

Woodland
Wildlife
Supplemental
Feeding



Fawn



Mature Buck



Peas

Where to
Get Help

For more information about supplemental feeding contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service in the phone book under US Government

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Habitat Enhancement

Feeding and baiting white-tailed deer is common practice in Louisiana. Although common and currently legal, many health, biological, and ethical issues have been raised regarding this topic. The placement of feed (i.e., corn, grain, pellets, etc.) on the ground or in a feed trough or feeder has the potential for numerous negative impacts to the herd and other wildlife and domestic species, which typically override the positive gains. Increased congregation and direct contact associated with concentrating food items increases potential means for disease and parasite transmission with the promotion of abnormal feeding activities. Stationary feeding sites may also increase fecal accumulation which may increase the incidence of protozoan and bacterial infections (i.e., toxoplasmosis, salmonellosis, etc.) and miscellaneous viral diseases. Also feed quality is a concern. Mycotoxins, which are toxins produced by fungi, are important causes of disease in domestic livestock, birds, and on occasion been associated with wildlife mortality. These toxins can be found in spoiled feed, particularly cereal grains, corn, and peanuts that are contaminated by fungus of the genus *Aspergillus*. Exposure and toxicosis occur when an animal ingests toxins present in the feed. The toxins are immunosuppressive, hepatotoxic, and carcinogenic.

Habitat enhancements such as planting non-invasive vegetation can be a means to provide nutritious supplemental food while lessening negative impacts. Wildlife species such as white-tailed deer, rabbits, eastern wild turkey, northern bobwhite quail, and many non-game birds benefit from woodland openings planted with herbaceous vegetation. Some habitats are nutritionally limited and favorable food may not always be available, so large scale, year around food plot establishment can be warranted. Below are examples of commonly used techniques for the establishment and management of annual cool and warm season food plots mainly used for white-tailed deer.

Establishment

Locate food plots on non-erosive, non-flooded, and as loamy and fertile sites as possible, where wildlife will use them. Information from the NRCS Soil Survey can assist with these efforts. Utilize existing openings such as rights-of-ways, when possible. Rectangular openings can be situated to receive more sunlight, which is necessary for plant growth. Also rectangular openings may promote some sense of security (if immediately adjacent to escape cover). Distribute food plots evenly over the area and plant enough so crops will not be quickly depleted and wildlife will not be congregated.

In preparation of food plot establishment, an important issue is soil fertility. Representative soil samples should be collected and analyzed. Apply nutrients and soil amendments (i.e., lime, etc.) at recommended rates. Deer often prefer food plots, which have been well limed and fertilized over those which need amendments. Local NRCS or Cooperative Extension offices can help with soil sampling and analysis. Seedbed preparation should begin two to three weeks before planting. If the plot is just being established or has heavy weed cover it may be necessary to mow the plots prior to seedbed preparation. Generally, two diskings are sufficient to prepare a suitable seedbed to a minimum depth of three inches and incorporate lime and fertilizer. If dense weeds and/or brush covered the site prior to seeding, several diskings may be needed to prepare a suitable seedbed. Following tillage operations, but prior to seeding, seedbeds should be firmed with a roller, cultipacker, harrow, or section of chain-link fence. Remember that food plots do not have to look like agricultural fields to be effective. Naturally occurring vegetation can add diversity and may provide benefits to numerous species.

Seed can be broadcast or drilled. Large-seeded species such as wheat, oats, rye and some pea species can be disked into the soil to a depth of one to one and a quarter inches during seedbed preparation without negatively impacting germination. Small-seeded species such as clover, turnips, and rape should be planted on a firm seedbed and covered no deeper than one-fourth of an inch. Legume species (clover, peas, and vetch) require inoculation with the proper strain of *Rhizobia* bacteria prior to planting. Do not mix inoculant with legume seed using chlorinated water as a sticking agent. Chlorine can kill the *Rhizobia*. Soft drinks (colas) containing sugar make excellent sticking agents.

Recommendations

No single forage species can meet deer or other species' year round nutritional requirements. Combinations of plant species are recommended. Below are some recommended combinations of cool season and warm season species utilized by deer and other wildlife species. For more site-specific information and other recommended plant species contact a NRCS Wildlife Biologist, Plant Materials Specialist or Conservation Agronomist.



Plant Species	Planting Date	Seeding Rate (lbs./ac.)*	Planting Depth (inches)
Warm-season 2 species combination cowpeas (<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>) alyceclover (<i>Alysicarpus vaginalis</i>)	April-June	40	1/2-1"
		10	1/4-1/2"
Warm-season 3 species combination cowpeas (<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>) alyceclover (<i>Alysicarpus vaginalis</i>) American jointvetch (<i>Aeschynomene sp.</i>)	April-June	40	1/2-1"
		10	1/4-1/2"
		5	1/4-1/2"
Cool-season 4 species combination rye (<i>Secale cereale</i>) oats (<i>Avena sativa</i>) arrowleaf clover (<i>Trifolium vesiculosum</i>) ryegrass (<i>Lolium multiflorum</i>)	Sept.-mid Oct.	75	1/2-1"
		25	1/2-1"
		10	1/4-1/2"
		10	1/4-1/2"
Cool-season 4 species combination rye (<i>Secale cereale</i>) oats (<i>Avena sativa</i>) wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>) arrowleaf clover (<i>Trifolium vesiculosum</i>)	Sept.-mid Oct.	75	1/2-1"
		25	1/2-1"
		20	1/2-1"
		10	1/4-1/2"

*Seeding rate is for broadcast. Reduce rate by 20% if drilled. Reduce rate by 40 to 60% if plots are primarily for quail/turkey.



Site Preparation



Food Plot



White-tailed Buck

References

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