



ANNUAL WILDLIFE FOOD PLOTS

Upland Birds – Deer



Biology Job Sheet TX-17

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Many times an evaluation of the habitat for a desired kind of wildlife will reveal a shortage in the year-round food supply. This food shortage may be quite severe, and can occur at various times of the year. The land manager can help eliminate these shortages by establishing food plots that will make food available when native foods are in short supply. The following items should be considered when developing food plots for upland birds and deer:

EROSION CONTROL - Adequate erosion control must be maintained at all times. Soil surfaces should be protected by growing vegetation or plant residues during seasons of expected wind and water erosion. Dimensions of food plots should be governed by the erodibility index of the site. Minimize erosion by orienting plots on the contour and/or perpendicular to the direction of the prevailing wind.

SHAPE OF FOOD PLOTS - Wildlife food plots should be designed to create as much "edge" as feasible. For example, a rectangular shape is better than a square. However, to maximize the "edge" effect plots can be designed in long bands or strips. These bands should not exceed 100 feet in width. Food plots laid out in bands can also serve as a firebreak.

SIZE - As a general rule, several small food plots, properly located within an animal's home range is better than one large plot. For quail and pheasant a minimum of one acre in food plots should be established for each 20-25 acres of the bird's range. For deer and turkey establish 3-10 acres in food plots for each 100 acres of the animal's range.

LOCATION - Food plots should be located as near as feasible to protective cover. Plantings for quail and pheasant should be within 200 feet of escape cover. Plantings for deer and turkey should be within 300 feet of escape cover.

PLANT MATERIALS - Seeds used in plantings should be of genetic and climatic origin known to be locally adapted.

Plantings can be made in pure stands; however, it is generally better to plant them in a mixture that contains several species. Mixtures can be seeded simultaneously or in strips of pure stands within individual food plots. When plots are designed as narrow bands, different species may be planted in a series of bands.

Care should be given in selecting species of plants that will produce food when native foods are in short supply.

The Standard and Specifications for Wildlife Upland Habitat Management contains a listing of plants that can be used in wildlife food plots.

MANAGEMENT - Seedbeds should be clean tilled and fertilized in accordance with a current soils test. Seedbed preparation in future years should be determined by the natural reseeding of food plantings. When natural reseeding is adequate, plots should be shredded to control standing residue and chiseled once with chisels spaced 12 inches to 18 inches apart. When natural reseeding is inadequate, seedbeds should be clean tilled and properly fertilized before planting.