

## Food Plots Can Benefit Wildlife

Now is the time to plant warm-season food plots for wildlife. Some readers may be thinking, “Why would I want to attract wildlife, especially deer?” I know exactly where you’re coming from there. When I was elementary school in the seventies, we didn’t see all that many deer. This has sure changed! Now, it’s very common to see deer along the interstate, in city and state parks, and even in populated housing developments.

Urban development has taken over wildlife habitat pushing deer out into space which may happen to be just outside your front door. It’s all of a matter of available habitat which includes food, water, shelter, and space.

Deer invade home landscapes in search of food. Wildlife food plots are an alternative for providing a food source for wildlife where natural habitat is diminishing. Food plots also provide smaller wildlife protection from predators and weather.

According to Dr. Craig Harper, UT Extension Wildlife Specialist, the best food plot should be planted with a combination of forage species. Multi-species plots will ensure forage availability over a longer period of time and will reduce that the chances of a total failure due to pests or drought.

Harper also points out that wild turkeys and quail benefit by feeding on the insects and other invertebrates in the plot. Mowing a strip through the plot will make the grain more accessible to smaller birds like quail and dove.

Food plots should be located away from roads to help reduce poaching. I recommend that you get a soil sample and follow the recommendations for soil and fertilizer.

Some good forage species for wildlife are alyceclover, American joint vetch, buckwheat, dwarf essex rape, forage-type turnips, soybeans, and cowpeas. Don’t forget to inoculate the legumes prior to planting to ensure nitrogen fixation. According to Harper, properly inoculated seed may produce over 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre.

When seeding plot, it is critical that you prepare a good seedbed. You’ll probably need to cultipack or firm the seedbed prior to seeding. Sow the seed and cultipack again. If you don’t have cultipacker, you’ll need to focus on good seed-to-soil contact and not get the seed too deep.

Food plots will add to the quality and quantity of the natural vegetation available to wildlife. For more, you may be interested in the UT Extension publication, PB 1769 – A Guide to Successful Wildlife Food Plots Blending Science with Common Sense.