that passion but rather enhances it to a new level, as you have become a deeper part of the cycle.

Growing a Family with Food Plots

My oldest daughter turns 20 this year, as difficult as that is for me to believe. She and her younger sister grew up planting food plots and hunting them with me. My dad has also worked and hunted many hours with me on food plots. That's my greatest blessing from food plotting. Teaching my girls the importance of caring for the soil and the miracle of growing things is irreplaceable. The hours sitting and talking as we hunt over a food plot are precious, and the excitement of seeing them harvest their first deer is exhilarating. Having them see the cycle come complete at our dinner table is fulfilling. As my daughters learned from me, I learned from my dad. A farmer for more than 65 years, the knowledge he provided and the memories we shared are incalculable.

*These immeasurable experiences
with my family are true treasures made possible
largely by the simple act of planting a food plot.*

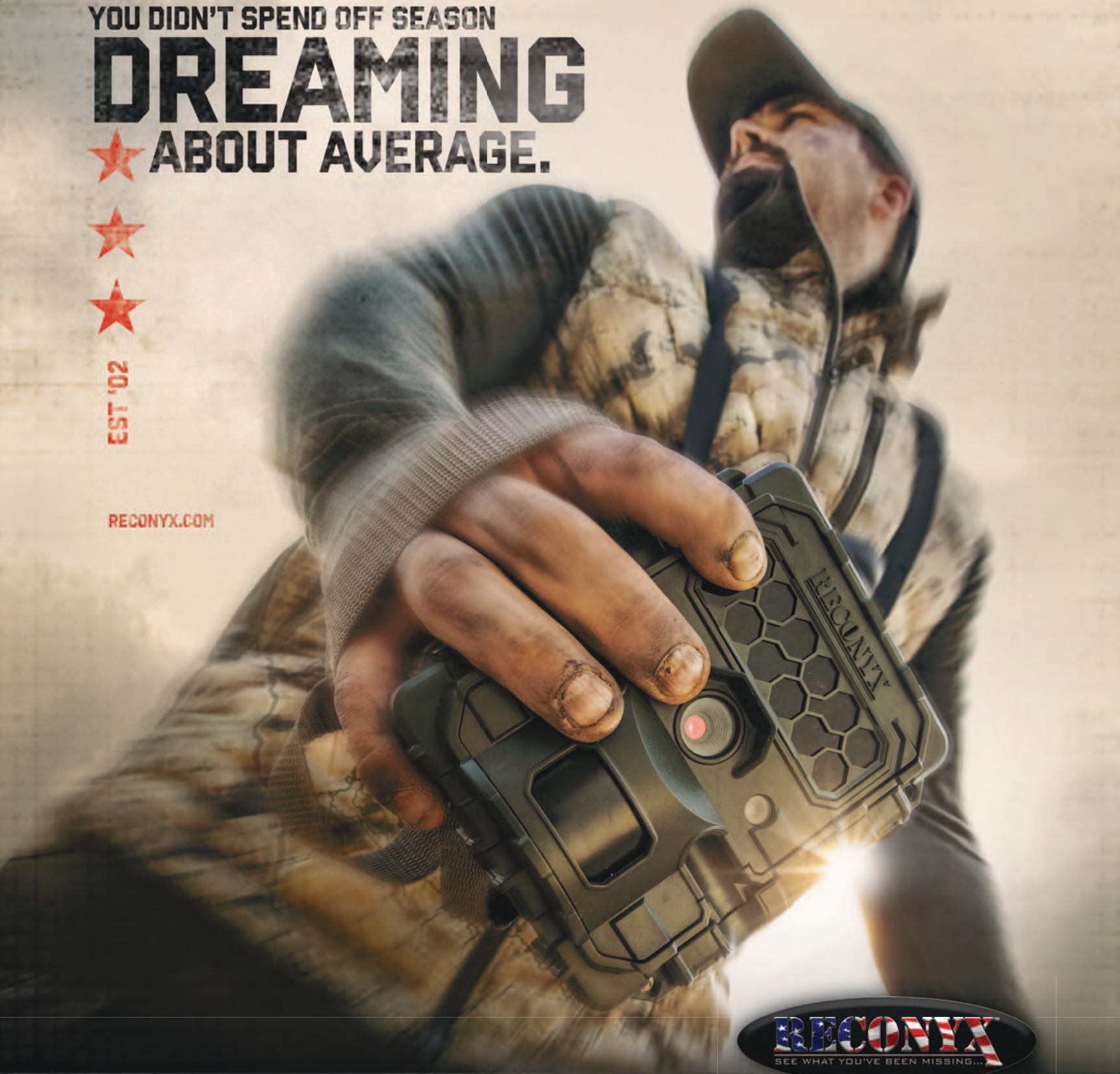


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Let's put this
to bed for good:

BAITING vs. FOOD PLOTS

By Scott Bestul

Photo by Charles J. Alsheimer

There's all kinds of bad associated with chronic wasting disease, but one of the most distressing is the way it makes hunters and deer managers fight amongst each other and fall for silly arguments that distract us from logical and legitimate means for dealing with the disease.

The latest example? CWD was recently discovered in my area, and as wildlife managers strive to reduce deer crowding and nose-to-nose contact, one of their first steps is to ban baiting and feeding. To which some reply, "Well, if you're banning baiting, you should ban food plots, because they are the same."

Sigh. Not too many years ago, I wrote a story describing the difference between food plots and baiting, and frankly, I thought that argument was put to rest by most thinking people. Not that I'm claiming my story held any sway in that debate, but even as I worked on the piece, it just seemed that whitetail management had matured and that most hunters understood that food plots and baiting were different sides of the same moon.

But hot-button topics such as CWD can bring out craziness in people, and I've had to explain my position on this topic with increasing frequency lately. The latest time I fielded a question on this topic, I took a deep breath, mustered another measure of patience and tried again.

"Imagine a long ridge on your favorite farm," I said to a friend. "Now what's better for whitetails and deer hunting? Dumping a monster bucket of acorns on the ground? Or planting a stand of white oaks? In my mind, that's the difference between a bait pile and a food plot."

Granted, it takes a lot longer for an oak tree to produce acorns than it does for a food plot to start pumping out deer nutrition. But a food plot can be on the landscape and can produce food for many years, so my oak tree analogy isn't a total stretch. And if my friend had stuck around long enough to hear my entire sermon, it would have been a five-part speech that might have sounded something like this.

Food Plots Space Deer

I've hunted several places where baiting was legal and have seen my share of bait stations. In almost all the scenarios I've witnessed, bait is piled in a concentrated area that encouraged deer to focus on the same tiny spot. I've also watched countless deer feeding through the years, and I can tell you that whitetails hate feeding like that. Dominant does and mature bucks force others off the groceries while they fill their bellies, making feeding a socially stressful situation that many deer simply learn to avoid. And because baiting is almost solely used for hunting rather than feeding deer, it seems potentially counter-productive. If a whitetail views feeding as a stressful deal, many deer — including some monster bucks that are shy or subdominant — will avoid the pile, reducing the chances of a harvest.

The conventional wisdom regarding CWD (and other diseases) is that it's likely spread by nose-to-nose contact. Although I think eliminating or even drastically reducing such contact among deer is almost impossible — deer are social critters that continually lick, groom and otherwise interact with each other — if nose-to-nose is a disease vehicle, a bait pile is the most obvious place for deer to interact that way.

Conversely, a food plot — even a small one — lets deer naturally space out and feed comfortably. I have several tiny (1/8-acre) plots on my hunting properties, and every year, I've watched up to a half-dozen whitetails scamper into those little places, find a comfortable feeding spot and fill their bellies without obvious discomfort. And although it makes me feel warm and fuzzy knowing my plot is a more natural feeding scenario, I'll be honest: As a hunter, I love it, because a relaxed deer is a lot easier to shoot, especially with my limited ability.

Food Plots are on the Landscape Longer

Obviously, a bait pile is only present for deer as long as a hunter is there to refresh it. So depending on how large the pile is, that might not be long. In states such as Wisconsin, for example, hunters are limited to a few gallons of corn or other bait, and after that's gone, the attraction to deer stops. But more important, bait piles invariably cease when hunting season closes, meaning they have no value to whitetails during the post-rut and winter, when deer need high-quality nutrition the most.

On the flip side, food plots can be constantly available for deer. Of course, that means deer can feed any time they want, even when a hunter doesn't have (or take) time to refresh a site. Most important in my mind is this: I know the plots I've planted will continue helping deer long after the DNR tells me I can't hunt any more for the year. That is truly important to me, as I long ago left the ranks of those who view deer as nothing more than a target, a trophy or even a source of meat. Although those motivations to hunt have their place (and no one loves eating deer more than me), they are secondary to this: I love whitetails and enjoy providing food and managing habitat — more on that in a second — so they'll thrive on the properties I can hunt.

Food Plots Grow Deer Managers

Let's be honest: Most of us got into food plotting for pretty selfish reasons. We wanted to attract, see and shoot more deer at our hunting areas. And to be equally honest, some folks never get past that stage and that is fine. But for many of us, food plots started as a stepping-stone to even higher levels of whitetail management. The first few years of plotting, I had a pretty mercenary intent. I had a small farm or two to hunt, and I wanted to suck deer off my neighbor's place so I could have a crack at them during hunting season. And I'll admit I achieved those goals more often than not.

But after a few years something interesting happened. I still set up food plots solely for hunting opportunity, but I created and managed others for a nonhunting purpose. I planted plots designed to help wintering deer that were still hungry long after the hunting season closed. I created other plots to feed deer during the spring fawning and summer antler-growing seasons. I knew I'd entered strange territory when I planted a plot that was designed to flourish during fall but was almost impossible to hunt — and I didn't care.

And then I took things farther. I talked to loggers and foresters about timber management and how to use a chainsaw to create bed-

ding and security cover. I did the same with prairie experts, who taught me how to manage grasslands through planting and controlled burns. In short, I became a land manager. Though whitetails began — and will remain — an integral part of my goal, I now see myself as more of a wildlife habitat manager than just a deer hunter. And the thing is, the more I talk to food plotters, the more people I've found who have matured into the same mindset.

Food Plots Benefit More Than Just Deer

One of the coolest things I discovered about food plotting was that deer were only one of the beneficiaries of my work. Turkeys, songbirds and small-game species were also happy to feed at my plots. (I've even had bears visit plots in Northern areas, but that's another story.) And I found that gratifying. Even better, plots often serve as more than a banquet table for wildlife.

Several times, I've had turkeys nest in or near a clover plot, and I've seen the same with songbirds almost every year. One of the neatest moments I had in a tree stand in recent years occurred during an October evening when I watched a red fox mousing in a brassica plot after a hard frost. As someone who enjoys observing and learning about all the species in a hunting area, I've come to see food plots as a perfect place to do that, and it's gratifying to think I helped create the habitat to make it happen.

Another aspect of plotting I'd never thought about was pointed out to me a few seasons ago, when a local wildlife manager visited one of my properties. Walking around one of my secluded plots, Don smiled and said, "There's a really nice edge here, which is one of the reasons wildlife love spots like this." Suddenly a light bulb blinked in my head, and I recalled the importance of edge — that place where two habitat types meet — to wildlife, and the number of species (not just deer) that are attracted to that edge. I didn't plant that plot with that intent, but it's become something I consider whenever I create a new plot. Food plots don't just create food; they create habitat.

Recruitment

It's no secret that hunter numbers are decreasing, and I'd be lying if I thought the problem was getting better soon. Our society is becoming increasingly urban/suburban, and the number of people with an understanding of and connection to wildlife and wild places will likely continue to shrink. Naturally, we have to keep recruiting as many young and new sportsmen as possible, and I applaud the efforts of every person and group devoted to that mission. But perhaps an even more important battle we're waging is the one of public perception. No one hates to admit this more than me, but what nonhunters think about us is becoming increasingly important. We're outnumbered at the voting booth, folks, and people making decisions about the activities we love should have at least a reasonable understanding of what we do and why we do it, or we're doomed.

What does this have to do with food plots? Plenty. I have many non-hunting friends — some of whom understand hunting and others who don't — and a vast middle ground of folks who really don't have an opinion — yet. I was talking to one of the latter group not long ago; a young lady who'd heard my neighbor had killed a big buck and who was curious about it. I described the hunt briefly before she stopped me and asked, "So, wait, you plant these food plots just so you can lure deer in and kill them?" I smiled and said, "Well, I'll be honest, yeah, we hunt the plots we plant once in a while, but that's not their only purpose." And in a two-minute mini-seminar, I outlined several of the main points I've covered here. My friend listened intently, and then nodded her head and said, "I get that. I have no problem with it."

I know my friend — a pretty sharp cookie — and I thought her reaction might not have been the same had I tried to defend a mound of corn I'd dumped in the timber.

Food plots also help hook young and new sportsmen we're trying so desperately to recruit. They are great places for newcomers to at least see deer and other wildlife, and I'm always pleased with how many young or first-time hunters get a kick out of at least helping with establishing, planting and maintaining a plot. In my mind, this is the satisfying kind of woods work most people understand from the beginning. As a rule, I think the more you can involve a rookie in the entire process of hunting, the more satisfied with the experience they'll be. And, they'll be more likely to return for more. Food plots are a perfect way to accomplish that.

Conclusion and Qualifiers

Hopefully this isn't a case of too little, too late, but I don't have a big beef against baiting. If it's legal and someone derives satisfaction from that type of hunting, I don't have any problem with it at all. Besides, as some of the food-plots-are-baiting crowd will point out, "It doesn't matter to a deer if you kill him over corn or clover." Point taken. If all you care about is killing a deer, the difference in that scenario is almost zero. And of course, I have good friends in Texas, most of whom rely on corn or pelletized feed to help them manage and hunt whitetails on vast acreages where growing a food plot is almost like farming in the desert. I talk at length with a southern Texas deer nut several times each year, and Ben knows as much or more about white-tail management as anyone I've spoken with. Would he be better off planting food plots? I have never visited that ranch, and I honestly don't know. What I know is Ben uses feeders, and I don't care one whit.

But is a food plot the same as a bait pile? Absolutely not, and I'll never be convinced otherwise. Plots are on the landscape longer, help deer throughout the year and benefit far more species than the few whitetails we try to harvest in a season. Food plots are simply better for deer and deer hunting. 🦌

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Whitetail Institute Seed Coatings

— A vital part of product performance

By William Cousins

Anyone who has looked inside a bag of Whitetail Institute perennial seed will likely say they immediately noticed the seeds are various shades of blue, red, yellow, gray and green. The same is true of many Whitetail Institute annual seeds. These are the colors of the seed coatings the Whitetail Institute applies to its perennial seeds and to annual seeds that benefit from coatings. Not all food plot seed companies go to the extra time, effort and expense of coating their seeds. So, why does the Whitetail Institute do so? For one reason: to help maximize your odds of food plot success.

Much has been written in the Whitetail News about other aspects of the Whitetail Institute's scientific research, development and testing. Comparatively little, though, has been said about Whitetail Institute seed coatings. This is something you will likely see covered more often, because Whitetail Institute seed coatings are an extremely important part of product performance. Unfortunately, some seed sellers try to confuse potential buyers into thinking seed coatings are a negative. As I hope you'll learn, Whitetail Institute seed coatings are beneficial and an important part of the company's ex-

haustive approach to maximizing product performance.

What are seed coatings? Seed coatings are seed-treatment or seed-dressing materials designed to be applied and adhere to raw seed. Depending on the type of seed being treated, coatings help protect seeds before they germinate, regulate and stimulate seedling growth after germination, and otherwise enhance seed performance. Although seed coatings continue to improve as technology progresses, the idea of coating seeds is nothing new. In fact, it's a matter of global research and development. Just do a web search for "applied seed technology," and you'll see what I mean.

Are seed coatings always a benefit to seed performance? No. There is one situation in which seed coatings provide no benefit: when the seed's growth environment is perfect, at the moment the seed germinates and consistently through the first few weeks after germination, while the seedling and its roots are still developing.

When you consider how many factors affect a seed's growth environment, you can understand why perfection is rare. For example, the type of soil in the seedbed must be optimum for the seed variety planted; the seedbed must be correctly prepared so the soil isn't too hard or loose; the soil must contain optimum levels of essential nutrients; the seed must be planted at optimum depth relative to the surface of the soil; seed-to-soil contact must be excellent; the soil must contain necessary bacteria for that type of seed to grow and flourish, and water must be consistently available in optimum levels. Given that, you can understand why a perfect growing environment is rare.

And even more important, no matter what we do, we can never be sure our food plot seeds will have a perfect growing environment. Although we can do our part to provide the best growing environment, some factors will always pose a risk because they are beyond our control. And that's where seed coatings come into play. They stack the odds of having a successful planting in your favor by substantially reducing risks you can't eliminate.

Seed Coatings Reduce the Likelihood of Risks You Can't Control

Consider two conditions that can damage or kill a food plot during the weeks after planting: low soil pH and lack of moisture in the soil. Low soil pH is a problem we can easily identify and correct before planting. Low rainfall right after planting, though, isn't. Whitetail Institute seed coatings substantially reduce the likelihood that seedlings will die because of lack of moisture if Mother Nature shuts off rainfall right after planting.

Consistent Access to Moisture

If water availability is inconsistent soon after planting, coated seed can mean the difference between a great food plot and a poor plot. In extreme cases, it can mean the difference whether a planting even survives.

Seeds consist of an outer shell that encloses a plant embryo and supplies the food the embryo will need during its early growth stages. A trigger is required to start the growth process (to germinate the seed). That trigger is usually water.

When water penetrates the seed coating, the embryo begins to grow, and after enough water is absorbed, the outer shell splits open and the seedling plant emerges. During the seedling stage — from germination through the next few weeks — plants are at their most vulner-

able to fluctuations in moisture because their roots are still developing.

Next, let's look at three ways Whitetail Institute seed coatings reduce the risk of seedling damage or death because of lack of moisture.

1. Whitetail Institute seed coatings help delay germination until sufficient moisture is present in the soil to sustain the seedling. When sufficient moisture is available to penetrate the seed coating and germinate the seed, the seed is fully committed, and if the seedling dries out and dies, it can't be brought back to life via re-wetting.

Again, seed coatings provide no advantage to water availability if the seedling's access to water remains otherwise consistently optimum as the seed germinates and the seedling grows. If planted raw (uncoated), though, some types of seeds can germinate on moisture amounts that are too low to sustain the seedling. If that happens, the plant can die. Whitetail Institute seed coatings can help minimize the chance of seedlings dying from lack of moisture.

