



A HARD-NOSED LOOK AT FOOD PLOTTING

The author has learned a thing or two during his decades of growing food plots. His real-world experience can help you better manage your property.

■ by *Gerald Almy*

Some writers would likely tackle this subject from a character-building or human-interest perspective — how they have developed as people or perhaps even spiritual growth they've gained from growing food plots. Great approach. But as a mostly nuts-and-bolts writer, I settled on a more down-to-earth view.

I'll highlight the most important practical consider-

ations I've learned to help me to grow the most nutritious plots possible, which have improved the health of deer, enhanced my hunting and let me watch bucks from my office window almost every day.

Here's a summation of those lessons since beginning this long journey soon after Ray Scott started the food plot craze in the late 1980s by founding the Whitetail Institute.

YOU MUST BE A DECISION MAKER

You will need to make choices almost every day in the world of food plotting. These decisions will affect how well your food plots grow and how well they fill the role you want them to play in the wildlife management plan for your property — what to plant where, when to plant, what equipment you need, when to mow, when to apply herbicides and where to carve out new plots.

YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES

Learn from them. Through the decades I've grown plots, I've probably made every mistake possible. But thankfully, I've learned from them. By seeing what I did wrong, I've learned to take the right approach the next time a similar situation arose.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING ADVICE

Yes, you can learn from mistakes. But you can also avoid many mistakes through careful research and, more important, by getting input from the experts at the Whitetail Institute. In the long run, if you're a good listener and heed the advice, you'll save time, money and wasted effort by following these pros' recommendations.

THE NEED TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

This is a corollary lesson to the previous consideration. If you follow the directions on the bag of seed carefully and don't skip steps, you'll probably find you don't need much advice. The people at the Whitetail Institute have covered every detail about how to successfully plant each of the many seed types offered. Follow them. You will be surprised how well your plots turn out and how few mistakes you commit.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WEED-FREE PLOT

This is one of the biggest challenges food plotters face. First, use Roundup or a generic glyphosate herbicide. Till repeatedly, and then spray again if needed. Till again if green shoots still appear. Then hit the problematic vegetation as it crops up in the plot with Arrest Max for grasses and Slay for broadleaf weeds.



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL WINTER-GREENS

- Brassica mix designed for late-season hunting and as a late-season food source. Contains proprietary WINA kale and Tall Tine Tubers.
- Annual: Valuable nutrient source for winter

Optimum Growing Environment:

- Soil Type: For medium- to well-drained upland type soils
- Soil pH: 6.0-7.5
- Sunlight: 4 to 6 hours of broken, filtered or direct sunlight a day



LINK: <https://bit.ly/2PZF1Ah>

Nothing can ruin a plot quicker than allowing weeds to overtake it. Sure, you'll have some, but keep them to a minimum. Also, soil testing and following the recommendations creates an ideal environment for your desired plants to flourish and out-compete weeds.

IT'S VITAL TO WATCH YOUR TIMING

Deciding when to plant specific forages is one of the most important decisions you'll make. But again, if you follow the charts in *Whitetail News* or the information included on each bag of seed, you'll be sure to hit that window of opportunity when you can grow the best plot possible.

For example, when planting a brassica mixture such as Winter-Greens or Tall Tine Tubers, there's a danger of planting too early or late. If you sow the seed too early, it might die in hot, dry late-summer weather or go to seed and be unpalatable. If you plant too late, the crop won't have time to reach full potential in size and tonnage of forage produced. As admitted, I've made plenty of mistakes in food plotting, and that was one I've committed on both sides of the pendulum. I've eliminated that mistake by keeping a planting calendar, which highlights in colored markers when each type of food plot must go in the ground in my area of the country, the mountains of western Virginia. There's usually a window of several weeks, and I make sure I get the seed in the ground during that time.

VARIETY IS IMPORTANT

In my early years of food plotting, I was so wildly impressed with Imperial Whitetail Clover that I was reluctant to use any of my small acreage for other

plants. Eventually, as I saved and purchased more land, I began broadening my offerings to include a wide variety of Whitetail Institute products.

I realized that although Imperial Whitetail Clover could be the backbone of my food plot program, I needed other forages that would thrive and reach peak palatability through various time frames, including the heart of winter, and hot, dry spells in summer. And there was a need for other plants to attract other deer. Some bucks prefer one type of food, but others go nuts about another forage.

It's foolhardy to buy cheap seeds and generics. Living on an outdoor writer's income, it was tempting to buy generic or cheap brand seeds occasionally. But time and again, I would see the dramatic difference between plots sown with those and Whitetail Institute products. When you consider other expenses in food plotting, hunting, wildlife management and life, the minor extra cost for the best seed available is well worth it.

THE REWARD

You can keep mature bucks on small properties, but you must do two things. You must provide them with ample forage and other crucial things, such as water, a sanctuary, thermal cover, native foods, dense security cover and protection from trigger-happy neighbors. You also need to avoid having those mature bucks feel pressured by resisting the temptation to overhunt plots. An old buck that's not pressured will often spend most his time on a small parcel. Give him what he wants, including great food plots, and that could be your land.