

## Food Plots Job Sheet

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)  
University of Missouri Extension – The School of Natural Resources

<b>For:</b>	<b>County:</b>
<b>Field(s):</b>	<b>Farm #:</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Tract #:</b>
<b>Designed By:</b>	<b>Contact Information:</b>

**PURPOSE:** Food plots are used to provide a wide variety of foods for a host of wildlife species. Typically they are planted to an annual agricultural crop, such as corn or milo, to provide a high energy source of food for wildlife in the winter. Interest in other types of plants for food plots, such as ladino clover for green browse or forage sorghum for escape cover and food, has increased in recent years. Although food is seldom the primary limiting habitat component for wildlife in Missouri, the use of food plots can provide important food and cover plants—both planted and natural—resulting in an increased abundance and diversity of foods available to a wide range of wildlife species. Grain plots also create important brooding/bareground habitat.



**Soybean Field next to Fallow Food Plot**



**Unharvested Corn Field Plot with Annual Forbs in Winter**

**SPECIFICATIONS:** Food plots come in two main types: (1) grain plots designed to provide seed; and (2) green browse food plots which offer succulent vegetation for wildlife forage. In some instances, the two can be combined. Food plots can also be created by leaving unharvested grain strips in crop fields.

For grain food plots, planting should be done early enough to allow adequate time for the crop to produce mature seed. In general, grain plots or unharvested grain crop strips should be a minimum of 0.25 acres in size, at least 30 feet in width, and located adjacent to good woody escape cover and diverse herbaceous cover. Establish plots so that soil loss is within tolerable limits, and planting on the contour is recommended. Food plots should be adequately fertilized and protected from livestock grazing. In most cases weed control should be limited, as the 'natural foods' provided by annual weedy plants are important to many wildlife species. Plots adjacent to woodland edges may need to be wider than 30' to lessen the impact of reduced production due to competition. In general, one plot per 40 acres of farmland is a minimum. Seeds produced on small plots are often exhausted by wildlife early in the winter; where possible consider increasing the plot size to one to two acres to provide longer-term benefits. In general, plots larger than four acres in size are unneeded. To maximize food diversity, establish a rotation where half of the grain plots are left fallow each year to allow native food plants

(annual broadleaves and grasses) to establish. Replant this fallow area the next year to your regular grain plot, and leave the other half fallow.

Green browse plots should be located adjacent to quality wildlife cover, and a minimum of one acre in size. The use of correct amounts of nutrients and maintaining desirable pH levels is important to ensure quality. Properly timed mowing can help to promote actively growing vegetation, especially for perennial plantings, and increase its attractiveness to wildlife. Mowing July 16 - September 30 is desired. Plots can also be mowed March 15 - May 1. It is recommended that only one-half of the plot be mowed annually, and that mowed strips are rotated, to increase plant diversity. Avoid planting aggressive non-native legume species.

**Grain mixtures:**

- 1. Grain Sorghum – 8#/acre  
Soybeans ---- 12#/acre
- 2. Grain Sorghum – 8#/acre  
Soybeans ----- 8#/acre  
German millet --2#/acre
- 3. Grain Sorghum – 12#/acre  
Sunflowers ----- 8#/acre
- 4.\* Grain Sorghum – 8#/acre \*this mixture is best used if planted in separate rows, e.g. two rows of  
Corn ----- 8#/acre corn and two rows of grain sorghum.

**Single species** grain plantings are also an option. If planting only one species, grain sorghum/milo will generally provide the best results.

Species	Broadcast Seeding Rate * (Pounds/acre)	Time of Year to Sow
Grain or forage sorghum	16 lbs	May – early June
Corn	15 lbs	April – early May
Sunflowers	8 lbs	April – early June
Oats	50 lbs	Fall – early spring
Wheat	50 lbs	September – early November
Buckwheat	40 lbs	May – June
Millet	20 lbs	April – June
Soybeans	45 lbs	April – May
“Bobwhite” Trailing Soybeans	6 lbs for pure stand, or 4 lbs. for mixtures	April – May

\* Rates can be reduced 50% for planting or drilling, except for soybeans, which could be reduced to 34-40#/ac.

**Fertilize grain plots** according to soil test. In the absence of a soil test, consider adding 150# of 12-12-12 fertilizer per quarter acre of food plot.

**Green Browse mixtures:**

- 1. Wheat ----- 30#/acre  
Timothy ----- 1#/acre  
Overseed half of mix 1 to ladino clover @ 2#/ac  
and red clover @ 2#/ac; overseed the other half  
with 10#/ac of lespedeza (Korean, Kobe, Summit  
or a mix of these).
- 2. Wheat -----30#/acre  
Alfalfa -----5#/acre  
Red Clover---2#/acre

Note: Wheat should be planted in the fall (September through October 15). Lespedeza should be planted in the spring.

Other mixtures and species may be used based on recommendations provided by a professional wildlife biologist. In some cases, simply disking may be sufficient to provide adequate natural foods. Note that there are specific program requirements for establishing food plots on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres.

#### Perennial Food Plot for Bobwhite Quail:

Beggar's lice (*Desmodium* spp.) provide an excellent perennial food source for bobwhite quail. Use a 5 PLS pounds/acre seeding rate. Existing vegetation should be controlled with an herbicide and/or disking prior to seeding. Perennial food plots may be seeded during the dormant season (November – February), or in the spring on a prepared seedbed by either broadcasting or drilling the seed. Dormant seedings are preferred.

Seedbeds prepared with disking should be cultipacked or rolled before and after planting. For dormant season plantings, the seed may be broadcast and rolled if the existing vegetation has been eradicated and more than 30% mineral soil is exposed.

#### MAINTENANCE:

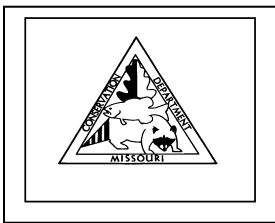
- Exclude livestock from plantings.
- Leave half of grain plots fallow each year to provide natural foods.
- Use proper fertilization to provide optimum benefits.
- Renovate and re-establish green browse plots every 3-4 years, or as needed, to maintain food values.

#### PRIMARY HABITAT CONSIDERATIONS:

- Provide food sources for targeted wildlife species. Food source can be seed, forage, or insects.

Consult with NRCS, MDC, or University Extension for additional recommendations.

Comment:



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