After sufficient moisture exists to penetrate the seed coating and germinate the seed, the role of the coating material changes. Instead of inhibiting moisture absorption, the coating material helps facilitate moisture transfer from the soil to the seed. As we'll discuss, Whitetail Institute seed coatings do this in two ways.

2. Whitetail Institute strategically uses Rainbond, which acts as a mini-reservoir that keeps moisture next to the seed as it germinates and starts to grow. After rain, moisture that isn't used by plants is eventually lost by percolation through the soil or evaporation. Rainbond is an absorbent material in Whitetail Institute seed coatings that acts as a mini-reservoir, retaining up to 200 times its weight in water that might otherwise be lost, and then keeping it next to the seed as it germinates and grows. And as the seedling uses the moisture Rainbond holds, Rainbond continually replenishes its supply by drawing more moisture from the soil. So, when rainfall is less than optimum after planting, Rainbond's ability to help ensure consistent moisture availability to early seedlings cannot be overstated.

3. The seed coating helps optimize seed-to-soil contact. Liming, fertilizing, disking, tilling, smoothing, firming and planting the seed at the correct depth are common mechanical actions involved in preparing and planting a seedbed. How well they are performed is within your control, and they are important for one main reason: They contribute to ensuring optimum seed-to-soil contact. Seed coatings improve seed-to-soil contact even more by increasing the moisture absorbing surface area of the seed.

Inoculation of Legume Seeds

As mentioned, coatings help improve seed performance by protecting seeds before they germinate, regulating and stimulating seedling growth after germination, and enhancing seed and seedling performance. In addition to enhancing water availability and transfer, Whitetail Institute includes the appropriate inoculants (rhizobia) in its legume-seed coatings to ensure that nitrogen fixing can occur.

Conclusion

I hope this article has helped clarify what's important when you're shopping for seed. It's not how many seeds you buy. It's how many plants you grow. And coating seeds is one of many steps the Whitetail Institute takes to help ensure your food plot success. 🌿

2 Major Goals Will Help You Plant the **BEST FOOD PLOTS**

By **Wilson Scott**

Photo by Charles J. Alsheime

In a perfect world, the “best” food plots would all be identical. They’d all be structured the same way, be free of grass when we’re ready to plant and have good quality soil that’s already at optimum soil pH and loaded with nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and other essential nutrients. And because they’re the same, we’d only need one forage product for all our plots. Our world is far from perfect, though, and the same extends to food plots. Even so, you can have the best food plots by following the same goal-oriented process every time.

As in any endeavor, your first step toward reaching your food plot goal is to clearly define the goal. Second, you’ll need to determine what actions you need to take to reach your goal. Third, you must execute your plan. The good news is, all that is easy to do.

The Most Common Food Plot Goal: The most common reason folks plant food plots is to “attract and hold deer” — that is, attracting them to their property and the plot, and then continuing to attract more deer while also holding the ones they have. You can maximize the results of your efforts to do both by focusing on two things: making sure deer feel as safe as possible using the plot and maximizing the quality of your forage planting.



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Another goal food plotters have is growing better-quality deer. Whitetail Institute products provide the nutrition required to help drastically improve deer quality and antler size. The record books confirm this, as a hunter today is five times more likely to kill a buck that qualifies for the record books than before the Whitetail Institute started the food plot revolution. This article will focus on planting the best food plots for attracting and holding deer because the nutrition a food plot provides simply won't be consumed if the deer aren't attracted to it first.

Help Deer Feel Safe Using the Plot

The most important consideration is that deer must feel safe venturing onto the plot. Otherwise, they might not use it — especially during legal hunting hours. That's why it's so important to locate and structure your food plots to give a sense of security. There are two elements that have the greatest impact on how safe deer feel using a food plot: plot location and the avenues of approach and exit a hunter uses to get to and from it during hunting season. Here are a few general examples:

Plot Location. The ideal location for a food plot is an opening that is surrounded by cover on all sides. At a minimum, it needs to be adjacent to cover on at least one side. The cover can be real cover, such as a thicket, or cover you create. Conceal is ideal for creating cover. Also, make sure you know where bedding areas are and that deer will have cover during their travels between bedding areas and the plot.

Avenues of Approach and Exit. Also, if possible, make sure you have several ways to get in and out of your stand without being busted. That way, you can choose the best option based on wind direction.

Again, these are just a few examples. Entire books have been written about food plot location and how to hunt them. As a deer hunter, though, you already have a pretty good idea about how to give deer a feeling of safety. Just use your common sense, and you'll succeed.

Do Everything You Can to Maximize the Quality of the Forage Stand

For our purposes, forage quality can be defined as the ability of a forage stand to maximize initial and sustained attraction to deer. Each component of that definition bears close attention if you want the best food plots.

Attraction

Before we get into how to accomplish that, stop and consider this: Just how attractive do your food plots need to be? Because we're discussing what it takes to have the best food plots, the answer is more attractive than anything else available in the area. In other words, the answer is one of comparison. We've already discussed the safety requirement, but if deer don't feel safe using other food plot options in the area, you're already way ahead of the game. To have the best food plots, though, you'll need to win out over the other alternatives in forage attractiveness, too. Most commonly, you'll face two alternatives.

Attraction — Generally: The first alternative is well known to most deer hunters: Your food plot planting needs to be more attractive than what Mother Nature offers. Natural forages in the highly tender condition deer need are widely available in most areas during early

spring. Unfortunately, they don't last long in that condition; most of it gets tough pretty quickly. Although most agricultural crops are more attractive to deer than Mother Nature's offerings, we're talking about the best food plots, so we need to take our comparison even further.

Maximized Attraction — Specifically: The second alternative might be one you've never considered. Did you notice that my question said, "How attractive does your forage planting have to be?" That's because to maximize how well your plots attract and hold deer, you'll need to plant forages that offer a better combination of initial and sustained attraction than what your neighbors plant. If they're planting food plots, it's pretty certain they also know that even generic crop plantings are more attractive than most natural food sources. Agricultural crop-type plants can be quite attractive to deer, and you'll often find some in even the best food plot systems. Even so, most crop-type plants have been developed to produce a crop for harvest or to be grazed by cattle, not browsed by deer. There's only one source for food plot products that have been scientifically developed specifically for food plots for deer: The Whitetail Institute. How important that is will become clear as we delve deeper into attraction.

Attraction — Initial and Sustained: Remember our two-part food plot goal? To have the best food plots, we need to make sure they offer maximum initial and sustained attraction. Even most crop-type plant varieties are initially highly attractive to deer. However, most lose palatability as they mature. Also, single-plant varieties rarely exhibit top performance in all the categories considered critically important by the Whitetail Institute. These include exceptional attractiveness initially and after the plants mature, as well as rapid stand establishment, vigorous growth, tolerance of heavy browsing by deer, the ability to flourish in various climates, and tolerance to cold and heat, and drought and disease resistance. These are some of the criteria Whitetail Institute considers crucially important in its scientific processes of breeding new plant varieties through traditional, non-GMO plant breeding methods, painstaking selection of existing forage components and meticulous development of blends to maximize performance. That's why whether you plant an annual or a perennial Whitetail Institute forage product, rest assured it has been designed to attract and hold deer for the life of the planting.

Ability of a Forage Stand to Maximize Performance

No matter how well a forage product is designed, you still have to do your part to turn it into the best food plot. That's where your action plan comes in. Here too, you can take specific steps to make sure you end up with the best food plots possible.

Choose a forage that's optimum for the site: As mentioned, in a perfect world, we'd only need one food plot product to provide initial and sustained attraction in all our food plots. In the real world, though, there's an almost unlimited number of combinations of factors that are extremely important to choosing the optimum forage for a site.

The first issue to address is whether the site offers equipment access, because most high-quality forage plantings require at least seedbed tillage to incorporate lime into the soil if soil pH is below optimum. If you can't till the soil, it's generally better to select a forage designed to be planted without seedbed tillage than to cut corners with a forage that requires tillage for optimum performance. That's where Whitetail Institute No-Plow, Secret Spot and BowStand shine. No-Plow can be planted in spring in most areas or in fall. Secret Spot and BowStand are for fall planting only. Tillage is required to plant all

other Whitetail Institute annual and perennial forage products.

The next issue to address is whether you want to plant a perennial or an annual at the site. Generally, annuals are designed to last for part of one calendar year and typically grow even more quickly and vigorously than perennials. Perennials, though, can last for multiple years from one planting saving you money from not having to plant as often.

Whitetail Institute annuals can flourish in a wide variety of soil types. This is also true of some Whitetail Institute perennials. If you're going to plant a perennial, though, you should focus on soil type for best results. Soil type, for our purposes, is generally an either/or thing — it will be a good soil, meaning one that has the ability to hold moisture, or a lighter soil, meaning one through which water drains more quickly. The Whitetail Institute offers perennials designed for a wide range of soil types.

The Whitetail Institute has made it easy to select the optimum forage product for each site by putting a Product Selector on its website, which will lead you to the right choice(s) with just the push of a few buttons. You can find it on the Product Selector link in the header on the home page at whitetailinstitute.com.

Establish an optimum growing environment: When you've selected the optimum forage for each site, your next task will be to establish a growing environment for the forage in which it can flourish. This is easy: Just follow the seedbed preparation and planting instructions on the back of the bag. The instructions for each Whitetail Institute food plot product are also provided at whitetailinstitute.com.

Keep in mind that Whitetail Institute has made a great effort to keep the instructions as short and simple as possible. That means that every

step is important, so follow them all — and in the order shown — to get the best results from your efforts. Make sure you incorporate lime into the seedbed if soil pH is low, and fertilize to bring any deficient soil nutrient levels up to optimum.

The seedbed preparation and planting instructions for each Whitetail Institute food plot product also provide default lime and fertilizer requirements for situations in which a soil test hasn't been performed. These default recommendations are designed to cover the bases for most folks. Even so, if you want to make sure you add enough lime to correct soil pH if it's low, and that you bring any deficient nutrient levels in the soil up to optimum with fertilizer, perform a laboratory soil test on each plot. Also, be sure to note what product you'll be planting on the soil submission form. That way, the lab can be extremely precise in its recommendations. (That also saves you money by keeping you from buying lime or fertilizer that seedbed doesn't need). Professional soil test kits are available from the Whitetail Institute.

Finally, just as you followed the seedbed preparation instructions, make sure you do the same with the planting instructions. A critical issue here is seed depth. Optimum seed depth isn't the same for all Whitetail Institute products. Each set of Whitetail Institute planting instructions specifies the depth at which that seed should be planted relative to the surface of the seedbed.

In conclusion, remember the two big factors that will help you have the best food plots: making sure deer feel safe using your plots, and making sure your forage planting is as attractive to deer as possible. By focusing on both, you'll maximize your odds of having the best food plots. 🦌

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The WEED DOCTOR

By **W. Carroll Johnson, III, PhD.,** *Weed Scientist and Agronomist*

Weed Identification: *How Can I Help You?*

Whitetail Institute customers often ask me to identify weeds and make a control recommendation. These requests normally come in the form of a digital picture along with an explanatory email. I do the best I can to correctly answer these requests. All weed scientists are trained in basic weed identification, and some are schooled in plant taxonomy. After hundreds of weed identification requests during 20 years, this has gotten much easier for me. Although I have been doing this for a while, I still need help from the customer.

When I receive an email request for weed identification, one of the first pieces of information I try to determine is the location of the food plot. If that's not stated in the email, I ask the customer. Location is important because species diversity varies widely across North America. The weeds I see daily in southern Georgia can be quite different from what customers encounter in New England, the Adirondacks, the Shenandoah Valley, the Appalachians and countless other regions. To confuse the situation, some species across North America might grow as cool-season weeds in the deep South but as warm-season weeds in Northern latitudes. That can make weed identification and control recommendations a bit tricky. Knowing the location (by state or region in a state) of your food plot also guides me toward reference books unique to the region.

Important Weed Characteristics

When identifying a weed, I focus on certain morphological characteristics. The obvious characteristics are plant growth type (for example, spreading growth versus upright growth), leaf shape, flower appearance and fruiting (seed production). Flower color is often variable and an unreliable identifying characteristic.

In one of my undergraduate botany classes, we focused on identifying plants to species relying heavily on characteristics of the flowers

and fruiting structures. Honestly, for advising farmers or food plot customers, that approach is time consuming and of limited value. Practitioners like me need to be proficient in identifying small (seedling) weeds that are not flowering or fruiting. Seedling weeds can be controlled with herbicides, but flowering weeds usually escape.

Fortunately, I had a clear-thinking and practical professor in graduate school at North Carolina State University whose approach was for students to learn the critical characteristics to instinctively identify the botanical family of an unknown weed using easily observed vegetative structures. Coincidentally, that's often good enough to formulate a weed-control recommendation in food plots. For those customers I have advised, that's why I occasionally identify an unknown weed to a botanical family but stop short of species. In those cases, the weeds are immature, making identification to species impossible, or the picture does not clearly show the critical identifying characteristics. If circumstances require identification to species, I might need follow-up pictures of the weeds from the customer.

Digital Pictures

Digital pictures transmitted via email represent a breakthrough in third-party weed identification. In my previous extension service career in the mid-1980s, I used to dread Mondays because plant samples from county agents were delivered by the postal service after languishing all weekend in transit. Those samples would be dried to a crisp or a rotten, soggy mass stored in a plastic bag. In either case, identification was usually impossible. Digital pictures and email have largely eliminated that problem.

To fully use the benefits of digital pictures, the images must be properly framed and shot at a suitable scale that captures the features nec-



Figure 1. *This staged picture is a whole-field image of a weed infestation. Little information can be gleaned from this picture that will help with weed identification. However, whole-field images help gauge the severity of the infestation.*

essary for identification. To illustrate, I staged three pictures: a wide-view image of a weed infestation, a close-up of an isolated plant and a close-up of the flowering structures. Figure 1, the wide-view is of a dense weed infestation. Careful inspection of the wide view indicates it's a plant with pale flowers on an elongated stalk. If that picture were from an unknown region and I had never seen that species, those vague characteristics would have been of little use in identification. Figure 2 is a close-up of an isolated plant from that infestation with an ink pen that serves as a size reference and a pointer to the weed. The elongated leaf with rounded lobes and rosette early-season growth gives me a clue that the weed is a weedy brassica. Figure 3 is a close-up of the flowers and developing seed pods, further evidence that the weed is wild radish. If the only picture I had was the wide-angle picture (Figure 1), positive identification would have been far less certain compared to the array of pictures.

When taking a close-up picture of weed leaves or flowers, it's important to make sure the object is sharply focused and has adequate depth of field compared to the background. These pictures were taken using an inexpensive point-and-shoot digital camera that originally belonged to one of my daughters when she was a teenager. On this camera, I chose the close-up mode to ensure a closer focal length and depth of field. I took multiple shots and selected the best for this example. That's the versatility of a digital camera. By the way, I have a high-end digital SLR camera at work with an exceptional macro lens for close-up pictures of seedling weeds. Trust me when I say that my daughter's first point-and-shoot camera produces comparable images to the digital SLR when used correctly.

Reference Books

I am of the generation that still prefers books as my go-to references. Some might view this a stubborn refusal to change and adapt to online references. Honestly, reading online resources makes my eyes tire, and that's not a problem with written sources. I routinely use and highly recommend two references for those who want quality materials to self-educate themselves on weed identification: *Weeds of the South*, or *Weeds of the Midwestern United States and Central Canada*, collaboratively published by the Southern Weed Science Society and *North-Central Weed Science Society*, respectively; or *Weeds of Nebraska and the Great Plains*, published by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. These are the reference books I routinely use when identifying



Figure 2. Close-up of an isolated weed shown in the previous whole-field image. The rosette-type early-season growth and elongated leaves with rounded lobes suggests the weed is wild radish, a weedy brassica.

weeds for customers, and I'm certain many will find these books equally useful. Additionally, consider *Forest Plants of the Southeast and their Wildlife Uses*, published by the Southern Weed Science Society. One of the authors is Dr. Karl Miller, a highly regarded wildlife biologist with the University of Georgia. This book lists all sorts of plants and their role in the ecology of forest ecosystems. Written for the casual user, it's rich with detail and insight.

This discussion on weed identification is not meant to deflect weed identification requests intended for me or anybody else at Whitetail Institute. Being a full-time agricultural researcher at my day job, I'm rarely asked to identify weeds other than those being studied, and my weed identification proficiency eroded. Requests from Whitetail Institute customers helped restore that skill.

Additionally, I view these requests as a chance for me to link with customers and gain a better perspective of the food plot challenges they face. Together, we can address these weed problems and formulate a workable solution. Frankly, I enjoy the challenge. 🌿



Figure 3. Close-up of the flowers and developing seed pods of a wild radish. Arrangement of the flowers and seed pods on the flowering stalk are characteristics of weedy brassicas. These characteristics are not seen in the whole-field image.



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OVERLOOKED PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

By Gerald Almy

Planting trails, roadways, fire lanes, log landings and other openings in the woods lets you take advantage of unused space and provide more benefits for your land.

It was a short side trail a logger had used to haul out dead ash trees, diseased and low-quality oaks, and the occasional red maple I'd marked for harvest when we signed the forest work contract. It provided a modest source of income — very modest — which I immediately poured back into additional wildlife management projects.

But income wasn't the goal. That logging operation was meant to enhance the quality of the woods for wildlife through timber stand improvement. The purpose was to improve the growth of remaining trees and let more sunlight reach the forest floor to enhance regrowth of forbs, shrubs and browse whitetails could nibble on as they approached my food plots in lower terrain.

But eventually, when I noticed deer tracks using that small logging road, several other skid trails and the clearing where the timber was loaded, I thought, "Why not make use of some of these newly open areas in a more hands-on, dynamic way?"

