Warm Season Food Plots for White-tailed Deer

By Jennifer Bearden

There are many ways to improve white-tailed deer habitat. One of those ways is planting agricultural crops in food plots. Food plots are only one component of deer habitat management. Other components include prescribed fire, thinning pines, and promote diversity of trees, shrubs, and grasses. Food plots are used as either attractants or supplemental nutrition. Most food plots are cool-season food plots. Cool season food plots are typically used as attractants, primarily, although they do provide some supplemental nutrition in one critical nutritional time for deer. Cool season plants chosen are highly desirable by deer. Warm season food plots are typically used as supplemental nutrition to the deer population, providing nutrition when population numbers are highest and deer are nutritionally stressed due to antler growth and fawn rearing. Plants are chosen for their nutritional value as well as palatability. When selecting plants, we should look at Crude Protein (CP) and Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN). White-tailed deer need a minimum of 17% CP for maximum body and antler growth and browse in Florida flatwood habitats only average 7.7% CP.

Site selection and soil prep

Warm season plots are typically larger in size than cool season plots. Three acres or more are desirable to provide adequate nutrition. Depending on deer densities in areas, 5-10 acre plots may be needed. Site selection is important. An area should be chosen where soils will hold moisture but not be saturated during wet weather periods.

Soil tests should be performed months in advance to planting. Soil pH will take time to adjust. To take a soil sample, obtain the following items:

- One non-metal bucket
- A soil probe, soil auger or shovel
- Newspaper or paper towels
- Soil sample bag or plastic bag

Using the soil probe, auger or shovel, take 10-20 subsamples per plot from the top 6-8 inches of topsoil. Mix these subsamples in the bucket. Spread the sample onto newspaper or paper towels to dry. When dry, fill the soil sample bag and ship to a trusted commercial lab or contact your local Extension Agent for instructions on sending it to the University of Florida Extension Soils Testing Lab for analysis. For more information about soil fertility, see EDIS pub SL248, *Soil Fertility Management in Wildlife Food Plots(http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/SS/SS46800.pdf).*

There are a lot of options for plants that can be used. It is important to choose plants that are best suited for your unique situation. You will need to evaluate your soils, your time and your money that you are willing to invest into the food plots.

Perennial Peanut

Description: Perennial, long-lived leafy, 12-16 inches tall, spreading by rhizomes, yellow/orange flowers
Varieties: Florigraze, Arbrook, UF Tito, UF Peace
Soil Adaptation: Grows best on well-drained sandy soils. Will not tolerate poor drainage.
pH: 6.0
Planting Dates: February-May
Planting Rates: 80-100 bu/ac
Crude Protein: 13-18%

Alyceclover

Description: Annual, erect, thin-stemmed, rounded leaves, pink flowers, not a true clover.
Varieties: N/A
Soil Adaptation: Well-drained sandy soils
pH: 5.5-6.0
Planting Dates: April-June
Planting Rates: 15-20 lbs/ac. Inoculant needed
Crude Protein: 16-18%

American Jointvetch (Aeschynomene)

Description: Annual legume
Varieties: Also called deer vetch or Aeschynomene americana
Soil Adaptation: Well-drained soils
pH: 5.5-6.0
Planting Dates: March-June
Planting Rates: 5-8 lbs/ac dehulled, 20-25 lbs/ac intact. Inoculant needed
Crude Protein: 8-18%

Forage Soybeans –

Description: Annual. Bushy, leafy plants.
Varieties: Hinson Long-Juvenile soybean
Soil Adaptation: Well-drained soils.
Target pH: 6.5
Planting Dates: April to July
Planting Rates: Seed planted at 60 to 100lbs/ac. Inoculant needed
Crude Protein: 17-21%

Iron Clay Peas

Description: Annual, viney, week stems, large leaves, curved pods.
Varieties: N/A
Soil Adaptation: Well-drained soils
pH: 5.5-6.5

Planting Dates: May-June
Planting Rates: 30-40 lbs/ac drilled, 100-120 lbs/ac broadcast. Inoculant needed
Crude Protein: 17-21%

Lablab or sweet hyacinth bean

Description: Vigorous summer twining annual legume.
Varieties: N/A
Soil Adaptation: Well-drained soils, tolerant of short periods of flooding.
pH: 6.0-6.5
Planting Dates: April-June
Planting Rates: 20 lb/ac broadcast. Inoculant needed
Crude Protein: 17%

Brown Top Millet

Description: Annual, erect, 2-3 foot tall, leafy, fine-stemmed.
Varieties: N/A
Soil Adaptation: Well-drained soils
pH: 5.5-7.0
Planting Dates: May-August
Planting Rates: 15-20 lb/ac drilled, 25-30 lb/ac broadcast.
Crude Protein: 8-11%

Forage	Lb/ac	Planting Dates	Planting Depth
Perennial Peanut	80 bu/ac	February-May	1 ½ - 2-inch
Alyceclover	15-20 broadcast 15-17 drilled	April-June	¼ to ½-inch
Jointvetch	20-25 broadcast 5-8 drilled	March -June	½ to ¾ -inch
Forage Soybeans	50-70 broadcast 30-50 drilled	April -June	½ to 1-inch
Iron Clay Peas	100-120 broadcast 30-40 drilled	May-June	¼ to ½-inch
Brown Top Millet	25-30 broadcast 15-20 drilled	May-Aug	½-inch
Lablab	20 broadcast	April -June	½ to 1-inch