



# DUAL-PURPOSE PLOTS FOR DEER AND TURKEYS

Want to attract whitetails and turkeys to your property?  
Consider these tips.

■ by *Darron McDougal*

If you own, lease or manage property for white-tailed deer, you've probably put some effort into cultivating food sources that attract them to critical locations. If you also hunt turkeys, or if you're an outfitter who runs turkey hunts at properties where you conduct deer hunts, it's wise to consider crafting your food plots to attract and hold both species.

This requires almost no additional effort during planting, as deer and turkeys have similar plant-life diets and everyday necessities. However, planning and forethought will help you achieve optimal results. Several considerations can boost your plot's productivity for hunting and pure attraction.

In this article, we'll explore insights from land manager and Whitetail Institute General Manager William Cousins and personal observations from longtime turkey hunting expert Brian Lovett. Hopefully, they will give you a greater understanding of what will make your food plots deer and turkey magnets.

## LOCATION

The saying, "If you build it, they will come," is true to an extent with food plotting, but you can increase your plot's potential by locating it strategically. Of course, if you're clearing trees and brush for a new plot, you can choose any location rather than using an existing one. Let's discuss some tips that can help you select a good location.

"While turkeys sometimes use terrain much like deer do, they're certainly less predictable," Lovett said. "If your plot is located near potential roosting trees, it's possible birds will use the plot frequently. Look at all aspects beyond the plot itself to determine why turkeys would be likely to use the area, and that'll help you choose a good spot."

For deer, start by identifying potential bedding areas, and then determine how deer might use terrain features to enter and exit the plot. Also, account for prevailing winds. You can set up a plot to have a stand or blind on the downwind side of the anticipated entry or exit point for an archery-close encounter.

For turkeys, prevailing winds are irrelevant, so although birds might enter and exit a plot somewhat unpredictably, they might be more susceptible than deer because you have more setup options. Your focus involves how to get a gobbler within 40 yards of your setup. If you make the plot 60 by 60 yards, you can place a ground blind in the middle. Then, any longbeard that pokes his head into the plot — whether he commits to your decoys or not — is well within shooting range.

Other shapes and configurations can optimize your plot for shooting opportunities at deer and turkeys.

"A lot of hunters like an hourglass-shaped plot or one that includes some other type of pinch point," Lovett said. "You almost have to tailor your plot toward whitetail hunting even if you want to attract turkeys, too. That's because, with turkeys, you generally have more setup options since the wind isn't a factor, and because you can place a ground blind just about anywhere in the absence of cover and use decoys to bring birds to you."

## PLANNING

After you've selected a location, always take a soil test to ensure food plot success. Next, identify common denominators between whitetails and turkeys before you plant.

"Turkeys, in some cases, will eat practically anything they can fit in their mouths," Lovett said. "They use many different forages, from soft masts to hard masts to insects to green vegetation. In terms of planting, Turkey Select Chufa has long been proven to attract turkeys. The tubers are easily scratched up and are sized perfectly for foraging."

"For year-round nutrition, Imperial White-tail Clover is arguably the best. It greens up early in spring, a critical time when turkeys have fewer foods available, particularly in Northern climates. The first green shoots really attract the hens. Obviously, whether hens are ready or not, gobblers will be nearby, showing interest in breeding."

Lovett also said clover expends well year-round for turkeys.

"During summer between mowings, it gets fairly tall and holds a lot of bugs," he said. "Insects are critical food for young poults, as is the clover. They need the protein to grow. An insect-riddled clover plot is a natural draw for family flocks. As fall progresses, there are usually many food sources available, but as some begin to diminish, they'll hit that clover again just like they did early in spring. It's a terrific all-year forage."

Of course, whitetails also love to forage on clover. Like turkeys, whitetails will hit it extremely hard during early spring through September. Often, it takes a back seat during the middle of the season, as other food sources become primary, but whitetails will eat clover all year, even pawing through snow to get it.

Years ago, my brother and I planted brassicas in a small 1/8-acre plot. We attracted some deer, but the area wasn't a magnet, and we didn't hunt it. The next year, I planted it with a clover and chicory mixture. I attracted more deer (including



seven bucks) but constantly had turkeys on my trail cameras, too. That season, I bow-killed a fall turkey and a mature doe in the tiny plot. My results suggest that although clover is king, chicory has its place in a dual-purpose plot, too.

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

When you've chosen a location and prepared the soil for seeding, start with year-round nutrition in Whitetail Institute's Imperial Whitetail Clover, and also consider mixing with Chic Magnet, which is a forage chicory deer and turkeys love. If you want to angle your plot a bit more toward turkeys, planting a dedicated area with Turkey Select Chufa can enhance its allure.

Cousins provided closing input worth considering.

"Whitetail Clover is certainly a great perennial, but I don't plant a perennial in the fall without also planting the nurse crop," he said. "I start by broadcasting fertilizer, and then I broadcast Whitetail Oats Plus as the nurse crop. I back the broadcast rate from 90 pounds per acre to only about 35



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

## TURKEY SELECT

- High-quality chufa that attracts and holds turkeys. The nut-like tubers produced are scratched and devoured by turkeys.
- Perennial — Designed for late summer/fall food source

### Optimum Growing Environment:

- Soil Type: Medium- to well-drained soils
- Soil pH: 5.5 - 7.5
- Sunlight: 6 hours of daily sunlight
- Best planted in late spring or early summer



to 45 pounds per acre. I'll lightly drag the oats and fertilizer in, and then finish by broadcasting clover at the full seeding rate."

Cousins' strategy lets the oats reach a height where they provide some cover within the plot for turkey poults and fawns. He also suggested creating a "soft edge" around the plot for additional cover and security.

"When I'm spraying or mowing my plots in the spring, I like to leave 20 to 30 feet all the way around the circumference untouched," he said. "Natural vegetation along with the oats and clover creates a soft edge with cover that makes good nesting

habitat for turkeys and other birds. It's also great for fawns."

### CREDIT ROLL

Now that we've explored the topic, roll up your sleeves, and get to work. Create an environment where whitetails and turkeys coexist during feeding times. You'll have the satisfaction of more shot opportunities while hunting and will also find enjoyment watching both species use an area you built just for them.

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