The logger had cleared the trails and the log landing, so the hard work was done. Why not grow some pathway food plots in

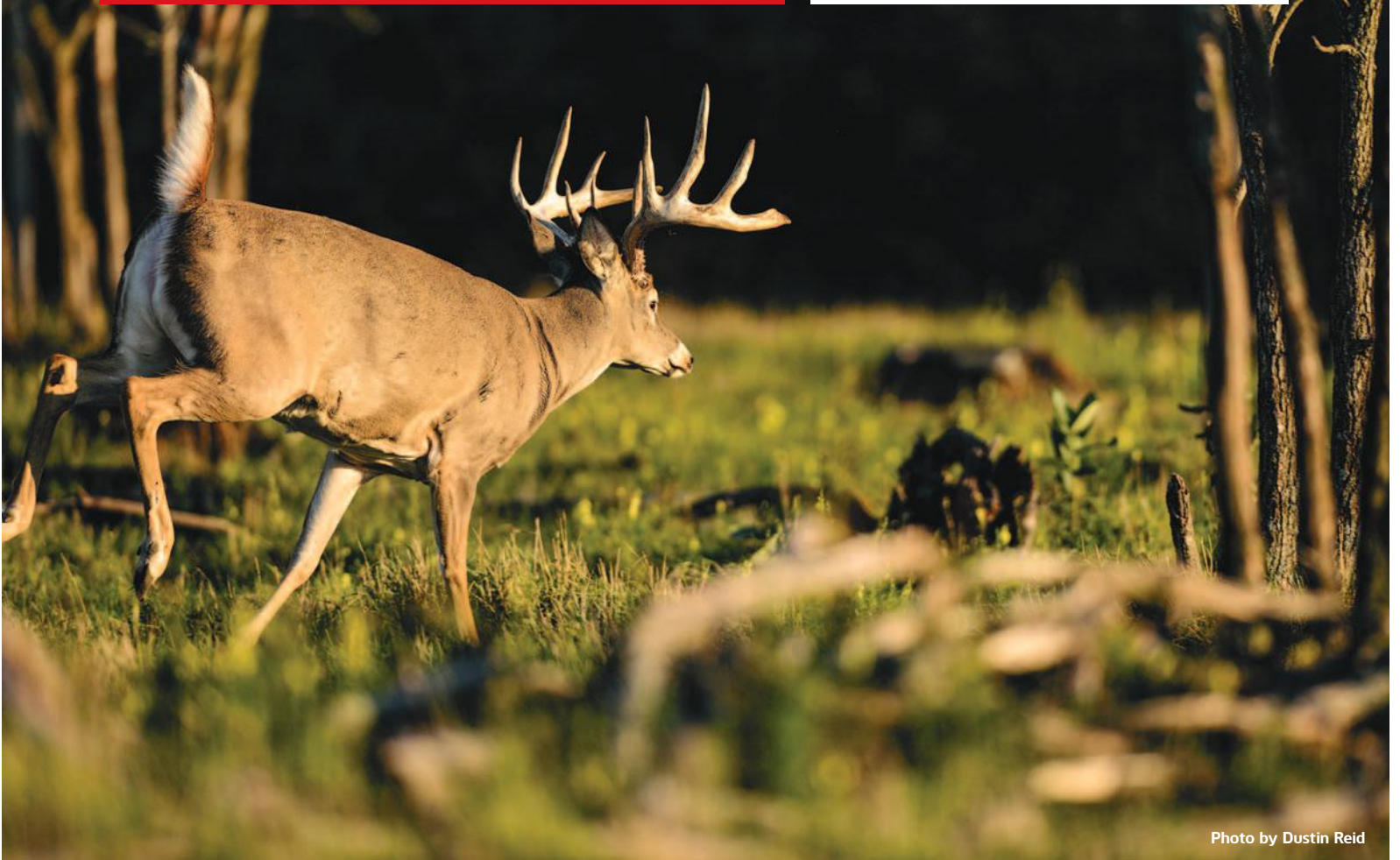


Photo by Dustin Reid

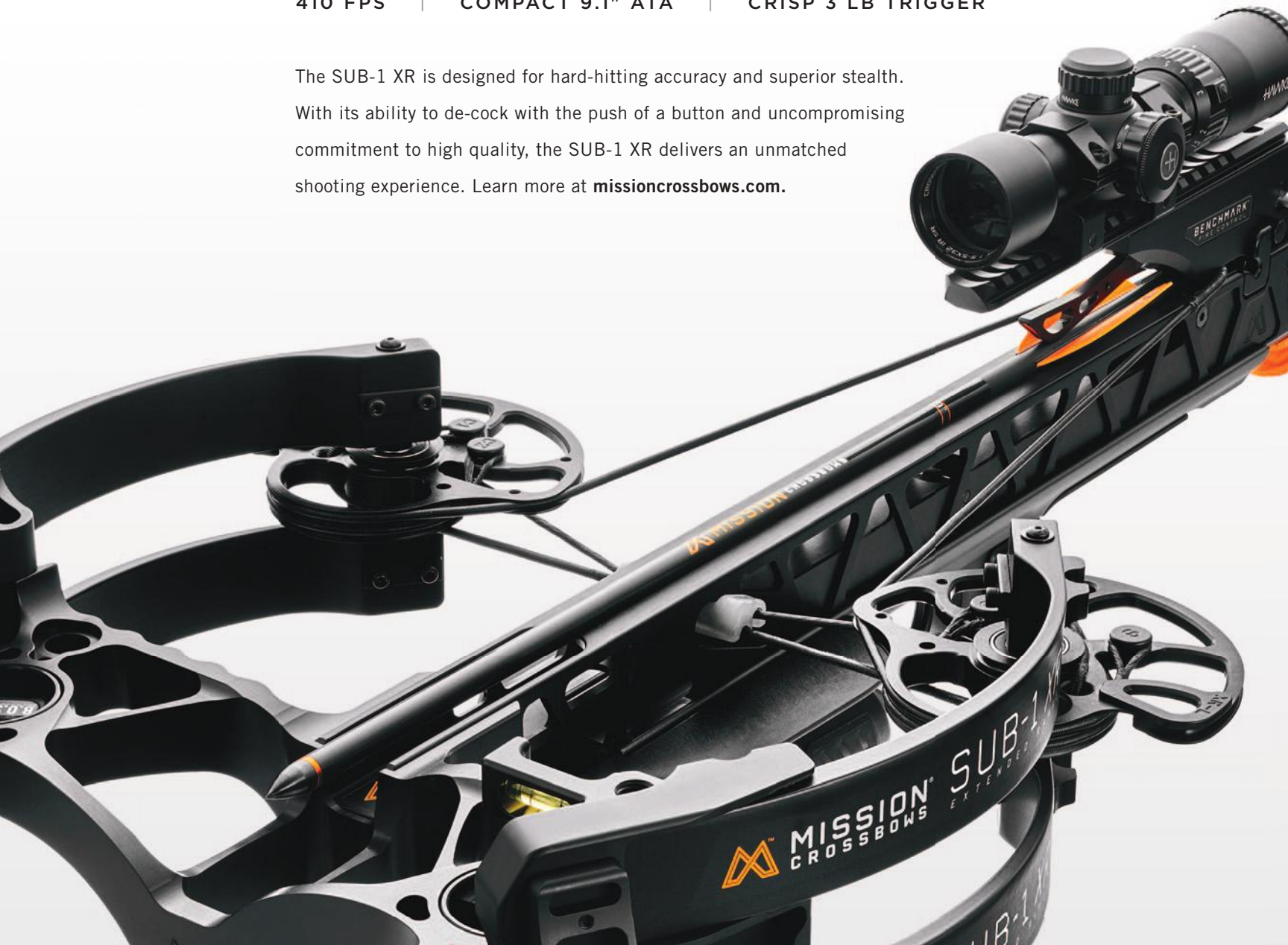


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those small open areas? I did. Then I set up trail cameras to monitor the growth of the linear-shaped plots and check on deer usage. Growth was excellent, aided by one trip where I cleared off leaves that were smothering a section of a plot.

The camera also recorded many deer, including one old, gnarled 10-point using a specific stretch of the logging road plot consistently. His tines were short, but his mass was exceptional. I knew he was an older buck — 4 years or older. On my third sit, the pathway plot offered my chance, and the crossbow bolt found the heavy buck just behind the shoulder.

That hunt proved several things. First, selectively thinning your woods so sunlight reaches the forest floor can start a resurgence of plants such as blackberry, greenbrier, raspberry, honeysuckle and other shrubs. These are magnets for deer in mature woods with little ground cover and little food besides hard mast for a brief period in fall.

But the trails and landings for the forest work also offer another benefit, which too many landowners overlook. The cleared lanes, truck roads, skidder trails and log landings offer perfect sites for growing miniature food plots or long, winding ones. Instead of hiring or renting a dozer and putting in hours of difficult and expensive woods-clearing effort, use existing cleared areas or spots that will be cleared after a logging operation or when a power line or fire lane is cut.

Carving plots out of woods is typically costly and time-consuming. But in this case, the cleared areas are waiting to be used. Take advantage of that extra space to further enhance your land. Of course, you might want to leave some of them to natural regrowth. Use selective judgement as to which are regrowing beneficial native foods and which would be better converted to linear food plots.

These pathway plots offer many potential advantages to a property, but six come to mind.

1. For starters, they offer a quick way to simply increase the total amount of food plot offerings and high-quality forage on your property. This is especially important if you've maxed out the available fields and clearings in more open areas. Extra food plots planted on woods trails and roads let you provide your deer with a high-protein forage in a forested setting, where most natural foods are in the 6 to 11 percent range. That helps balance the protein intake of deer so their overall diet is closer to the 16 to 20 percent they need at various times of year.

2. Another advantage of skid-trail, fire-break and logging-road plots is they help keep deer on your property. Chances are you've improved the woods with habitat enhancement steps so it meets a mature buck's bedding and security needs — hinge cutting, selective logging and planting clusters of pines and shrubs. Deer also relish having small food sources close to their bedding areas to nibble on during the day, between visits to major evening and nighttime feeding areas. They typically arise hungry at about noon and snack on whatever is available. Small plots and food trails in the woods offer the perfect location for that midday meal.

3. Pathway plots make great early-afternoon ambush spots, offering many tactical advantages over larger plots in lower or more open areas. Except during the rut, the oldest, wariest bucks often don't reach bigger community food plots and crop fields until late in the day, near or after the end of shooting light. But you can often catch those reclusive mature deer stopping to nibble on pathway plots soon after they rise from their beds and begin the slow movement towards larger, more exposed fields.

4. These plots provide better shot opportunities. Even if deer head straight for major feeding areas and don't pause long at mini woods plots, the setups still offer good shot opportunities as the deer steps out of thick woods and cross the opening the plot provides. Chances are they will have to cross these plots at some point. Trail cameras and scouting will tell you where. Knowing that crossing point offers you an exceptional shooting opportunity. In reality, deer will probably at least pause for a bite or two, offering the ultimate setup for a clean, killing shot with bow or gun.

5. Pathway plots also offer terrific morning hunting opportunities. It's difficult to get set up at a large open field for a morning hunt without spooking the deer in it. Even if you can approach without bumping the animals there, the largest, wariest bucks will typically be gone, vacating those plots before first light to head back to thick forested cover.

But with pathway-plot setups farther in the woods, closer to bedding areas, you can loop around through the woods undetected before daylight. Arrive early, and set up on these isolated plots of Secret Spot, BowStand or No-Plow, where deer will typically stop for a few bites before bedding down for the day.

6. They are great late-season hunting spots. As the season unfolds and hunting pressure builds on surrounding properties, these linear plots attract mature bucks seeking a place to hide from pressure but with food readily available. Security is foremost in an old buck's mind when large numbers of hunters are afield and pressure builds. But he still wants something to eat without exposing himself to danger. Secret deep-woods food plots that let him slip in with a small move from his core bedding cover fit the bill perfectly.

Choosing the Best Sites

Some potential sites for pathway plots are better than others. Analyze each situation for its potential benefits versus leaving the site for native plant regrowth. After that, follow specific steps for creating the pathway plots, such as doing a soil test, adding lime and fertilizer when needed, and possibly daylighting to remove shading from nearby trees.

Let's look at some spots to avoid. First, make sure enough sunlight reaches the trail. A few hours are needed for some annuals to flourish and more are needed for other crops. If it's too shaded and you can't open it up, it's likely a poor candidate for a food plot.

Second, avoid plots that have a sharp slope. There's too much potential for erosion if the plot is tilled. And seeds might wash off even if you just rake the ground and rough it up using the No-Plow method of planting.

Third, avoid trails that are being used actively with vehicles — ATVs or trucks. The heavy traffic will damage young seedlings and also discourage use by older, more mature deer, which favor more secluded, quiet setups.

Fourth, avoid landings and roads where the soil is excessively rocky or just extremely poor quality. You need at least moderate quality soil because you're also battling the decreased sunlight these plots receive.

Creating Pathway Plots

When you pinpoint sites that don't have those drawbacks, here's how to convert them to pathway plots. First, do a soil test. This is vital, because woods soils usually need certain fertilizers and likely

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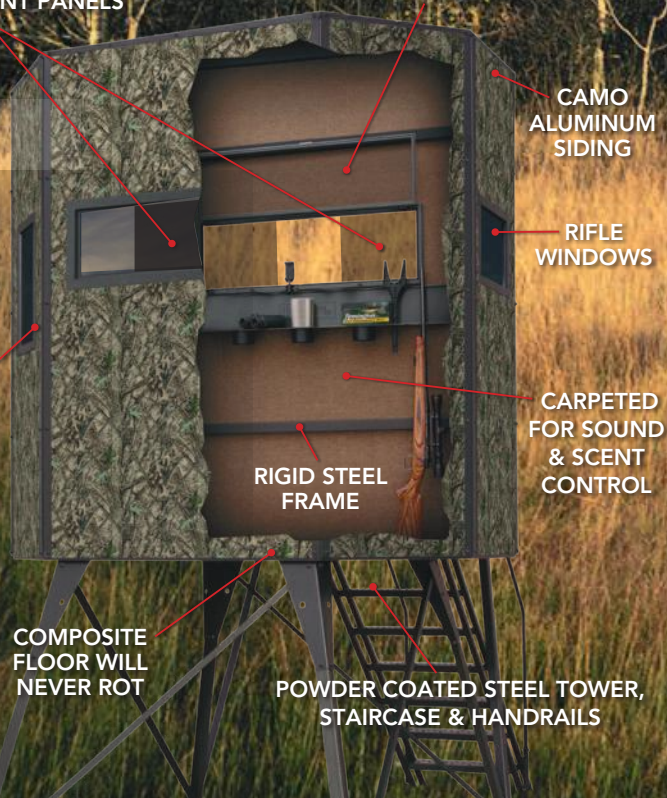
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lime to grow a decent plot.

If you can't do a soil test, apply lime to the site, which is likely acidic. That increases the pH and lets the plants absorb nutrients from the soil, which would otherwise be bound in the dirt and unavailable for the plant you're trying to grow. Also apply a 19-19-19 fertilizer or similar. Follow the rates for both from your soil test or from the general recommendations on the bag of seed.

If there is significant weed and grass vegetation, apply Roundup or a generic glyphosate to kill it and prepare the site. After a week or two, drag, rake or clip off dead vegetation and any leaves. Next, it's time to till or disk the soil or loosen it with a rake. ATVs with attachments are excellent for making pathway woods plots and are often more practical than tractors, which are hard to maneuver in the tight quarters.

Follow the directions on the seed bag. I've used many Whitetail Institute products for pathway and log-landing plots, but Secret Spot and No-Plow are two of my favorites and easy to establish. They are formulated to offer lush green growth even in difficult situations such as this. Where some of my pathway plots receive sufficient sunlight, I have also had good luck with Imperial Whitetail Clover, Fusion, and

Edge. Just be sure to follow the directions on the seed bag to the letter. Then hope for rain and wait.

Don't expect results like you can get in large open fields, where you have access to tractors and full sunlight. Still, woods plots such as these can perform extremely well and help the nutrition needs of your herd, hold mature bucks on your property, attract them when pressure mounts on surrounding lands and bring them out for quality shooting opportunities during good light conditions in morning and afternoon. That's a pretty long list of benefits.

It's likely your pathway plots might grow better in some areas and poorly in others. Simply use that information to concentrate your future food plotting and hunting efforts on the areas that receive the most sunlight or have slightly better soil where your plots perform their best.

However, don't neglect the areas that come up somewhat thin. I've seen 5-year-old bucks that preferred those parts of my pathway trails, because the areas with the best forage were too crowded and heavily used by other deer to suit the reclusive personalities of older bucks, which place survival ahead of quality food. 🦌





Photo by Gerald Almy

Hauling out a 144-inch pathway buck.

Consider Daylighting Pathway Plots

If possible, you can improve linear plots and log landings by cutting some low-value trees that are shading them. Leave the trees that fall for security cover, or cut some of them for firewood. Their stumps will also sprout, offering additional food for the deer next to the plot.

You can check the plot several times during the day or do a time-lapse photo study to show when the shading is worst. Then, see which trees could be cut to enhance the amount of light the plot receives. If they have financial value, you might be able to get a logger to cut those trees and brighten up the plot while pocketing a bit of change.

Be sure you don't go overboard, though. The real enticement of these plots is their remoteness and seclusion, so you don't want to open them up too much or create too much commotion. Do any such work after the season, in late winter or early spring, so the area can calm down from the activity.

With human disturbance kept to a minimum, chances are your skid-trail and logging-road plots will be your keys to hunting success when pressure gets heavy on surrounding lands and older bucks aren't using your larger plots in daylight.

Tip: Depending on when you establish your plots, be aware that fallen leaves can sometimes harm plots. They're generally acidic and can blanket the plants and kill young seedlings. Check the plot occasionally, or use a trail camera to monitor it. Then, rake or use a blower to remove leaves when they look like they might be suffocating young plants.

Wear gloves and rubber boots when you do this, and only do so at midday, when bucks are more likely to be bedded. A few leaves won't hurt, but a carpeting of them can cause trouble during initial germination and early growth. When plants get several inches tall, the leaves won't bother them.

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REAL HUNTERS DO THE TALKING

about Whitetail Institute products...



We have been hunting and managing our farms for almost 15 years. We started using Whitetail Institute products approximately seven years ago. All I can say is wow! What a transformation in our deer herd. We use Imperial Whitetail Clover, Chic Magnet, Tall Tine Tubers and Beets & Greens. We had all of the elements on our farms; bedding, sanctuaries, water, and plenty of acorn-producing trees of all types. The only thing we were lacking was a good food plot program. We have no farming background, so there have been a lot of challenges to learn how to grow things and use equipment, but Whitetail Institute products have spoken for themselves. They are not hard to grow if you just follow the directions, and Whitetail Institute customer service has been very helpful. I have called and asked questions and have had great feedback from representatives.

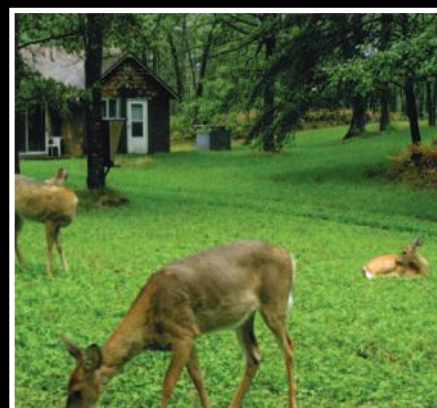
The body weight on our deer has improved dramatically, and the sheer amount of deer that we have and are able to hold on our farms now is amazing. My dad always says, "I would hate to be my neighboring landowner." My dad, sister, and I have killed some amazing bucks over the years. I took my biggest buck ever this year which had been feeding in the new product Beets & Greens that grew really well. I am 22 years old, and I will always use Whitetail Institute products. They have turned our farms into some amazing world-class hunting, and Whitetail Institute products have been a great addition to all of the management practices that we do. Thank you, Whitetail Institute.

