



Food plots offer so much more than just nutrition for deer and better hunting. More land managers have found purpose beyond simply harvesting venison.

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FOOD PLOTS FOR THE SOUL



■ This image shows the author and his father in the 1980s, providing for deer before being introduced to food plots.

When the Whitetail Institute of North America was founded in 1988, the food plot we know today was nothing more than a vision to its founder, Ray Scott. At the time, little was known about deer nutrition, and even the most astute hunters had limited options for seed when it came to planting what were then referred to as greenfields for deer, save for a handful of clover varieties and cereal grains customarily grown for cattle.

Scott set out to change the way we pursued whitetails, and deer hunting has never been the same.

THE FOOD PLOT REVOLUTION IS BORN

Scott and his team devoted years and vast sums of money researching, breeding and cross-breeding the genetics of various plant varieties. As their work continued, it became clear that white-tailed deer preferred certain plants. Deer would pass over mainstay greenfield plants to indulge in the varieties researchers were developing.

In addition to superior attraction and palatability, Scott's varieties featured exceptional levels of critical nutrients that boosted body weights, antler mass and overall herd health. Researchers saw consistent ground-breaking results, and when Whitetail Institute's flagship seed, Imperial Whitetail Clover was released and began hitting the soil across the whitetail's range, hunters realized the impact Scott's food plots were having on hunting success.

A NEW PARADIGM UNFOLDS

Flash forward to today, and something else is also crystal clear: Food plots offer so much more than just food for deer and better hunting. More hunters-turned-land-managers have found purpose and satisfaction beyond simply harvesting venison. Food plots nurture a profound relationship to the land we've been entrusted with during our brief time here — a connection that reaches deeper than the roots of the seeds we sow. Knowing that we're contributing to the abundance — or in some cases, correcting a deficit — of natural resources that sustain and help wildlife flourish, there's nothing more rewarding than seeing a food plot through the various stages of planning, planting and producing.

For some people, deer hunting is an annual ritual or event — something they look forward to with the same level of excitement or anticipation as Christmas morning for a child — but often nothing more. The hunt, obviously, is no less enjoyable than that of other hunters, but food plotting is simply a tool in their kit. Plant a food plot and improve your odds of harvesting a deer.

For others, like me — and I'm betting you, too — food plots offer much more. They're more than just a labor of love. They're a way of life. We read each issue of Whitetail News cover to cover and often several times again because the plots we plant and animals we pursue are a 365-day-of-the-year passion. They offer much more than just improved habitat for whitetails and other wildlife. We plant them not for mere personal gain or an advantage during hunting season but for the satisfaction of knowing we're providing an opportunity for the animals in our neck of the woods to thrive. There's simply no better feeling than watching wildlife in a food plot you cultivated.

YEAR-ROUND BENEFITS

When the freezer is full and a seemingly all-too-brief hunting season has ended, long after the bows, rifles and smoke-poles have been put away and the woods grow quiet again, food plots continue yielding even the most intangible benefits. For example, what better way to introduce friends, family, prospective hunters and nonhunters to the sport and lifestyle we

hold dear than by welcoming them to join in the fun of planning and planting a food plot? Sharing such valuable one-on-one time with another person, young or old, can be the most engaging and rewarding experience you might ever know.

Outside of hunting season, food plots also let us spend more time in the woods observing wildlife, uncovering new experiences, exploring new ideas and contemplating the age-old question so many of us ask: "Where'd be another great spot for a plot?"

Tools such as the Institute's first-of-its-kind Plot Perfection app helps habitat managers improve plans for upcoming seasons by guiding them along the path to food plot and hunting success. The web-based tool, with easy access through any computer, tablet or smartphone, provides a holistic view of the food plot process by integrating, maps, trail cameras, seed ratios, fertilizer calculations, soil test analysis and much more. The digital experience is easy to use and an exceptional tool designed to keep things clean and organized. What's more, when control of the app is placed in the hands of today's technically savvy

youth, it can be educational and empowering, in addition to helping develop or hone decision-making and leadership skills.

The success of a food plot is ultimately at the mercy of Mother Nature, and try as we might even after a lifetime of learning to correctly do all the steps that lead to a lush, bountiful food source, things don't always go as planned. I have noticed, though, she tends to smile on those who embrace the challenge of doing more for wildlife beyond simply investing in a filled tag.

AND LIFELONG LESSONS

Though food plots pull at our purse strings, it's often the heart strings that are tugged most. Before you know it, a young hunter's time in the woods with a father and uncle opening a new plot quickly matures into the next generation of habitat managers eager to invest the time, energy and money into improving what will someday be entrusted to them. Simply put, food plots nourish the soul.



SOIL TEST KIT

Whitetail Institute Soil Test Kits provide the data you need for great food plots. Professional laboratory soil testing is one of the most important things you can do to ensure food plot success. The Whitetail Institute offers professional results and recommendations for all Imperial Whitetail products, as well as other crops. Accurate fertilizer and lime recommendations are provided.

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