



THE WHY? FOOD PLOTS FOR WILDLIFE?

- 1) There are 3 main ingredients to what I call the formula for “Mega Bucks” namely; genetics, age and nutrition.
 - a. The first two pieces are probably the most difficult and will no doubt take the most time to achieve.
 - b. Of these nutrition is with out a doubt the quickest and simplest to provide.
 - i. Recent studies have shown that upwards of 60% of whitetail bucks in the wild would reach record book proportions with nutrition and age. So if you want to shoot a “Mega Buck” then don’t shoot a little one, “Let Him Go So He Can Grow!”
- 2) Look around when you’re out for a ride in the country.
 - a. You see acres and acres of barren fields, mostly golden rod, where there used to be farm crops.
 - b. Many of the small family farms that used to dot the countryside are gone along with the food sources they once provided for wildlife in that area.
- 3) That’s where food plots come into play. That said food plots do require planning, time, some money and a certain amount of sweat equity.
 - a. The amount of time, money and sweat required is directly proportionate to the equipment available.
- 4) Food plots can provide year round food sources for deer, turkeys and other wildlife.
 - a. Food plots can provide levels of protein well above the 16% benchmark level needed for whitetails to thrive and reach their genetic potential.
 - b. The Kerr study – took two groups of 1.5-year-old bucks – one group was fed an 8% protein diet (similar to what is found in nature) and the other group got a 16% diet. The 16% group averaged 230% more antler development and 25% more body weight.
 - i. Bucks need high levels of protein year round but especially during the magical 200 days of antler development.
 - ii. Does need the protein this food plot protein to maximize body development, provide proper nutrition for their fawns during pregnancy and during lactation after the fawns are born.
 - c. Food plots in combination with mineral supplements will give you the ability to meet these critical needs.
 - d. These food plots are an integral part of any wildlife management program.
- 5) Food plots provide more stand locations during hunting season.
- 6) A food plot is a great place for wildlife enthusiasts to have the opportunity to view wildlife even if they don’t hunt.

- 7) Food plots in concert with other sound management practices will in time provide the “Mega Bucks” you’re looking to grow on your property.
 - a. Set age and size standards for the bucks in your area.
 - i. Enforce those standards for example: one group in NY imposes a 2 year “no buck” penalty if a member harvests a substandard buck, harsh, maybe, however - it’s working for them.
 - b. Talk to your neighbors, partner with them, get them involved and work together towards a common goal, “Mega Bucks”, “Let Them Go So They Can Grow!”
 - c. Sound management practices combined with a food plot based nutritional program will make the difference. It will take 2 or 3 lean seasons but believe me it will be worth the wait. Let those over populated does provide your table fare.
 - i. If you just want venison, shoot a doe.
 1. Be selective here too, take older possibly barren does and older smaller bodied does. Be careful not to shoot button bucks.
 - ii. This will lower the buck to doe ratio.
 1. This makes bucks more receptive to calling.
 2. Shortens the rut period.
 - a. When too many does exist the rut can be extended to maybe 3 months.
 - b. This puts tremendous pressure and unbelievable stress on your best bucks and many may not survive the winter and those that do may be so weakened that they can’t reach their potential the next year.

THE HOW AND THE WHERE? STEPS IN FOOD PLOT PREPARATION

- 1) Determine the size(s), location(s), and number of food plots needed consider:
 - a. A good rule of thumb is that 3% of your total acreage should be devoted to food plots.
 - i. Thus percentage may vary with the population density of the deer.
 - b. Choose secluded sites.
 - c. Several small plots scattered throughout your management area will provide better results than one or two large ones.
 - i. This will reduce competition for food.
 - ii. Spread out the deer over your management area.
 - iii. Provide more stand locations for hunting season.
 - iv. Keep plots in their youngest vegetative state thus providing increased protein levels.
 - d. 3 – 5 hours of sunlight will be needed to establish a successful food plot.
 - e. If your property is mostly wooded consider clear cutting marginal timber areas and plant your food plot there.
 - i. A lot of time, work and money may be involved, but it’s worth it.
 1. You may be able to use money from the sale of the timber to finance some or the entire project.
 - f. Long narrow/ winding plots work well.
 - i. Whitetails are edge creatures and prefer these types of plots.
 - ii. Consider planting tall cover crops on the edges of plots that don’t boarder wooded or brushy areas making these plots more secluded.