Shae Benassi - Kentucky



At Whitetail Institute. This is why I like my camp lawn planted in Imperial Whitetail Clover. Plus, the deer and turkeys usually take care of the mowing. And I got lucky and killed a buck on one of our Whitetail Oats Plus plots. He's 20 inches wide. Thanks, Whitetail Institute, for 25-plus years of fun and great hunting.

Dave McGlone - Michigan



We live on a 262-acre farm in southern Missouri, and the bucks around here aren't quite what you will find in northern Missouri. A 125-class buck around here is considered to be a pretty decent trophy. My dad first started using Imperial Whitetail Clover 10 years ago. Since then the results have been unbelievable. Eight years ago, he killed an 11 point that scored 161 3/4 inches



(Photo 1). The next year I killed a main frame 8-pointer that scored 152 1/2 inches (Photo 2) and it had an inside spread of 22 inches. The clover stopped growing five years ago, and four years ago, my dad passed away. Unfortunately, I wasn't motivated to replant the clover, and I waited until two years ago to get it replanted. The years the clover was gone, I wasn't seeing the number or size of deer that I had grown accustomed to. Last year, I replanted Imperial Whitetail Clover, and I started getting some pictures of big bucks again and you couldn't scare the deer out of the clover. This year on opening weekend of firearms season, I shot a main-frame 8-pointer with a kicker that scored 143 1/8 inches (Photo 3). Let's just say that I am very happy that I carried on my dad's tradition of using Imperial Whitetail Clover.



Everyone always asks me how I continue to get numerous pictures of wall-hangers, and I tell them it's simple. "Imperial Whitetail Clover." This product is a complete game changer and I will continue to use it for the rest of my life. Even years when the timber has been flooded with acorns, I have witnessed the deer feeding nearly all day in the clover field. Whenever you hunt over Imperial Whitetail Clover, you are going to see something feeding on it, whether it be deer or turkeys. There have also been numerous gobblers harvested from this field. I want to thank the Whitetail Institute and congratulate them on making such a mind-blowing product. We have had so much success from this product that friends and family of ours have gone out and purchased this product. The term "clover field" has become very commonly talked about among my friends. Once again, I want to give a big thank you to Whitetail Institute from a very satisfied customer!

Jeremiah Bryan - Missouri



My son Scott and I have managed 60 acres, two of which are planted, for about 13 to 14 years. We have tried about 12 products. On our property, Imperial Whitetail Clover has worked the best and in the near future, this will be our only planting. Since we started planting food plots our deer herd has about doubled. Also, the antler size had increased a lot. We are consistently seeing and shooting 130-class deer yearly. This year we shot a 120-class buck with a bow and a 154-inch class buck with a rifle along with three does. We usually see about 20 to 25 deer a day, of which 5 to 10 are bucks. We are very pleased with Imperial Whitetail Clover. A picture is enclosed of the 9-point, 154-class buck I shot this year. Definitely my best buck ever. Thanks, Whitetail Institute.

Bob Denny - New York



My wife and I are not farmers or gardeners by nature. However, our passion for nature and its wild creatures led us to a conservation project. Part of this project was to include a 2.5-acre clover food plot. We decided to go with Imperial Whitetail Clover because of the research and development Whitetail Institute has put into this clover. Our goal was to decrease our learning curve and increase our chances for success.

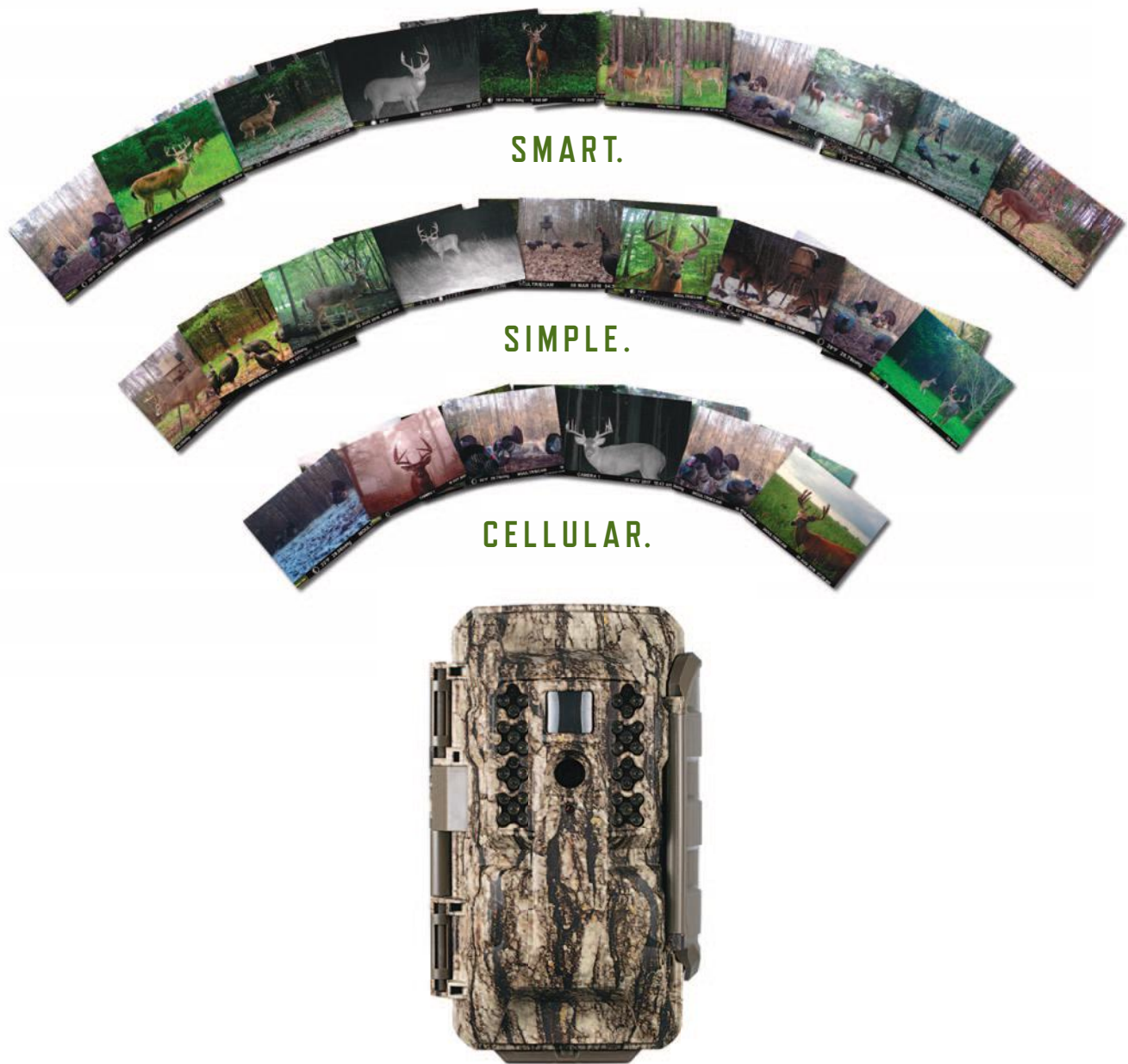
In spring two years ago, we planted our clover food plot. The clover was treated with Slay and Arrest Max the following spring, and by June, the clover was gorgeous. In fact, the clover was so gorgeous our neighbor's son and his fiancé asked to have their engagement photos taken in the plot! They reported that during their photo shoot, they saw three fawns!

I realize we don't have large antlers to show you now. However, in our humble opinion, this journey is already a success.

Thank you, Whitetail Institute, for all your help!

Tom and Chris Pappenfus - Minnesota

(Continued on page 61)



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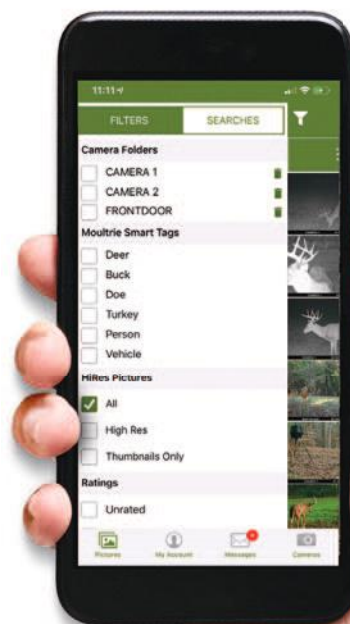
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Imperial Whitetail Edge delivers. It's also one reason it took the Whitetail Institute five years of scientific research, development and real-world testing to create Edge, and why Edge is designed to perform well in various climates, from Florida to Canada.

Like other Whitetail Institute food plot products, Edge is the result of Whitetail Institute's goal-oriented approach to forage research, development and testing, which means Edge's product quality and performance are the best the Whitetail Institute can make them.

Edge is a carefully designed blend of several types of plants that have been carefully matched and blended in the ratios Whitetail Institute testing has shown to maximize the attractiveness, nutritional content and longevity of the planting. Rarely will one plant type perform at the highest levels in all test categories. That's why the Whitetail Institute takes care in selecting forage components that complement each other and determining the optimum ratios in which to combine them, based on exhaustive testing.

Let's look at the components in Edge and how they interact to maximize attraction, nutrition and longevity.

Components

Edge contains these forage components, some of which will be familiar to folks who have planted other Whitetail Institute perennials. Edge includes proprietary forage varieties available only in Whitetail Institute products.

Specially Selected Sainfoin Variety: Sainfoin is a legume that produces high protein levels similar to those produced by high-quality alfalfas. The sainfoin variety included in Edge has been selected for

its outstanding deer preference compared to other sainfoin varieties tested by the Whitetail Institute. It is incredibly attractive to deer. It's also cold-tolerant and drought and heat-resistant to withstand, hotter, dryer climates.

Persist Forb: Persist is the backbone perennial in another Whitetail Institute perennial, Imperial Whitetail Extreme. This exceptionally sweet plant is deeply rooted and highly drought resistant. Persist adapts well in lighter soils and in good soils that drain well.

X-9 Grazing Alfalfas: The X-9 alfalfas in Edge are the same as those the Whitetail Institute includes in Alfa-Rack Plus. Whitetail Institute testing has shown these alfalfas to be superior to hay-type alfalfas when used as a forage for deer, mainly because they produce more leaf relative to stem than ordinary alfalfas. The X-9 alfalfas are also deeply rooted and drought-resistant.

WINA-100 Perennial Forage Chicory: This is the same perennial forage chicory the Whitetail Institute includes in Chic Magnet, Fusion, Alfa-Rack Plus, Extreme and Vision. Simply put, WINA-100 is the most attractive chicory variety the Whitetail Institute has tested. That's because its leaves stay tender as it matures, unlike other chicories, which can become stemmy and waxy. WINA-100 chicory is also deeply rooted and drought resistant.

WINA Golden-Jumpstart Annual Clovers: Small amounts of annual clover are included to help Edge sprout and grow rapidly, providing fast green-up and attraction. These are the same proprietary clovers included in other Whitetail Institute perennial and annual forage blends.

Rainbond Seed Coating

Edge also features Whitetail Institute Rainbond, high-tech polymers included in the seed coatings. These polymers push seedling survivability to the maximum by retaining water that would otherwise be lost to evaporation or percolation so the seedlings have access to it. Specifically, Rainbond absorbs water from the soil (up to 200 times its weight in water), keeps it next to the seed as it germinates and begins to grow, and replenishes the water it holds from the soil as the plants use it. The seed coatings in Edge also contain the precise inoculant needed by the alfalfas in the blend so you don't have to inoculate the seed before planting. In short, Edge is ready to go out of the bag.

Additional Information

Edge is designed for a well-prepared seedbed in good soils that are moderately well drained. As with any alfalfa or product containing alfalfa, soil pH should be within neutral range (6.5 to 7.5) at the time of planting. Edge can be planted in spring in most areas or in fall. Planting dates and instructions for planting and maintaining Edge are provided on the back of the product bags, and they're also available online at whitetailinstitute.com. If you have additional questions about Edge, call the Whitetail Institute's in-house consultants at (800) 688-3030. The call and the service are free. 🍷

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The Right Food at the Right Time



Understanding the Yearly Nutrition Cycle of Whitetail Deer

By Matt Harper

Photo by Charles J. Alsheimer

In our modern society, we're taught to be more tolerant and open to opinions that vary from our own. I'm better at that sometimes than others.

Take, for example, those who believe a healthy diet has no room for meat. They argue that meat is too high in fat and other nasty compounds and is the root of our obesity epidemic. They don't tell you meat is one of the best sources of protein — specifically the amino acids our bodies need for growth and maintenance — not to mention being a great supply of minerals and vitamin B12.

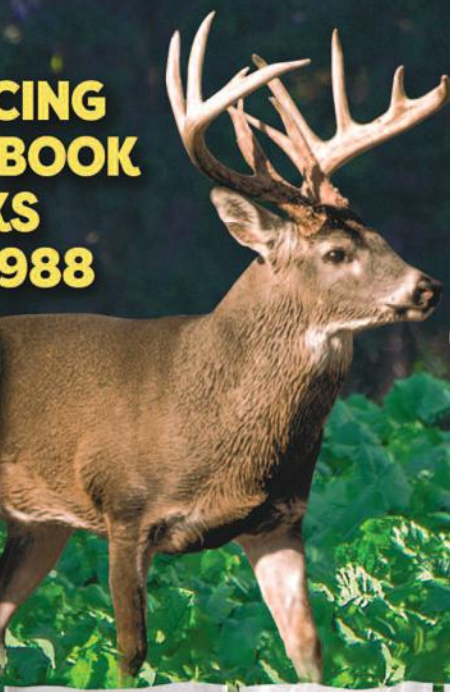
Granted, some cuts of meat and certain species of animals can be high in fat, and overconsumption in the absence of burning calories can result in a swollen waistline. Then again, so can the overconsumption of pasta, sugar, starches and other foodstuffs. If people were not supposed to eat meat, I argue, why do we crave it so much? Why do almost all civilizations aspire to have the wealth that lets people eat meat? Even those who abstain from eating meat try to make meatless concoctions that are supposed to mimic the taste of meat. Funny, you never see someone try to make a lettuce-flavored steak.

Almost everyone loves the taste of bacon, which is largely fried pork fat. The best tasting, juiciest steaks are those with marbling, which is otherwise known as intramuscular fat. My theory is that people naturally crave high-calorie, high-energy food such as fat because it's built into our DNA. When we had to chase down our food or at least physically exert ourselves to obtain food, we burned enormous amounts of calories to do so and, in turn, craved high-calorie food to replenish energy.

You can't continually burn more calories than you consume or you will eventually die. If you ate a couple of Big Macs every day while never leaving the couch, you'd build up energy stores at a high rate. But if you had to sprint around McDonalds a few dozen times to chase down a Big Mac, you'd probably keep your beach body. Although I can't communicate with a whitetail deer, I'm certain they don't worry about getting too fat.

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There's little chance that would happen anyway, as a wild whitetail burns enormous amounts of calories evading predators, breeding, fighting, raising fawns and simply trying to survive.

Therefore, deer seek food sources that supply nutrients they need for survival. Throughout a deer's yearly cycle, those nutritional demands change based on biological functions and environmental conditions. For example, the nutritional needs of a buck or doe are different in summer than they are in the winter, so to maximize nutritional supply, you should manage your deer nutritional program to meet each demand.

Late Winter, Early Spring

I like to begin the discussion of a deer's yearly nutritional cycle with the relatively brief but extremely important time when winter is waning but still holds an icy grip on the whitetail's world. The exact timing varies based on geographic location and annual fluctuation of temperatures, but it involves the final few weeks leading to spring green-up. In the Midwest during a typical year, that encompasses the latter part of February through early April. That's a small window, but it can be one of the most stressful in a deer's annual cycle. Quality food supplies are typically in short supply — in fact, lower than at any other time. The nutrient-rich vegetation that accompanies spring green-up has not yet sprouted, and in most cases, winter food sources have all but disappeared.

Doe's are entering their last trimester of gestation, which is when the most fetal growth occurs. Early in gestation, poor nutrition can lead to fetal reabsorption or abortion, but during the final weeks of pregnancy, nutrients consumed and from body reserves are routed to the unborn fawn — even to the detriment of the doe. If good nutrition is not available, a doe's health and body condition will suffer and can cause low birth weights and decreased post-natal milk production. Those conditions dramatically decrease fawn survivability. Also during this time, newly formed antler buds are just starting to appear on a buck's pedicles. Although protein requirements are not as high as they will be during the peak antler growing season in late spring and summer, protein needs increase from winter requirements to support the new antler growth.

A shortage of protein during this stage can stunt early antler growth and negatively affect eventual antler size. Like does, bucks are often in poor body condition coming out of winter and in need of high-energy food sources. Increased nutritional needs combined with the lack of those nutrients present a serious threat to the health and quality of a deer herd. However, you can take steps to help manage the problem. One option is to use a free-choice supplement (where they are legal) that contains highly digestible protein and energy sources. Typically, these supplements also contain minerals and vitamins, which are nutritionally important, although not to the extent as they will become in late spring through early fall. It's important to use a supplement that has been scientifically developed and formulated specifically for deer and for this time frame. Whitetail Institute's 30-06 Thrive is a great example.

You can also plant enough winter forage to supply a food source until spring green-up. To do so, you must have a good estimate of the herd size, the amount of tonnage the forage will produce and how long you need it to last. Plug those factors into your equation and you will arrive at the acreage required. For example, let's say your estimated deer herd size is 50, and you think each animal will eat 2 to 3 pounds



Late winter and early spring can be very nutritionally stressful for deer. Protein needs rise as bucks begin antler growth and does enter the third trimester of gestation. Having a food plot that greens up quickly, like Imperial Whitetail Clover is very important. Photo by Matt Harper

per day. If you average 4,000 pounds of forage per acre and want to supply food from Oct. 15 through April 1, you will need to plant about 5-1/2 acres (50 head times 2.5 pounds per day times 170 days/4,000 pounds per acre). Of course, that's not an exact science and can be affected by forage production, year-specific temperature and climate, attracting more deer from adjacent properties and other factors; but it provides a good rule of thumb. I will go into more detail on what to plant when we discuss fall and winter nutrition.

