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Food Plot Considerations

Fall is here and so is hunting season. Dove season opened the beginning of the month and rifle season for deer is quickly approaching. If you are an avid hunter and/or manage land for deer, you may be considering planting a winter food plot. Before you plant a food plot there are a few things to consider first. When determining what the best option for your property is ask the following questions:

- What management goals are you hoping a food plot will accomplish?
- Will the forage be available during the stress periods for deer and benefits them nutritionally?
- Will the forage benefits justify the required costs and effort?
- What areas on the property are good locations for food plots?
- Do you have the necessary equipment to establish and manage food plots?

After you have answered these questions and determined your goals for the food plot, the next step is to decide the location of the food plot as well as its size. The habitat available (water, food, and cover) on the land will help in determining the type and amount of acreage that should be planted. Recommended sizes for food plots vary from ½ to 5 acres depending on the forages being used and the type of wildlife the food plot is being planted for. Usually larger, 3–5-acre food plots are the most beneficial for deer as smaller plots are often grazed down by deer.

Once you have determined the size of plot, next is the decision of what type of forages to plant. Choose forages that are palatable to deer, will provide nutrition during stress periods (such as rut), and are suited to the location of the food plot. The type of forage that is suited the best to the food plot will depend on soil fertility, sunlight availability, soil drainage, density of the deer herd, and surrounding land use practices. For example, if the food plot will be in a location that receives little rainfall, you might consider a more drought tolerant plant like cowpeas. Or if your goal is to have a food plot that is more available during the hunting season rather than the summer, milo or corn could be considered. Sunflower is another possibility if you also want to attract doves along with deer to the plot. Another consideration when deciding the size of food

plot and what to plant is the type of equipment you have available to use to plant and maintain the food plot.

It is also important to have the soil tested to determine if any fertilizer or liming is required for the forages you plan on growing. To collect a soil sample, gather soil from 4-6 random locations in the food plot, roughly 4 inches deep, and then mix the samples together and allow the soil to dry. The soil sample can then be taken to your local extension office in Crawford, Labette, Montgomery, or Wilson counties to be sent off to be tested.

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