- iii. Try planting a food plot in the center of another crop, for example corn or our Ringneck Ranch. Leave some trails seeded with the food plot blend leading to/from and through the cover crop.
 - 1. Ground blinds could be utilized to hunt this type of plot.
 - g. Trails and right of ways are also good choices for food plots.
 - i. These areas provide good ambush stand locations for hunting season.
- 2) Complete soil test(s) for all site location(s) to determine lime/fertilizer requirements for each site(s).
 - a. Take several random core samples from each site(s) 4” – 6” in depth.
 - i. A bulb planter works great for this task.
 - ii. Place the samples in plastic bucket mix them, remove a sample of that mixture, place it in a plastic bag, label it to identify it by site and have the sample(s) tested. (Coop office, the store where you buy your lime/fertilizer can tell you where to get the soil sample(s) tested.
 - iii. When you get your results back, if you need help, simply provide us with the results and we will help you determine the quantities of lime/fertilizer to apply.
- 3) Next you need to determine the specific seed blend for each of your plot(s) consider:
 - a. Till or limited tillage process.
 - b. Type of plot annual or perennial.
 - i. A perennial plot should last 3 – 4 years before replacement is needed.
 - ii. Both types have their benefits and in combination with mineral supplements can provide the necessary protein and nutrition levels on a year round basis.
 - c. Determine the quantity of seed needed for your plot(s).
 - d. Order the seed, If you need help here I can assist you.
- 4) Now the work begins consider:
 - a. Brush hogging and the application of a herbicide, especially if you don’t have the equipment to actually plow your plot.
 - b. Plowing, disking and float/drag to firm up the seedbed.
 - c. Spread lime/fertilizer and broadcast or drill the seed
 - i. Wait until the soil temp is at least 55 degrees.
 - ii. If it’s dry I suggest waiting until rain is in the forecast.
 - 1. The worst thing that can happen is that there’s sufficient moisture to germinate the seed but not enough to keep growing.
 - iii. You can plant all summer as long as you have sufficient moisture, so don’t rush it.
 - d. Roll or drag lightly to achieve the needed soil to seed contact.
- 5) If you don’t have access to farm equipment consider:
 - a. Dragging/roughing up the top 2 – 3 inches use what ever you have, wait a couple of weeks, then rough it up again, spread the lime/fertilize/seed and drag/roll.
 - i. Use what ever you have for example an old bed springs section of a drag and etc. Cabelas has a harrow that works well by pulling it with a 4 wheeler or garden tractor
 - b. If your plots are small you can use a rototiller.
 - c. You may be able to hire a local farmer to prepare your plot(s).
- 6) Now the fun part: enjoy watching the wildlife using the food plot(s) you have planted.
 - a. With a little luck your deer will keep your plot(s) mowed for you but if not when the plants reach 12 – 14 inches in height cut them back to 4 – 6 inches.
 - i. A brush hog will do the job.
 - ii. This mowing will encourage new, thicker, tender high protein growth this new growth will in turn keep the deer in your plot(s).

- iii. If it's very dry, consider delaying mowing until you get some rain. Without the moisture it takes longer for your plot(s) to regenerate.
- 7) If you can afford it, consider purchasing an infrared camera to see the animals and exactly when they are visiting your plot(s).

THE WHEN?

FOOD PLOT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

1. As concerned sportsmen, hunters, property owners and/or leaseholders it's time to stop talking about providing nutrition for deer and other wildlife. Take action!
 - a. For years I sat around hunting camp during the season talking to fellow hunters about how "next year" during the spring and summer we "should" put in some food plots. Until 3 years ago it never happened!
2. Almost 3 years ago I was looking for some seed to plant for my first food plot, most food plot companies are located in the Deep South. I had real concerns about whether or not the plants in their blends would survive the northern winters.
 - a. Then I found Wildlife Buffet, located in Minnesota, I began to communicate with Dean Mierau, founder of the company and the rest is history.
 - b. Since then I have planned and planted over 20 food plots, most of these were done with only a 4 wheeler. So the "I don't have a tractor" excuse isn't valid here!
 - i. You don't need to own hundreds of acres, my son has only 7 but we put in 4 small plots and a mineral station he has upwards of 10 – 15 deer using the plots on a regular basis.
 - ii. Several of my plots are on my neighbors, a farmer's, property in areas he doesn't use for crops. He feels if the deer eat my food they won't eat his.
 - iii. So you see if there's a will there's a way.
3. Here's the bottom line; if you want to help feed the wildlife on your property, provide more stand locations, grow bigger healthier does, fawns and in turn "Mega Bucks" then food plots are the only way to go.
4. Every journey begins with a first step! The first step on this journey is the planning process.
5. We have discussed food plots and the important role they play in any whitetail management program.
6. Now you need to apply and adapt the information we've covered to your property.
 - a. Develop a long-term, 3 – 5 year plan to include food plots, mineral stations, possible supplemental feeding and management standards for the harvesting of game in the management area.
 - i. Set goals and benchmarks, don't try to do it all at once, it may be too overwhelming and never happen.
 - ii. Topo maps, aerial photos and hand drawn grid drawings will help.
 - iii. Keep records of every plot planted, mineral and supplement usage and animals harvested. This will enable you to monitor your progress and revise your plan if necessary.
 - b. Establish an annual budget for foodplots.
 - c. We talked about where to put your food plots. Take the path of least resistance, if available, put your first plots in good areas that require the least amount of preparation time.

- i. When you see your results here you'll be excited and anxious to do whatever is required to stay on track and implement your plan.
 - ii. At this stage most plots should be perennial, since they should last 3 –5 years and won't need to be replaced until you near the end of your long-term plan.
 1. The exception might be Alpha Buck Fall Blend plot planted in August to provide needed carbohydrates for winter or cover/food plots used to create edges for your perennial plots with 2 or more sides bordering open fields.
 - d. Stay the course, Review your long term plan and results each year, revise as needed and continue to work towards your established benchmarks and goals.
7. The “when” is now not tomorrow, next week, next month or next year? Start planning today and then work your plan. Food plots and wildlife management do require some effort but the rewards will be worth the time and money spent. Imagine when you harvest a homegrown Boone & Crocket or Pope & Young buck on your property? What a rush that will be!

“PLANT IT AND THEY WILL COME!”

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