Finally, the sooner spring green-up occurs, the better. You can do nothing about the timing of natural food green-up, but you can consider that factor when planting food plots. For example, Imperial Whitetail Clover and Imperial Whitetail Fusion are extremely cold tolerant, which means they will stay green longer in winter and also green up sooner in spring.

Spring and Summer

Spring and summer are a time of plenty in the whitetail's world. Natural vegetation is at its highest nutrient level, as most plants are vegetative and growing. It's nature's design to have the most abundant food supplies coincide with the birth of offspring. This is also when nutritional needs are at their peak. In most parts of the country, does give birth in late spring, and milk production drives the need for the highest quality and quantity of food sources. Protein requirements for a lactating doe are about 18 percent, and the energy needs are at the highest in her yearly cycle. Mineral and vitamin needs are also at their highest levels.

Doe's milk is extremely nutrient dense in that it has a higher fat and protein content than cow's milk. If a doe's diet is lacking in quality or quantity of nutrition, it will not change the composition of the milk but rather the quantity she produces. Optimal milk supply is critical for fawn survivability, especially for the first few days and weeks after birth. A healthy, strong, growing fawn has a far greater chance of making it through those first few days when mortality rates are at



Spring and summer brings about the highest nutritional demands for all deer. Having a highly digestible, nutrient rich food source like Imperial Whitetail Clover or Fusion can help give deer the nutrition they need to maximize growth and production. Photo by Matt Harper

their highest and the critical factor is optimal milk production. Beyond survivability, weaning weights and yearling weights are directly correlated to mature body weights and in turn linked to antler size. Essentially, lower yearling weights show a trend to lower mature body and antler size.

For bucks, spring and summer encompasses the peak of antler growth, but before that can occur, bucks must first regain body weight losses they suffered in winter and early spring. Antler growth is a secondary function compared to body weight, so the faster a buck regains lost weight, the faster more nutrients can be directed toward antler growth. For immature bucks, nutrients are not just used for body maintenance but also for muscle, skeletal and overall body growth. That's why immature bucks never have full antler growth ability compared to mature bucks: Nutrients are directed toward body growth and antler growth. But for that age class of bucks, optimal body growth is vital to produce the optimal antler growth at maturity. In general, bucks require about 16 percent protein during the antler-growing season, plus high amounts of digestible energy.

Bucks also require high amounts of minerals and vitamins during the antler-growing season to support what's basically a skeletal formation outside the body. For bucks and does, minerals used for lactation or antler growth are pulled from the skeletal system. If optimal amounts of minerals are not available in food, milk production and antler growth will be diminished. Deer — especially bucks — will not pull more minerals from their skeletal systems than what they can healthily support.

Almost every soil has some kind of mineral deficiency, which is why supplementation is so effective for antler growth, doe lactation and overall body growth. For years, Imperial 30-06 and Imperial 30-06 Plus Protein have been proven products that produce consistent and excellent results. In fact, for more than 20 years, tens of thousands of hunters and deer managers have seen great success with those products. For protein and energy needs, food plots have become a management staple.

The amount of quality natural vegetation is generally high in mid-

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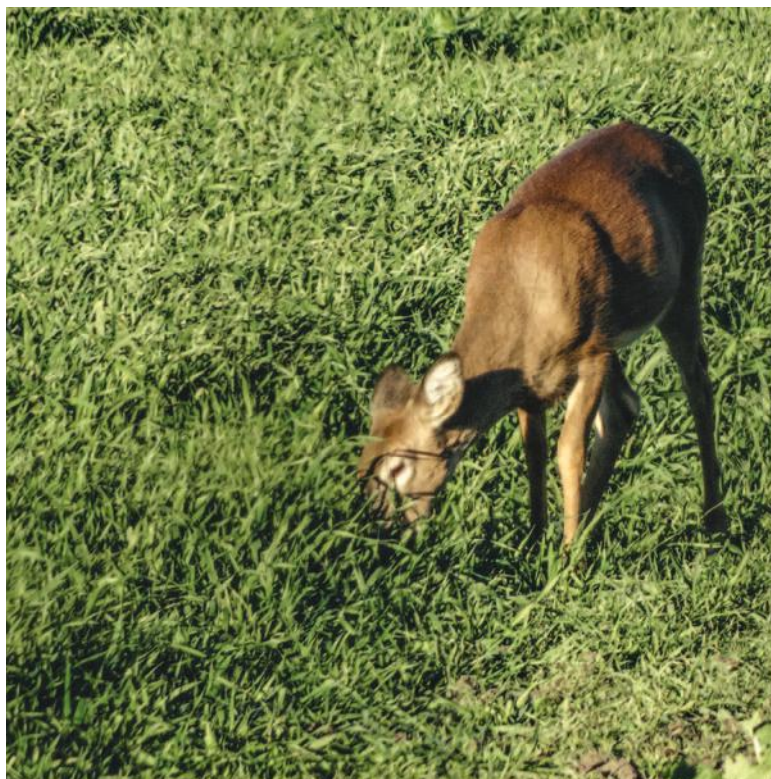
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spring, but as plants mature, nutrient levels decrease along with digestibility. Even in spring, a compilation of natural vegetation most often doesn't supply the 16 to 18 percent protein levels the deer herd requires. To supplement natural food sources, food plots planted with highly digestible high-protein forages can fill the nutrient gaps. For example, Imperial Whitetail Clover, Alfa-Rack Plus and other Whitetail Institute perennials can provide more than 30 percent protein but the duration of digestibility and high nutrient content are also important. As mentioned earlier, most forages decrease in nutrient content and digestibility as they mature. The perennial foods plots from Whitetail Institute are designed to stay vegetative far longer than other varieties of the same families. That's critical, as deer need high-quality nutrition throughout spring and summer, not just in spring. Whitetail Institute's PowerPlant is another great option for providing deer with large amounts of high-quality protein. PowerPlant is an annual blend of peas and forage soybeans that produce incredible amounts of nutrients even during the hottest times of summer, and it grows so thick and tall it can double as a bedding area.

Fall and Winter

Fall and winter represent another big transition period for deer. In early fall, deer are still packing on weight in preparation for winter and the breeding season. As soon as the velvet starts to peel, revealing the finished hardened antler, a buck's habits begin to change. First, bucks split up from their bachelor groups as they become more aggressive toward one another. As the rut nears, bucks begin to move more and eat less, and during the heart of the breeding cycle, bucks



Having multiple food sources available helps to provide deer what they need nutritionally when they need it. Pure Attraction is a great fall food source to help does gain back body condition that was lost during lactation. Brassicas also provide a valuable winter food source. Photo by Matt Harper

move almost constantly and burn huge amounts of energy chasing does, fighting rivals and breeding. Having better body condition before the rut can determine a buck's breeding success and also determine their chance of survival when breeding ceases.

A doe's body condition is also important before and during the rut. We've all seen trail-camera pictures of does that appear shrunk because of the high demands of lactation. For better odds of copulation that results in pregnancy, does must regain body condition and, in extreme cases, even to cycle properly. High-quality food sources containing energy, protein and minerals need to be abundant in late summer and early fall to help ensure that bucks and does are at their physical peaks before breeding begins.

As summer turns to fall, nutrition requirements begin to shift. Protein and mineral needs start to decrease while energy needs increase. That's not to say protein and minerals are not important. Rather, the levels needed are simply lower. After the rut, bucks again begin eating with a passion as they try to pack on fat. When winter arrives, bucks and does of all age classes go into a semi-dormant stage in terms of digestion. Everything slows, including the rate of food passage, consumption and even mobility. That's a natural way deer deal with the lack of food. Protein and mineral needs decrease even more, but energy still remains important to fuel their bodies through winter.

Fall and winter nutritional management is all about providing enough quality food supplementation to help deer get through this time in as good a condition as possible. To accomplish that, you can use high tonnage-producing yet highly nutritious and digestible food plots. These forages should be high in carbohydrates but must also have the physical characteristics that will let them be available even in snowy conditions. One of the best methods is to plant plots that target fall and early winter and also those that target winter specifically.

For example, Whitetail Institute's Pure Attraction is a combination of Whitetail oats, winter peas and WINA brassicas. The oat variety is winter hardy, nutrient rich and highly attractive, which provides the added benefit of producing a good hunting plot. The brassica portion of the blend supplies food late into winter, giving the blend the unique ability to provide quality nutrition in fall and winter.

Winter-Greens, Tall Tine Tubers and Beets & Greens are great nutritional tools for food plots designed for the coldest months. All can produce an incredible amount of tonnage and are excellent sources of energy, and they can be available even in deep snow. As discussed, it's important to plant enough for the deer herd you're managing. Use the equation that accounts for herd size, consumption rates and the desired duration of the food supply to come up with the acreage needed.

Conclusion

A whitetail deer's nutritional needs are ever-changing, but at least they're predictable. Knowing when and what to do to nutritionally manage your herd will ultimately result in healthier, higher-quality animals. You'll encounter innumerable variables when managing natural biological systems, but that does not mean an educated, thoughtful approach should not produce favorable outcomes. For most, that means producing a quality deer herd. A quality deer herd translates to deer that exhibit the optimal characteristics we seek. We desire the ultimate phenotype. In other words, we want highly productive fawn rearing does; healthy, growing young deer; and those big-racked bucks we all dream of. 🍁

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Perennial Food Plots: Advantages of Planting in the Fall

By **Hollis Ayers**

Photo by Charles J. Alsheimer

Whitetail Institute perennials can be planted in spring (in most areas) or fall. Each planting season has its own unique advantages. In this article, we'll look at some of the advantages of planting perennials in the fall.

I should clarify what I mean by planting in the fall. It's my way of saying planting during the Whitetail Institute's fall planting dates, which are a few weeks or months before hunting season starts in most areas. The planting dates for each Whitetail Institute product can be found on the back of the product bags, and they're also posted at whitetailinstitute.com.

Three big benefits of planting Whitetail Institute perennials in the fall relate to plant development. First, a perennial



planted in fall will generally be the youngest and most tender when hunting season starts. Second, a fall-planted perennial will also be one of the first things to green up after winter and provide deer with much-needed nutrition during the next spring and summer. Third, planting in fall allows more time for the perennial's roots to fully develop before they must tackle their first summer of hot, dry weather. That can be a big benefit, especially in the South.

A fourth important benefit of planting perennials in the fall concerns weed competition. No matter if you plant your perennials in spring or fall, you'll need to control grass and weeds as part of normal spring maintenance. Even so, perennials planted in fall almost always suffer less weed and grass competition than those planted in spring.

Even with all the advantages I've mentioned, there's an additional option you might consider if you want to maximize the advantages of planting perennials in the fall: planting a nurse crop of Whitetail Oats Plus with your fall-planted perennials. Doing so isn't mandatory, but it can yield even greater benefits, including boosted early tonnage and attraction. Whitetail Institute perennials tend to come up very quickly. Even so, annuals just naturally germinate and emerge more quickly than perennials generally do, and Whitetail Oats Plus does that. The additional benefit of its high sugar content makes Whitetail Oats Plus a superb choice for maximizing early-season tonnage and attraction of fall perennial plantings.

Planting a nurse crop of Whitetail Oats Plus with perennials in fall also offers a variety of forage choices within the same plot, and it can even serve as a sort of insurance policy if Mother Nature turns off the rain after planting. Because Whitetail Oats Plus can establish quickly with even less soil moisture than perennials need, planting them as a nurse crop with perennials in fall can help ensure that you'll have an even more attractive plot to hunt. That can be a good move, especially in the South where recommended planting dates are later in the fall.

[Note: When planting Whitetail Oats Plus as a nurse crop with a perennial, use only about 30 to 45 pounds per acre as opposed to 90 pounds per acre if planting Whitetail Oats Plus alone.] 



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Whitetail Institute **RECORD BOOK BUCKS...**

Eric Wagler - Indiana

My wife and I purchased a heavily timbered track of all woods five years ago. The property was very thick and perfect for large bucks but was almost unhunttable due to the heavy undergrowth. We cleared one plot about an acre and another quarter acre plot and constructed box blinds to hunt out of. Four years ago, a 173-inch buck was killed in the large plot of Imperial



Whitetail Clover (Photo 1). Last year, a 178-inch buck was also killed on the property (Photo 2). They love the clover in the early season, and with all the does the property holds because of the clover, we never know what monster buck will show up in the rut. The food plots are what make the hunting so good. Thanks, Whitetail Institute. This is only a 50-acre tract surrounded by lots of other hunters. Both bucks were shot with crossbow in early October.

Kevin Alker - Louisiana

When we got the 120 acres of land almost 18 years ago, it had not produced a trophy class whitetail (130 plus) in over 15 years. I knew this was my chance to do my own program. After a lot of research, I decided to go with the Whitetail Institute's products. We planted our two largest fields in Imperial Whitetail Clover the first year. We put out



cameras and realized we not only had a horrible age structure, but our few older bucks weren't what you would hope they'd be. We had a bulldozer come in and help us widen existing plots and strategically create some new ones. We added one more perennial plot in Alfa-Rack Plus and the other four plots are annuals, including one that we use for PowerPlant in the summer, and we've used Winter-Greens, Pure Attraction, Beets & Greens and Winter Peas Plus in the others.

By the summer three years later, we were seeing a significant increase in the number and quality of deer on our cameras. I took a trophy that fall, and my daughter took an old cull buck (Photo 1). The Imperial Whitetail Clover fields were amazing during this time. We would get over 1,000 pictures a week. Also, our annuals were loaded with deer every day. We were taking two to three good bucks a year on our little property, but the biggest was in the low 140s. We increased the size of our PowerPlant summer plantings and brought in a bulldozer again to increase the size of our annual plots. This is also when we decided that

as great as the Whitetail Institute products worked for our food plots, we should try their mineral and vitamin supplements. We were blown away by the activity and frequency at these sites when we put down 30-06. Over the last two years, we have seen the mass and size of our bucks' racks increase dramatically.

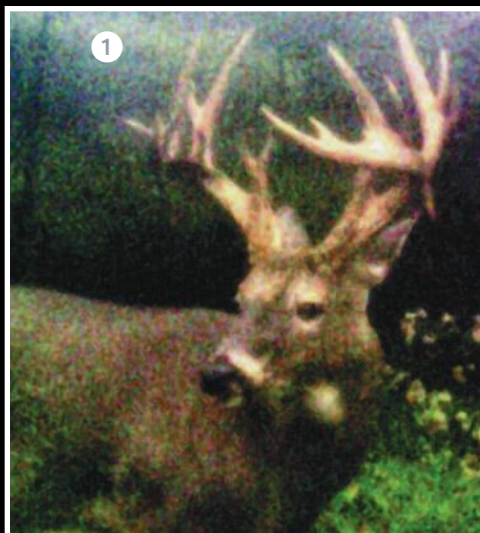
This year, I shot the largest buck we have shot so far, grossing just over 160 with my bow (Photo 2). We have done a lot of hard work, but I also know we owe a lot of credit to the products of the Whitetail Institute, which have been amazing. It has been an incredible and memorable journey, and I can't wait to see what our little land does in the coming years! Thank you, Whitetail Institute.



Matt Best - Ohio

I've used Whitetail Institute products for years. Two years ago, I started getting a lot of pictures of a large buck in my Imperial Whitetail Clover plot (Photo 1). I planted Whitetail Oats Plus that fall and got more and more pictures of him. I had pics of him seven days in a row on the Whitetail Oats Plus plot at 5:45 p.m. The wind got right on Oct 11th and he came in for the eighth day in a row at 5:45 p.m. After shooting him with my crossbow it took about 30 minutes before I could get out of the stand I was so shaken up. He had 21 scoreable points and scored 194 inches (Photo 2).

This year I started getting photos of another buck in the Imperial Whitetail Clover in July (Photo 3) and as the season approached, I again planted Whitetail Oats Plus. Just like the year



before, this buck started showing up on the oats. I had lots of pictures of him on Oct. 12 and even more on Oct. 13, and the wind was right on the 14th, so I hunted him. And here he comes. I shot him with my crossbow at 34 yards. He has 13 points and scored around 170 inches (Photo 4). These bucks have grown up their entire lives on my farm and Whitetail Institute products.

I've counted up to 26 deer in one of my Whitetail Oats Plus plots at one time.

Thanks, Whitetail Institute, for the awesome products that helped me kill the two best bucks of my life.



Jordan Hanks - Illinois

I just wanted to tell you all at Whitetail Institute how much I appreciate everything you all do in the whitetail world. I've been following and using Whitetail Institute products for years. I had been planting food plots for years and had success with them, yet I wasn't getting the antler growth I thought I should from the products I was using. Three years ago, I established an Imperial Whitetail Clover plot. I couldn't believe the reaction of the deer versus other brands. That same year, I had a young buck on my farm with what looked to have great potential. The next year, he blew up and added on extreme mass unlike any other deer I'd ever had on our farm. This past season, I harvested this deer. At only four years old, he grossed 201 7/8 Boone and Crockett. I can't thank Whitetail Institute enough for helping me accomplish my dream. Thanks again.



Send Us Your Photos!

Do you have photos of a buck that qualifies for the Pope & Young, Boone and Crockett or your state record books that you grew or took with the help of Imperial products? Send it to us and you might find it in the Record Book Bucks section of the next issue of *Whitetail News*. Email your digital photos and a three to four paragraph story telling how you harvested the deer and the role our products played to

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Georgia Hunter Swears By **No-Plow's** Performance & Versatility

Imperial Whitetail No-Plow is designed to attract deer to your property and hold them there and does so in perfectly prepared seed beds or with minimal preparation. And you won't have to convince Hank Hammond of that. As he'll tell you, No-Plow is the main reason he regularly sees big bucks at his lease in southwestern Georgia, and he said it's the biggest reason he harvested a 6.5-year-old, 277-pound, 150-inch 8-point there this past season.

"I've had this particular lease for seven years," Hammond said. "When I first got the lease, a friend of mine who used to hunt the property told me that I'd see a lot of deer there, but I'd never see any big bucks."

Hammond is not one to back down from a challenge, and he committed to see what he could do to improve hunting at the 275-acre property.

"With the way the acreage is laid out, you have a lot of movement of deer back and forth across the property lines," he said. "I figured if I could pull more deer onto the property and then hold them there more of the time, it would dramatically increase my chances of seeing big bucks."

Hammond has used No-Plow for more than 20 years and said it's ideal for the two main planting situations his property presents. The first is "smaller food plots of about 1/8 to 1/10 acre that are all so far back in the



woods that I can't get to them with conventional machinery," he said. The second involves strips of No-Plow he plants along the edges of the property's commercially planted fields.

"Every few years, the commercial fields are planted in peanuts, and that was the case last year," he said. "Some volunteer peanuts come up after the crop is harvested in the early fall, and they provide a good flush of quick growth, but it goes away after the first frosts. After that, the harvested areas offer virtually zero attraction and nutrient value. That's where the No-Plow really shines."

Hammond harvested the big 8-point last season in one of those No-Plow strips. He had seen the buck there before.

"The chase phase of the rut in southwestern Georgia kicks in sometime around Nov. 8 to 13, with some variation due to weather," he said. "The first time I saw that buck, it was during the pre-rut in the first part of November. We had already had frost, so the peanuts were dead. There were quite a few does in the No-Plow, and several young bucks were there pestering them. No big deer showed up until the big 8-point showed up right before dark. He was 250 yards away when he stepped out, but even at that distance, I could see he was a nice buck. I put the cross-hairs on him and could barely make out his outline, which for me made it a no-shoot situation. You have to do

things like that if you're an ethical hunter."

Although Hammond didn't connect that day, he wasn't worried.

"Does were coming in consistently," he said. "So, I knew I'd likely have another chance at him later on."

His suspicion proved correct.

Hammond hunted the strip a few weeks later and, as usual, saw lots of does and little bucks in the field.


"Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the 8-point enter the field, again right at 250 yards, but this time from a different approach," he said. "It was a little earlier that afternoon than when I had seen him a few weeks earlier, and I took him with a perfect quartering-away shot that took out both lungs. He was a big, long deer. Some bucks around here are short and muscular, but he was long and lanky like a racehorse."

The awesome Georgia buck wasn't a fluke. A few years ago, Hammond killed his best buck ever, a 159-2/8-inch 8-point.

Hammond is also a long-time fan of other Whitetail Institute food plot products, notably Imperial Whitetail Clover and Whitetail Oats Plus. He explained that Whitetail Oats Plus has proven so attractive it has even affected his hunting strategy.

"I've had great results on the other side of my property with Whitetail Oats Plus," he said. "They're just fantastic. Deer are coming to them constantly. I got one bag of them last fall and planted them in a special favorite plot of mine on a power line. I ran out of them before I had the whole plot planted, though, so I ran up to the local feed-and-seed store and got some other brand oats to finish planting that area. I made sure the other oats I bought were grazing-type oats, not seed oats. Even so, the power line is about 60 yards across, and deer would walk through the other oats to get to the Whitetail Oats Plus. The most interesting thing I noticed though, was in the past, bucks usually scooted across the power line fairly quickly, but when I planted the Whitetail Oats Plus there, they stop almost every time now to eat some of the oats."

Hammond isn't shy about his appreciation for Whitetail Institute products.

"I owe Whitetail Institute a lot of gratitude for putting out such superior products," he said. "I give them a lot of the credit for the big 8-points I've killed and for the general increase in the number of big bucks I've seen on the property over the years. Whitetail Institute products have proven to me time and time again that they will pull deer from other properties and keep them on my property." 

Another 150-plus inch Georgia 8-point!



From Swearing to Smiling –

BLAME IT ON THE WHITETAIL INSTITUTE

By Craig Dougherty

Photos by the Author



Yup, the guys at Whitetail Institute are the ones who started it all.

They're the guys who popularized the idea of planting food plots for deer. It was a novel idea back in the '80s, but now it is standard procedure for deer hunters. Every year, land manager/hunters follow a predictable cycle. It starts with sweat and hard work and generally ends with success. Put another way, you start out cussing and finish happy, happy, happy, and the Whitetail Institute gets blamed for it all.

The cussing part comes when your tractor won't start or a heavy disk lands on your toe, or when you bark your knuckles turning a wrench, or the weatherman calls for sun and it rains all weekend. When it comes to food plotting, you go from a little swearing to a whole lot of smiling. It's how the game is played.

One of my first and fondest food plot memories goes back about 30 years ago. I had waited all my life to have my own hunting property and I finally managed to get my hands on my own piece of paradise. My son, Neil, and I were intent on turning 150 acres of ho-hum property into a world-class hunting property. I had read in *Outdoor Life* magazine all about planting Imperial Whitetail Clover for deer and was convinced that was the key. Ray Scott was the guy behind the concept and frankly, he was pretty darn convincing.

I ran out and bought my first bag of Whitetail Clover and was off and running, most of it in circles. Food plots were new to me and I

quickly found out I had more than a little to learn. I had one clear spot on the 150-acre property and didn't have much in the way of equipment. I owned an old lawn tractor, a very used busted-up old drag, an 8-foot length of cyclone fence that I nailed to some boards for a drag of sorts. And the only clear place on the property was a 1/2-acre old campsite or log landing.

I got the equipment to the clearing, wrestled with the disk for an hour or two, and something broke. I can't remember what, but I do remember using some of my favorite cuss words. I ran the disk around the clearing for a few more hours until finally the sod cover started to resemble dirt. Three hours later I figured I'd have a seedbed in an hour or two, so I cussed some more. Trouble was, I didn't know what a good seedbed looked like. The weekend was hot and dry and too many trips around the plot turned the soil to dust. The dust choked both me and the tractor into submission.

So, I cussed, and I cussed some more. I kicked the tractor, and spit the dust. Finally, I managed to get the bag of seed spread relatively evenly, and I was done. I'd add some fertilizer next weekend, maybe. My first food plot was now planted and as I was driving home I began wondering if my first food plot was my last one? Oh, did I mention all the way home I cussed Ray Scott and *Outdoor Life* magazine.

I couldn't get back to my property for a few weeks, but I was in a much better humor on my return trip. I had 150 acres of deer woods to explore and kinda happy to be back. I hit the woods and eventually



worked my way over to the 1/2-acre “dust bowl” that I cussed so bad two weeks earlier. I crested a small rise in the log road and there it was — the “dust bowl” was a carpet of green, and right there in the middle of the green were two turkeys! I was agog. I almost cried, and I was at peace with the plot that I had cussed so bad two weeks ago. The “dust bowl” was now the “Twin Oaks” and it’s been the “Twin Oaks” since that fine day. That night I crept up to the plot and there, right where the turkeys had been was a doe and two fawns. I can’t remember whether I laughed or cried, but I know I smiled a whole bunch that night on the trip back home. I was a believer!


That was 30 years ago, and I’m still a believer. Our Kindred Spirits hunting property has brought joy to all who have gathered there since that eventful day. She now spans a little more than 700 acres with 50 some acres in food plot plantings. It’s a wildlife mecca with a resident population of shooter bucks and longbeards. At the center of it all are those cussed food plots. We seldom cuss the food plots any more — it’s mostly praise and that includes praising the Whitetail Institute.

For instance, take the case of “Traveler.” Traveler was a mature buck that showed up on camera a few seasons back. Like most of our older-aged shooter bucks he was very much a “night runner.” The after-shooting hours pictures outnumbered the daytime shots 10-1. We never quite figured out where he spent his days, but most of his nights were spent hanging out with the girls around the Twin Oaks food plot complex (when our small shooter plots get to be bigger, they turn into a “complex”). We needed his need to breed to overcome his vampire ways before we could hunt him. Like a fine wine, we wouldn’t hunt him “until it was time.”

Then one day in mid-November, we caught him breeding a doe on camera right smack in the middle of the day. The hunt was on. We were confident he would show up to visit the dozen or so does who dined at the Twin Oaks restaurant each and every evening. Two evening sits later Neil had an arrow in him. We sang again that night.

Traveler is just one of a couple of dozen or so good bucks that have been taken off of food plots at Kindred Spirits. We’ve come a long way since that hot dusty afternoon 30 years ago. Time after time, the old adage, “If you plant it, they will come” has been proven to be true. Food plots are the centerpiece of our entire management program both on our personal hunting property and the 200 or so acres of food plots Neil puts in for his clients each year. No, food plots are no longer challenges to us. We aren’t cussing them anymore.

Over the years, our “go to” products have been: Imperial Whitetail Clover, Chic Magnet, Tall Tine Tubers and Winter-Greens. Sometimes we mix and match them and sometimes we plant them straight. Annuals and perennials, it depends on the site. Not that we haven’t used other Whitetail Institute products — it’s just that our soils or weather conditions, or time of year, just move us into these products more than most. That’s the nice thing about working with Whitetail Institute products. They have multiple solutions for all kinds of food plot challenges, and they all work their little bit of magic. This season we are looking forward to planting Conceal in certain areas that have been needing a special cover treatment for years. Conceal seems to be what we have been looking for. We have been using Whitetail Institute products exclusively for the last 10 years or so.

Truth be told, we have come to love every aspect of the food plot game. It’s a big part of the game we call hunting. Cussing out a food plot would be like cussing out an old faithful bird dog or a trusted hunting partner. Come to think of it, the Whitetail Institute may just be the best deer hunting partner a guy could ever have. 

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Whitetail Institute

SOIL TEST KITS



Professional laboratory soil testing is one of the most important things you can do to ensure the success of your food plots. The Whitetail Institute offers professional laboratory soil test kits which provide results and recommendations for all Imperial Whitetail products or any other type seeds. (Complete instructions and all related information will come with each kit.) Test results include pH, phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). Specific and accurate fertilizer and lime recommendations for maximum performance from your plantings will be provided. The average turnaround time is 24-48 hours after our lab receives the sample. Another huge benefit to soil testing is, it can save you a lot of money by helping you avoid unnecessary fertilizer and lime expenses.

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

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or CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-688-3030

Farm-Country Food Plots. **WHY?**

Contrary to what some folks believe, food plots are a great idea — even essential — in farm country.

By **Scott Bestul**

Photo by Charles J. Alsheimer

I probably field more questions from fellow hunters — folks I meet or ones unlucky enough to sit through one of my seminars — about food plotting than almost any other aspect of deer hunting. Whitetailers are endlessly curious about the three W's (what, when, where) and the big H (how) to plant food plots. That's understandable, and I love chatting about those topics with fellow deer hunting addicts.



But the question that continually surprises me is, “Why?” This is typically the query of hunters who live in farm country and question the time and effort required to plant deer food when whitetails have easy access to some of the most prime agricultural food on the planet.

Of course, those concerns are legitimate. They just don’t go deep enough into the lives of deer. I have farm fields next to my front yard, so I know well the power and attraction of a bean, corn or alfalfa field to a hungry deer. With all respect to the publishers of this magazine, at certain times of the year, no food plot seed can compete with a modern agricultural field. Those acres devoted to row crops and green fodder produce tons of nutrition per acre and are often so sprawling that a herd of whitetails couldn’t wipe them out on a bet.

The problem with modern agriculture is that it’s rarely on the landscape when deer need it most. That’s why food plots are a great idea in farm country. In fact, I’d argue they’re essential, at least for serious deer managers, and here’s why.

The Feast-and-Famine Equation

Not long ago, ag fields were a bounty of food, even after harvest. Downed stalks and stems lay everywhere, and grain that escaped the combine or picker provided ample food for any deer willing to do a little nosing around. In fact, I remember many picked fields being even more attractive to whitetails after they’d been cut than before. Although there was obviously less food in terms of tonnage, it was (at least in my view) more accessible to deer, which are essentially lazy critters. In my experience, if you give a buck the option of chewing kernels off five cobs of corn on the stalk or eating the loose kernels of one cob on the ground, he’ll pick the loose kernels almost every time.

Unfortunately, the loose-kernel option is getting tougher for modern whitetails to find. Today’s uber-efficient combines leave little, if any, waste. And across much of the country’s ag country, the fall plow comes as quickly behind the combine as farmers can manage. What was once a salad bar of waste grain and stalk residue is now a sea of black dirt.

“Farm-country whitetails have the best possible world in summer and early fall,” said Steve Scott, Whitetail Institute vice president. “The problem is, after those fall plows come out, there’s very little food left, at a time of year when it’s most critical for deer.”

Worse, fall plowing creates a double-whammy for deer.

“Not only does it cover up any waste grain for late fall and winter, but there’s nothing on the landscape in spring,” Scott said. “That’s when does are in the latter stage of pregnancy and bucks are growing antlers. Both those requirements call for a high-protein food source, and plowed fields obviously don’t have that.”

Plugging the Hole

Enter the food plot, the ideal solution for plugging the leaky bucket that represents whitetail food sources in the wake of fall plowing. By strategically planting a combination of annual and perennial food plots, managers can meet the year-round nutritional needs of whitetails and create better hunting opportunities.

Perennial plantings are the poster child for fundamental food plotting. For a green food source packed with nutrition, nothing comes close to clover. Perhaps that’s why Imperial Whitetail clover remains the star player in a Whitetail Institute lineup that contains 21 products.

“Not only is Imperial Whitetail Clover highly attractive and palatable, it provides nutrition that helps pregnant does and antler-growing bucks,” Scott said. “Even more important in farm country is that the rest of the landscape is pretty bleak in spring. Of course, whitetails will flock to a soybean field, but many of those aren’t planted until late April or May, and not available as food until weeks later. Clover helps fill that critical nutritional gap.”


Many of my farm-country compadres can wrap their minds around the value of spring-time clover. They have more trouble with understanding the value of annual food plots. This requires a little more preaching on my part. Of course, I get that deer will often ignore smaller plots of brassicas, oats or other green forage when ag fields offer the easy eats. But whitetails — especially mature bucks — will often readily visit a secluded plot of annuals en route to the farmer-planted salad bar, and often in daylight. Even more important, these visits serve as the perfect primer for when annual plots shine: as soon as the combines do their work and the plows hit the ag ground.

I see this scenario play out every fall, and this past year was no different. In August, I planted a small plot behind my house we call the “Log Landing” in Beets & Greens, one of Whitetail Institute’s newer products. As they do every season, deer picked and nibbled at the plot when it first greened up toward our mid-September bow opener. But as the fall progressed, that little plot lit on fire. Of the many annual plots I planted, the Log Landing was by far the most visited, and it got only better after the crops were harvested, and even as the snow started to fly in the late season. I’d have placed the odds of killing a mature buck or doe at that spot at 5 to 1 over any ag-field edge stand I’d hung.

Dirty Little Food Plot Tricks in Farm Country

I guess it should be clear I don’t waste effort trying to compete with row crops or alfalfa fields. What I do, in the right situation, is try to make a farmer’s offering just a bit better for deer. One of my favorite ploys is to find a bean field next to timber and spice it up by seeding a brassica or other annual between the rows late in the growing season. Here in the Midwest, soybean leaves start yellowing and drooping in late August and early September, which allows more light to reach the soil between the rows. Then, the closer to harvest we get, the leaves turn brown and drop off. Just before that leaf-drop is a perfect time to sow some aggressive annual (Winter-Greens, Tall Tine Tubers and Beets & Greens are ideal for this technique) between the rows. It’s critical, of course, to gain permission before such a project, but most of the farmers I’ve asked have readily agreed. Unless whitetail populations are really low, deer will likely have severely limited the crop yields in the rows next to the woods, and many farmers count these rows as a loss anyway.

The slick thing about that technique is it requires zero soil disturbance. In fact, the ideal scenario is to sow the annual seed directly on the soil surface. Then, when bean leaves drop, they cover the seed. Add a well-timed rain or two and you’ve suddenly created a new green food source, right when everything else in a whitetail’s world is turning brown. Even better, few farmers in my area fall-plow bean fields, so I never worry that my effort — which was as minimal as walking up and down bean rows cranking a hand-crank spreader — is in vain.

If you are currently unaware of these red-hot farm-country deer tips, work them in to your hunting plan for fall, and send thank-you letters to me directly at the *Whitetail News*. 

Imperial Whitetail Pure Attraction for Early and Late Hunting Seasons

If you're looking for a fall annual designed to attract deer quickly, grow rapidly and provide sustained food and attraction during the coldest months, Pure Attraction delivers.

Annuals can be great tools for delivering abundant forage at specific times of year. Pure Attraction is a perfect example of how great tools become exceptional performers when they are carefully selected and combined in ratios that take advantage of the best attributes of each. Pure Attraction is scientifically designed to deliver its sustained, season-long attraction in a one-two punch of rapid growth and attraction in the early season and prolific forage availability in the late season.


Whitetail Oats and Winter Peas for Early Season: The backbone of Pure Attraction's early-season attractiveness and nutrition is Whitetail Oats. These oats are winter-hardy and drought-resistant, and their high sugar content makes them exceptionally attractive and palatable to deer. These early-season plants establish and grow

quickly. And after exhaustive side-by-side testing, the conclusion is clear: Whitetail Oats outperform all other forage-oat products the Whitetail Institute has tested.

Performance in the early stages of Pure Attraction is further enhanced by small amounts of highly attractive winter peas. Meanwhile, the WINA brassicas in Pure Attraction establish and provide even more tonnage during the early season. This combination results in fast germination, rapid growth and sustained attraction and tonnage in both the fall and winter.

WINA-Brand Forage Brassicas for Late Season: As the weather turns colder later in fall, frosts cause an enzyme in the brassicas in Pure Attraction to turn starches in the plants to sugars, making them even sweeter and more irresistible to deer. These brassicas stand taller, even in snow, and continue to provide deer with highly attractive and nutritious forage during the coldest months. The availability of highly nutritious forages during winter can be a huge benefit to deer by helping them maintain body weight and health. This helps them recover from winter more quickly in early spring. And remember, the sooner a buck can recover his winter health losses, the earlier in the antler-growing season he can direct more nutrients to building antlers.

Pure Attraction is designed for fall planting during the same dates as the fall-planting times for Imperial Whitetail perennials, and it's even easier to plant because it does not require the sort of deeper ground tillage required for planting some perennial blends. Optimum soil pH for Pure Attraction is 6.5 to 7.5, and if lime must be added to raise soil pH, it need be tilled only into the first few inches of soil. Also, smoothing the seedbed before planting Pure Attraction is not as critical as it is with many perennial blends. Just leave the surface of the soil loose, and when you broadcast Pure Attraction, drag over the seed lightly to seat it into the soil.

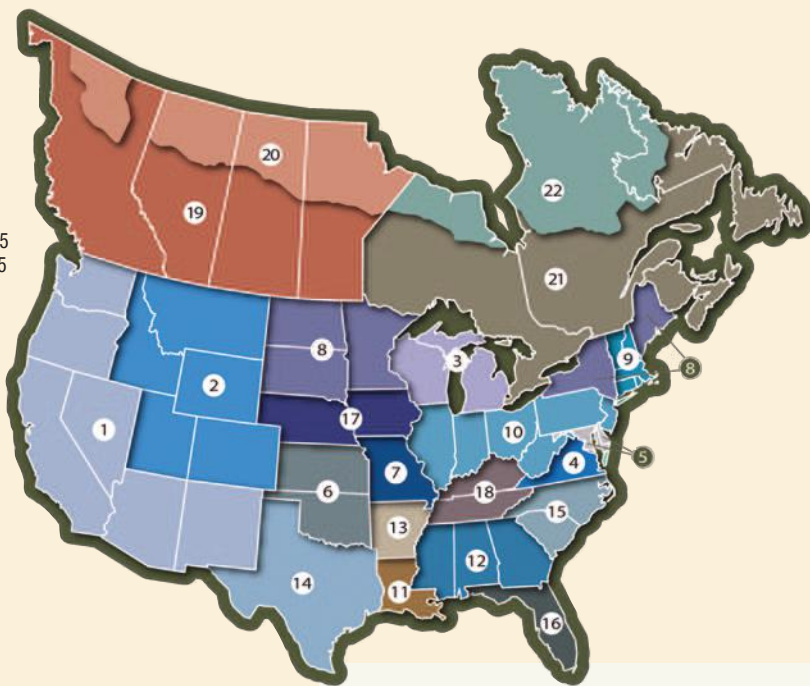
For information about Pure Attraction, go to whitetailinstitute.com, or call the Whitetail Institute consultants at (800) 688-3030. 



Food Plot Planting Dates...

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

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

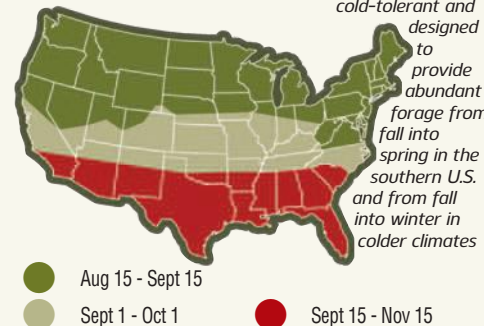


PLANTING DATES FOR VISION, PURE ATTRACTION, SECRET SPOT, WINTER PEAS, BOWSTAND AND AMBUSH

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

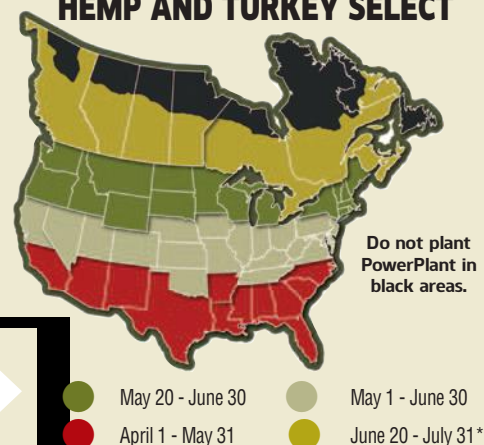


PLANTING DATES FOR WINTER-GREENS, TALL TINE TUBERS AND BEETS & GREENS

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

***Do not plant PowerPlant, Conceal or Sunn Hemp until soil temperatures reach a constant 65 degrees F.**

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



Do not plant PowerPlant in black areas.

The Sixth Stage

Most hunters transition through five phases

By David Hart

Photos by the Author

Like many veteran deer hunters with a few seasons to his credit, Jim Yoak has gone through some changes. Nowadays, the 70-year-old West Virginia resident is content to sit in a box blind with a young hunter at his side. He might carry a gun, but more than likely, he won't. Yoak loves deer hunting as much as he always has, but he doesn't measure success in his own punched tag but by someone else's.

"I get much more joy in watching a young hunter get a deer than I do shooting one myself now," he said. "In fact, I haven't shot a buck in five years."

Since he shot his first deer 55 years ago, Yoak transitioned through the five phases of hunting, a premise developed by two University of Wisconsin-La Crosse psychology professors in the late 1970s. Bob Jackson and Bob Norton, both hunters, interviewed more than 1,000 hunters before determining that most of us transition through the same five stages.

The Five Stages of a Hunter

The first one? We just want to pull the trigger and taste success. We wait anxiously for the first legal deer to walk in range so we can join the ranks of successful hunters. That first deer can take years, or it might take minutes. The thrill is just the same.

Then, little else matters more than numbers. A successful season is measured not by a deer or even a couple, but in filling every possible tag, bagging limits of ducks or squirrels or rabbits. The limit stage is the natural progression that comes from an increasing skill level and a deeper, more intimate knowledge of the outdoors. Yoak was firmly entrenched in the limit phase at one time.

"I wanted to kill five deer every year," he said. "We ate a lot of venison, so providing food for my family was an important part of my desire to get as many deer as I could."

Eventually, though, the desire to shoot lots of deer gradually changed. Yoak moved into the third phase, where quality takes the place of quantity. Instead of shooting numerous deer, the goal of hunters in the trophy stage is to hunt animals with specific characteristics. It might be mature whitetail bucks, adult gobblers or even a specific species of duck.

Even that can lose its appeal, though. For those with ample resources or who happen to live in the right area, shooting big deer with a rifle or shotgun no longer becomes a challenge. That shift might come after they tag a few big bucks, or it might not. Whatever the rea-



The sixth stage of a hunter, the stewardship stage, often sets in when a hunter buys a piece of land, allowing him to create high-quality habitat on his own time and dime.



The fifth stage of a hunter is all about sharing the experience with friends and family. Success matters, but even more for those who haven't had much during their hunting careers.

son, the desire to get close to a whitetail or hunt with a unique tool is a stronger pull than the size of the buck's antlers. So, we switch to a recurve bow or a flintlock muzzleloader or some other means that presents more of a challenge.

Finally, we care less about how, what or how many we kill and more about cherishing the entire experience. The fifth stage of a hunter has more to do with spending time in a deer camp with friends than punching a tag. It also revolves around mentoring, passing wisdom and woodsmanship down to another generation of hunters and sharing the thrill of their first deer.

The Sixth Stage

For more hunters, including Yoak, there is another stage — one Jackson and Norton did not include in their hypothesis. It doesn't involve traditional archery equipment or antler scores. Instead, it revolves around the land and our connection to it.

The sixth stage — call it the stewardship stage — has more to do with growing deer and creating high-quality habitat than killing those deer. Those hunters get as much satisfaction watching a bare patch of dirt grow into a vibrant patch of clover as sitting in a tree stand over that food plot. Punching a tag means far less than it did when they first started hunting.

"Sometime back in the 1980s, I saw Whitetail Institute's video about food plots and how they could help keep deer on my property and provide them with high-quality forage, so I started planting Whitetail Institute food plots on the family farm," Yoak said.

Those food plots worked. Yoak noticed more and bigger deer on the farm, but he realized there was more to the landscape than a handful of clover plots scattered among the pastures and mature timber. So, a decade ago, he started researching ways to make the habitat better throughout the farm. Why not? Grouse and turkey numbers were declining. So were such ubiquitous animals as rabbits and even squirrels.

"I reached out to the Natural Resources Conservation Service and enrolled in some conservation programs that helped educate me about creating good wildlife habitat," he said.

Since then, he removed the cattle from the land and spent his spare

time creating openings in the forest and improving the habitat along pasture edges. He turned low ground into marshy habitat and improved a few ponds. Entire sections of his 220-acre farm are designated sanctuaries — places he rarely goes and never hunts.

"I see a lot more stuff now," he said. "I see bobcats more frequently, and the number of rabbits has gone up. So has the number of turkeys I see and hear. I get as much satisfaction knowing that I'm helping wildlife as I do hunting that wildlife."

In other words, leaving the land a little better than it was is more important than pulling the trigger. That sixth stage has more to do with helping wildlife than killing it. It's not that the men and women who have transitioned away from the other stages have become anti-hunters. Hardly. Nor have they grown soft as they age. Yoak, for example, understands the role hunting plays in the cycle of life, and he also understands that all animals die, whether at our hands, the fangs of a coyote or age. He has no issue with those hunters in any of the five other phases. He was one of them.

In fact, many hunters in the sixth stage are still firmly entrenched in one or more of the five traditional phases. They might still love to chase mature whitetails with a flintlock, but they are equally content to sit on their tractors for hours at a time and to spend every spare penny on seed, gas and fertilizer, even if they never fill the November air with a cloud of white smoke.

The transition from hardcore hunter to steward can occur overnight or through several decades. There was no epiphany for Yoak, but seeing the results of his first Whitetail Institute food plots helped move him closer to the stewardship stage. However, for many hunters, the transition into the sixth stage is most obvious when a life-altering event occurs: They buy their own land. It doesn't matter if it is a 5-acre lot on the outskirts of town, a sprawling farm deep in the country or something somewhere in between. What matters is that they can make it their own. It isn't much different than a new homeowner putting a fresh coat of paint in the living room, changing the blinds in the bedroom or even remodeling the kitchen. They want to put their own mark on it.

They see that land not as a blank canvas just waiting for their vision but as a work in progress. The existing trees, fields of fescue or broom straw, and even the trails cut through the property are byproducts of the previous owners. The forest might have been cut, the fields planted in crops and the stream dammed to make a pond, but there is always work to be done. In some cases, that land might already have the perfect combination of habitat, but even perfect can be improved. Or at least it needs to be maintained. Invasives must be controlled, fields need to be burned and food plots need to be planted.

That sixth stage might seem like it has nothing to do with hunting, but for those in that stage, it has everything to do with hunting. In fact, many hunters in the stewardship stage are still extremely active hunters and many of them are some of the best hunters. Some improve the habitat and plant food plots to attract and grow bigger bucks. They shape food plots to bring deer within bow range. Or in Yoak's case, they work on the land so that others can transition their way through the first five stages of a hunter.

"I'll spend six or eight weeks preparing and planting food plots, even though the only time I spend in a blind is with another hunter now," Yoak said. "It thrills me to help a kid get his first deer or showing people around my property. They might want advice on how to turn their land into better wildlife habitat, and I'm always glad to show them what I've done." 🦌

BORN TO HUNT

By **R.G. Bernier**

Photo by the Author



From dusk until dawn.

From sunrise to sunset.

When pain and discomfort have long been
forgotten.

Between times of shivering and those of sweat.

From energy to exhaustion.

After hunger but before fulfillment,

All thirsts are eventually quenched.

When frustration greets humility,

Sadness gives way to exhilaration as challenges
are overcome.

Through it all, the hunter carefully plans his
chase with but a simple prayer,

Asking for only one fair chance.

All the rest is dreaming time.

– *Primal Dreams* (Wensel/Mitten Productions)

What is it that attracts a hunter to the spirit of the chase and the great outdoors? Is it to merely collect another set of antlers? Take the life of a spirited animal? Feed an ego, chase a dream or bolster your self esteem? What are we really after?

Nate Simmons of *The Western Hunter* asked, “It can’t simply be boiled down to meat on the table or antlers strapped to our pack. If that were the case, why would we climb so high, endure so much and fail so often?”

Deer hunting is recreation and an invigorating pastime, but if we are to instill the passion of this grand pursuit into the heart of a would-be hunter, we must first define what hunting actually is. It’s not about the kill. It’s about the process, Simmons wrote. It’s the beauty, peace and perspective it produces. It’s the pain and fear we often face. At times, it’s about reconnecting not only with people you love but places you love. And occasionally, it’s the solitude needed to reconnect with ourselves and listen to a voice more powerful than our own.

To Hunt

In *Boys to Men of Heart: Hunting as Rite of Passage*, Randall Eaton wrote, “Hunting and killing are as fundamental to male development as birthing and infant care have been to women.... Men take life to support life, and the kill itself is the event that engenders compassion, respect for life and the moral responsibility to protect it.”

Yes, you read that right. We were born to hunt. For those of us who do, male and female, we need no convincing of that. We didn’t need an incentive — just an opportunity. However, a poor, misguided soul that chooses not to exercise that innate desire to hunt is making a choice derived more from societal influence than disdain for the natural activity. Deer hunting is so much more than the act of taking an animal’s life. It consists of solitude and camaraderie, success and failure, strategy and methodology, stewardship and land management, and all the fun of new equipment, seed, camp, cooking and so much more.

The Desire

Desire is something that cannot be imbued. It must be felt. It’s that longing in the heart to be an active participant and also succeed and excel at whatever fuels your passion. From my earliest recollections, I wanted to be a deer hunter. I played the role as a youngster, enacting scenes of hunting tales heard from my dad. By using fallen tree branches for rifles, with friends holding real antlers atop their heads pretending to be deer running amidst the forest, we made our childhood games a realistic sport.

I think the reason many of us return to the deer woods year after year has more to do with desire than success. Results, whichever way the pendulum swings, should never overshadow the exhilaration of the hunt or diminish our recognition of the good graces allowing us to hunt. Hunting is a process that should never be overshadowed by the results. Bonds between family and friends, fathers and children, man and nature should become a major part of each outing, and when success shines upon you, it will feel even sweeter because of them.

Void of the distant rustling of leaf litter announcing the arrival of a deer, the hunter’s heart would never realize the stimulating sensation this sound engenders. Minus the tranquility that comes with a gentle falling snow, the type that accumulates like cotton on a stick, the trek becomes mundane. Without the sun rising in the east to cast its first

rays of light on the wooded terrain, the experience would seem lifeless. This mystique romances the hunt, stimulates the soul and brings great pleasure to the entire experience. Short of sharing the adventure with someone of like spirit, the odyssey quickly loses some of its charm. Charlie Alsheimer wrote, "The most important thing for hunting is not whether a new world-record whitetail is killed. It's planting the seed so future generations can experience the greatest outdoor experience there is: hunting white-tailed deer on crisp autumn mornings."

The Formative Years

Today's world is not the one in which I grew up. The cultural changes have been vast. Vying for children's time and attention are things that I could never have imagined while growing up: fast-paced, action-driven interactive gaming devices, cell phones laden with social media, and a host of other technological gadgets geared to move them along in eight-second media bites. How do you compete with that, especially when deer hunting requires immense patience, and long spells of inaction and quiet?

If we are to make a deer hunter — one eager to continue a life-long pursuit — it must be fun, and children must have a hand in all that goes into each hunt. They need to feel as important in the entire process as you. Let them tote a BB gun. Outfit them with similar clothing to what you are wearing. This cultivates a sense of responsibility on their part and enhances the education we are providing them.

When my son reached legal age to hunt with me (10 in Maine), he was already well versed in safety, woodsmanship and rudimentary deer behavior. One afternoon, I turned to him and asked, "Do you know how to get us out of here?" At the time, we were hunting northern Maine's wilderness. He responded with a resounding, "Yes." "Ok," I said, "take us back to the truck."

That little shaver looked down at his compass and, without diverting a minute of an angle, made a direct beeline for the vehicle. Part of the way through our exodus, I halted him to say, "If you come to an obstacle, thick brush or something similar, we can walk around that and then resume our course." Let me assure you, there was not a prouder 10-year-old when we reached our truck that day.

The Caught Principle

If I heard it once, I heard it a million times growing up: "Do as I say, not as I do." That might sound good, but it seldom works. Children learn through example, and more is caught than is taught. Children learn from observation, and how you act or react while hunting will have a lasting impression on an impressionable mind.

Being a grandfather of six brings me opportunities with these incredible youngsters to teach them to love the woods and wildlife and recognize the boundless world of nature. Aside from replying to their many queries and entertaining endless curiosities, I expect to ingrain in them a great respect for wildlife, an appreciation for all that is most wild and a thankful heart for the gift of life. I want them to see my dead deer; one that I took through fair chase using ethical standards. I want them to realize and understand that a deer sacrifices its life that I might live. I want them to know that blood is not dirty and hunters are not bad. I hope to be there when each of them takes their first whitetail, as I was when my son took his first. It is then they will better understand that bullets kill, death is final and life is precious.

I strive to be the kind of influence on my grandchildren that will

make them want to emulate my values. I wish to pass on to them the reasons behind the precepts I live by, the ethical standards I hunt by and the core values that make their grandfather who he is. I want them to know that the ends don't justify the means, that success is earned not granted and that without failures, victories will end up hollow. After all, the result of a successful hunt is not entirely in dead deer flesh and antlers. A vanquished buck is the primary goal, but the journey in getting to that buck will hold the greatest significance — events played out along the trail where your experiences turn into memories lasting a lifetime.

Training


A beginning hunter, regardless of age, must be trained properly if they are to find any fulfillment in the sport. That training takes time, effort, energy and lots of patience. The beginner will make mistakes. They will blow opportunities, which is to be expected. The key to learning is by taking those gaffes and turning them into positive experiences that will ultimately shape the eventual outcome the next time that situation occurs. For example, I asked my 2-year-old grandson if he'd like to help Gramps shovel the drive. Of course, he had no idea what that meant but was more than eager to get outside. The first thing I did was provide him with a shovel he could call his own that was a size to fit him. Second, I demonstrated how to shovel. And last, as he began emulating my movements, I continuously lavished praise for the job he was doing. With children, always remember size, demonstration and praise.

Unfortunately, in today's culture of instant gratification, much of the time-honored traditional values that helped shape the deer hunter have been lost to cheap imitations. Deer hunting is much more than killing a whitetail. It is much more than hiking from point A to point B and back again. Becoming a successful deer hunter is not found in the purchase of the right bottle of scent, the most fashionable hunting attire, most popular deer call or gadget, or even in owning the most expensive weapon. None of these will make you a woodsman or have any bearing on your aptitude as a hunter.

End Game

Learning about whitetails, their behavior and how they use the land is a continuous endeavor, even for the veteran. The more you know, the better you will become at making educated decisions about where and how to hunt a piece of real estate. Education is great, but knowledge through observation and experience is what separates those that want to excel and those that continue to thirst for more.

"The deer is so irregular in some of its movements, so difficult to observe closely, and so quick to change many of its habits after a little persecution or change in methods of hunting, that it is not probable that any one person thoroughly understands the animal even in any one state. And I have heard the very best and oldest hunters of my acquaintance say that they were continually learning something new about deer." T.S. Van Dyke wrote that in 1904, and it remains just as true today.

The process of helping to grow and shape a new hunter is the epitome of investing in something that will outlive you. And when done correctly, it ensures that our tradition lives on, and all the rest is dreaming time. 

30-06 Thrive Nutritional Supplement for Fall and Winter

Fall and winter aren't just hunting seasons. They're also a period when you can help your deer thrive.

The Whitetail Institute's 30-06 product lineup includes four products: 30-06 Mineral/Vitamin supplement, 30-06 Plus Protein Mineral/Vitamin Supplement, 30-06 Mineral Supplement Block and 30-06 Thrive. All but Thrive are designed to be used in spring and summer to help improve antler growth, keep does in top shape during the late stages of pregnancy, increase milk production for newborn fawns and promote overall herd health. Thrive is the only 30-06 product scientifically formulated to help deer maintain body weight and overall health during fall and winter, which can be especially tough on deer.

During fall, food sources dwindle and eventually are exhausted or too tough for deer to effectively use. When you also consider the rigors of the rut and energy-sapping winter weather, you can understand why the cold months can take a heavy toll on deer health.

Thrive is formulated with a specific balance of energy, protein, mineral and vitamin components to help deer maintain body weight and overall health during fall and winter. It's nutrient-dense for winter stamina, helps deer maintain muscle mass, and helps replenish critical minerals and vitamins. It also includes antioxidant nutrients that help deer maintain a healthy digestive system and aid in muscle and tissue recovery. Thrive also contains Devour, the Whitetail Institute's exclusive scent and flavor enhancer, which is extremely attractive to deer.

Critical Understanding: Antler Growth in Bucks is a Secondary Characteristic

Also, remember that Thrive does indirectly help bucks improve antler growth the next spring. Antler growth in bucks is a secondary characteristic, which means it's not the top nutritional priority during the antler-growing window of spring and summer until a buck recovers the physical losses sustained during the previous winter. Therefore, the less a buck must recover after winter, the sooner he can devote more nutritional resources to antler growth the next spring. Thrive is designed to do that.

Although Thrive has critical nutrients deer can use all year, it is designed to be used in the fall and winter. Use 30-06 Mineral/Vitamin Supplement, 30-06 Plus Protein or 30-06 Block during spring and summer, and switch to Thrive after bucks have hardened their antlers and cooler fall weather arrives. In most areas, that generally occurs in September or October. Continue providing Thrive through fall and winter until it's time to transition back to 30-06 or 30-06 Plus Protein with the arrival of spring green-up.

Research indicates you should provide a supplement site for every 40 to 100 acres of land, depending on the habitat and size of your herd. When you have observed the usage of your sites, you can better determine the exact number of total sites needed. As with other 30-06 supplements, site selection is extremely important with Thrive. Deer prefer to be in cover, so select a site in a wooded area where deer feel safe, preferably just off a well-used trail, crossing or funnel.

Thrive is designed for use in ground sites, trough feeders and gravity feeders, and it can be mixed with corn at a rate of 10 to 20 pounds of Thrive to 100 pounds of corn. When creating a supplement area, use about 10 to 20 pounds of Thrive per site. Always keep the area well supplied to encourage continued use by deer.

Caution: Thrive is so attractive to deer that it is considered bait in some states, so be sure to consult your local game laws before using or hunting over a Thrive site. 🦌



Photo by Jason Say

REAL HUNTERS DO THE TALKING

(Continued from page 33)

about Whitetail Institute products...



My 75-year-old dad is my hero. He has always been a giver and has taught all five of his children and eight grandchildren to be givers. He taught me a lot of great things about life — the bad stuff I learned on my own. We have a lot of food plots planted in various Whitetail Institute products, including some 3-year-old Imperial Whitetail Clover plots that are doing great. We fertilize and spray them one time in the spring with Arrest Max, and they keep on producing. We also plant PowerPlant in the spring and use Whitetail Oats Plus, Beets & Greens and Ambush in our fall plots. We also use the 30-06 Mineral and 30-06 Plus Protein in the spring and summer.

This past Nov. 17 was the opening day of gun season in Alabama and it was a perfect morning, cool, clear skies and light winds. Dad decided he wanted to hunt what we call Sandy's stand after I told him it was full of big tracks. The field is planted in half Beets & Greens and half Whitetail Oats Plus, and the deer had been hammering it day and night. It still looked pretty good despite the heavy browsing.

He texted me about 7:30 a.m. and said he had seen about 20 does and small bucks. I told him to stay as long as he could because obviously the deer were moving like crazy. Well about 8:30 a.m., he texted me that seven racked bucks had just walked out. I knew I was probably about to hear a shot, but it didn't come. Until about 9:00 a.m. (Boom). I anxiously waited for a text, and about five minutes later he calls me on the phone and said he shot a good one. I said, "Sit tight, I'm on my way." And then I remembered to ask him if one deer ran, and he replied he fell about three feet straight down.

When I got to his stand, he was waiting on me, and we went out into the plot. When I saw his buck, I was like dang, that's a giant. He has 13 points and scores 157-7/8. A true Alabama trophy.

I can honestly say that day is the happiest I've seen him in a long time, and the only one that might have been more happy was me.

Dad can't do all the things he used to, but he isn't afraid to jump in on any project. In fact, we had a rain forecast this past October, and we still had some plots that needed planted. He worked with me side by side for two days and we finally finished a little after 10:00 p.m. on the second day. He earned this buck and it made my whole season, no matter what happens from here on.

Love you Dad.

Thank you, Whitetail Institute, for the great products and great advice.

Newt Norton - Alabama



Here is a very nice buck I took while hunting with Monquin Creek Outfitters in Virginia this archery season. I was set up in a pinch point leading to a Whitetail Oats Plus plot when I spotted this buck heading for the plot. He was 70 yards out and heading away, so I grunted at him, and he stopped and looked back. I grunted a second time, and he came in to 20 yards for a perfect shot. Monquin Creek Outfitters has numerous food plots strategically placed on their properties, and all of them are planted in Whitetail Institute products!

Hank Tassitano - Virginia



Send Us Your Photos!

Do you have photos and/or a story of a big buck, a small buck or a doe that you took with the help of Imperial products? Send it to us and you might find it in the Field Tester section of the next issue of *Whitetail News*. Email your digital photos and a three to four paragraph story telling how you harvested the deer and the role our products played to:

info@whitetailinstitute.com

or send them to:

Whitetail News, Attn: Field Tester Response
239 Whitetail Trail, Pintala, AL 36043



Check this out. Imperial White-tail Edge plot. We call this plot "The Meadow." It is a secluded area surrounded by woods, grasses, and swamp. It's a buck haven. Notice the picture had three sets of bucks pushing each other around and one buck refereeing. The picture was taken in the early rut in Wisconsin.

Kurt Dorfner - Wisconsin

SAVE A Few Dollars With Whitetail News

IMPERIAL WHITETAIL® CLOVER YOU SAVE \$55.00



Suggested Retail: \$279.96 (36 lbs. - 4.5 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$224.96

Please send _____ 36 lb. quantities of Imperial Whitetail Clover.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 36 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



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Suggested Retail: \$279.96 (36 lbs. - 4.5 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$224.96

Please send _____ 36 lb. quantities of Imperial Vision™.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 36 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL NO-PLOW® YOU SAVE \$40.00



Suggested Retail: \$149.96 (50 lbs. - 3 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$109.96

Please send _____ 50 lb. quantities of Imperial NO-PLOW Wildlife Seed Blend.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 50 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL EXTREME® YOU SAVE \$65.00



Sugg. Retail: \$289.96 (46 lbs. - 2 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$224.96

Please send _____ 46 lb. quantities of Imperial EXTREME Seed Blend.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 46 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL ALFA-RACK PLUS® YOU SAVE \$65.00



Suggested Retail: \$289.96 (33 lbs. - 2.5 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$224.96

Please send _____ 33 lb. quantities of Imperial Alfa-Rack PLUS Alfalfa-Clover Blend.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 33 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL FUSION® YOU SAVE \$65.00



Suggested Retail: \$289.96 (27.75 lbs. - 4.5 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$224.94

Please send _____ 27.75 lb. quantities of Imperial FUSION.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 27.75 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL WINTER-GREENS® YOU SAVE \$70.00



Suggested Retail: \$239.96 (24 lbs. - 4 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$169.96

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

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$12.00 for shipping and handling for each 24 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL PURE ATTRACTION® YOU SAVE \$35.00



Suggested Retail: \$94.96 (52 lbs. - 1 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$59.96

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

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 52 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL TALL TINE TUBERS® YOU SAVE \$65.00



Suggested Retail: \$199.96 (24 lbs. - 4 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$134.96

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

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
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Please add \$12.00 for shipping and handling for each 24 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL EDGE® YOU SAVE \$65.00



Suggested Retail: \$289.96 (52 lbs. - 2 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$224.96

Please send _____ 52 lb. bags of Imperial Edge.

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(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 52 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL WINTER PEAS PLUS® YOU SAVE \$10.00



Suggested Retail: \$120.00 (44 lbs. - 1-Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$109.96

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

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 44 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



IMPERIAL "CHIC" MAGNET® YOU SAVE \$50.00



Suggested Retail: \$139.94 (9 lbs. - 3 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$89.94

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

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$9.50 for shipping and handling for each 9 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) *Please enclose with shipping and payment information.*



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IMPERIAL WHITETAIL OATS PLUS® YOU SAVE \$13.00



Suggested Retail: \$49.95 (45 lbs. - 1/2 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$36.95

Please send _____ 45 lb. bags of Whitetail Oats Plus.

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Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 45 lbs. ordered. (Not available in Canada.)
Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL AMBUSH® YOU SAVE \$20.00



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Please send _____ 40 lb. quantities of Imperial Ambush.

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Please add \$18.00 for shipping and handling for each 40 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL BEETS & GREENS™ YOU SAVE \$70.00



Suggested Retail: \$239.96 (24 lbs. - 4 Acre Planting)

Price with coupon: \$169.96

Please send _____ 24 lb. quantities of Imperial Beets & Greens™.

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(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$12.00 for shipping and handling for each 24 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL MAGNET MIX BLOCK® YOU SAVE Up To \$25.00



Suggested Retail: \$59.96 and \$29.95

Coupon Price: \$34.96 or \$19.95

Please send _____ ☐ 2-Pak Blocks @ \$34.96

Please send _____ ☐ 1 Block @ \$19.95

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$12.00 for shipping and handling for EACH Block or \$18.00 for EACH Double Pack. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL 30-06® THRIVE™ YOU SAVE \$25.00



Suggested Retail: \$90.97 (60 lbs.)

Coupon Price: \$65.97

Please send _____ 60 lb. quantities of Thrive.

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$19.00 for shipping and handling for each 60 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



ARREST MAX® HERBICIDE YOU SAVE \$10.00 to \$50.00

Suggested Retail: \$49.95 (1 Pint - 1 Acre); \$189.99 (1/2 Gal. - 4 Acres)

Price with coupon: 1 Pint - \$39.95; 1/2 Gal. - \$138.96

Please send _____ pint(s) of ARREST MAX Herbicide.

Please send _____ 1/2 gallon(s) of ARREST MAX Herbicide.
Call for larger quantities.

TOTAL \$ _____ (Add 7% Sales Tax)

No charge for shipping and handling. Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL 30-06® BLOCK YOU SAVE Up To \$13.00



Suggested Retail: \$59.96 and \$29.95

Coupon Price: \$46.96 or \$24.95

Please send _____ ☐ 2-Pak Blocks @ \$46.96

Please send _____ ☐ 1 Block @ \$24.95

TOTAL Including shipping and handling \$ _____
(Add 7% Sales Tax)

Please add \$12.00 for shipping and handling for EACH Block or \$18.00 for EACH Double Pack. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



SLAY® HERBICIDE YOU SAVE \$10.00 to \$21.00

Suggested Retail: \$59.95 (4 oz. - 1 Acre); \$159.95 (1 Pint - 4 Acres)

Price with coupon: 4 oz. - \$49.98; 1 Pint - \$138.98

Please send _____ 4 oz. Package(s) of SLAY Herbicide.

Please send _____ Pint(s) of SLAY Herbicide.
Call for larger quantities.

TOTAL \$ _____ (Add 7% Sales Tax)

No charge for shipping and handling. Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



IMPERIAL 30-06® Mineral/Vitamin Supplements YOU SAVE \$25.00



Suggested Retail: \$90.97 and \$99.97 (60 lbs.)

Coupon Price: \$65.97 or \$74.97

Please send _____ 60 lb. quantities of 30-06™

☐ Original 30-06™ @ \$65.97

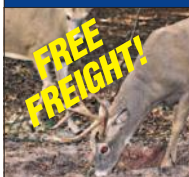
☐ 30-06™ Plus Protein @ \$74.97

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Please add \$19.00 for shipping and handling for each 60 lbs. ordered. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.) Please enclose with shipping and payment information.



KRAZE® Flavored Deer Attractant YOU SAVE \$40-\$65



Suggested Retail: \$119.99— 6-Pak, \$69.96— 3-Pak

Coupon Price: \$54.96 or \$29.97

Please send _____ ☐ 6-Pak KRAZE @ \$54.96

Please send _____ ☐ 3-Pak KRAZE @ \$29.97

TOTAL \$ _____ (Add 7% Sales Tax)

No charge for shipping and handling. (Canadian residents call for shipping charges.)
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Michael and Gavin Shaw – Indiana

This is my son's first deer. He came in before dark on his way to the Imperial Whitetail Clover plot that we had planted the year before. My son made a perfect shot with his crossbow, and the deer only went 50 yards before going down. My son was 11 years old at the time and now is hooked. Thanks, Whitetail Institute, for making these great products. You have a customer for life.

Andy Traister – Pennsylvania

I have been using Whitetail Institute products for around 10 years and have been absolutely amazed with the results. This year, I got to take my 7-year-old son, Hunter, out. We hunted over a Whitetail Institute Fusion plot that was getting hammered with deer. The first deer that showed up was a spike, and Hunter put a perfect shot on it. Before the deer left the plot, Hunter jumped in my arms shaking uncontrollably. He was so excited and is hooked on hunting with the help of Whitetail Institute products!



George Peachey – Wisconsin

On Friday, Nov. 24, last year, my granddaughter, Hope, and my wife, Diane, (Hope calls her Granny) decided they would go deer hunting. Diane, unnoticed by Hope, decided to leave her rifle at home. Hope now had to do the shooting. They went to Diane's tower stand which two people could comfortably hunt from. A buck appeared on the wooded ridge around 4 p.m. Diane told Hope it was a shooter but didn't mention how big the horns were, because Hope, being 15 years old, had never shot a buck. However, Diane could see the buck clearly, but with the woods



being so thick with fallen trees, brush and small trees, Hope couldn't see the buck clearly for a good shot.

The two of them decided to change seats, but carefully so as not to scare the buck. Finally, the opportunity came for Hope to have a clear shot in the vital area. As soon as Hope shot, the buck ran down the ridge, stumbling over fallen trees and falling, finally coming to rest at a huge oak tree (which you can see in the picture). Hope telephoned me (her Grandpa, called "Bumpa"). I drove my ATV and trailer to where they were, trying to find a way through the woods because of all the fallen trees. While looking at the buck lying there, I noticed one horn was busted off, but it was a fresh break. We started looking for the busted horn. Hope and I started back up the ridge. Meanwhile, Diane rolled the buck away from the tree and found the broken horn. Hope texted her mother, who was hunting across the road. She was hesitant to call her because her mother hadn't shot a buck this big yet. A while later we all enjoyed the happiness and congratulated Hope on shooting her first buck. She has been hunting for two years, had seen smaller bucks, decided to not shoot them and let them grow up. I am 78 years old, and through the years of my hunting experiences, it is a joy and privilege seeing generations of hunters being able to enjoy the sport as I have enjoyed it. 🍷

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Visit them online at www.tractoptics.com.

Email your First Deer photos and story to info@whitetailinstitute.com or send them to: Whitetail Institute of North America, 239 Whitetail Trail Pinilala, AL 36043, Attn.: First Deer Dept.

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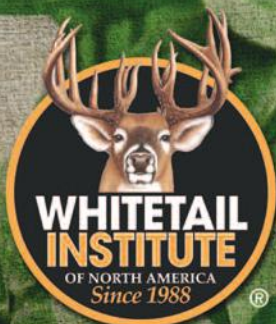


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FREE *Producing Trophy Whitetails* DVD, plus samples of Imperial Whitetail Clover®, Tall Tine Tubers®, Fusion®, No-Plow®, CHIC Magnet®, and Winter-Greens®. Each sample plants 100 sq. ft.

Offer 2: Only \$19.95 (s/h) Add 7% Sales Tax
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WHITETAIL INSTITUTE APPAREL

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Hunter Orange Logo Cap



Camo w/Tan Mesh Logo Cap



Brown w/Tan Mesh Logo Cap



Camo Logo Cap



Black Logo Cap

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All our Whitetail Institute tees are made from 100% preshrunk cotton, and feature screen-printed front and back designs.

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Front Chest Design



Front Chest Design



Upper Back Design



Upper Back Design



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Front Chest Design

Whitetail Institute Short Sleeve Tees

Available sizes:

S to XXXL

Available colors:

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Whitetail Institute Official Logo Short Sleeve Tees

Available sizes:

S to XXXL

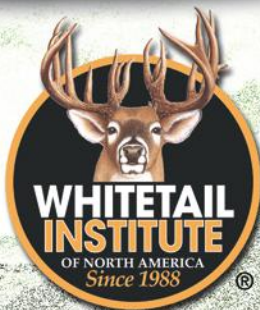
Available color:

White

Imperial Whitetail Clover

FIRST in the FIELD

SINCE 1988



When Imperial Whitetail Clover was introduced in 1988, it marked the first in the field of food plot management and deer nutrition. This new product gave hunters the ability to attract deer, hold them on their property and supply the herd with optimal nutrition throughout the year. In fact, deer hunters today are five times more likely to kill a buck that qualifies for the record books than before the introduction of Imperial Whitetail Clover.

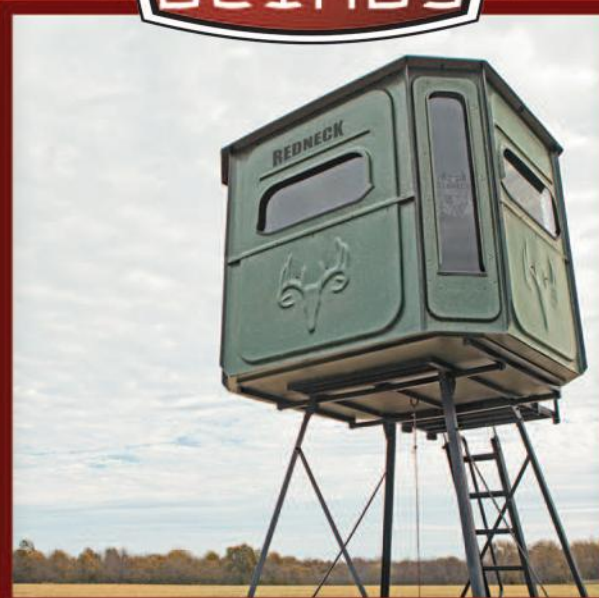
The Whitetail Institute's research and development staff have continuously upgraded and improved the original blend. Proprietary clovers developed by Whitetail Institute agronomists have been incorporated resulting in even better attraction and extremely high protein levels, up to 35%. These clovers are available only in Whitetail Institute products. Imperial Whitetail Clover was the first in the field and has become the gold standard by which all other food plot products are judged.

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