

I've been making poor-man's food plots since 1995. They are made from small natural openings or semi-openings in cover or on the edge of the woods. The goal is to turn these hidden spots into productive staging-area food plots using only hand tools and no large equipment.

I've tried several methods for making these plots and have reached several conclusions about what works best. The plots will typically be ¼ to ½ acre, and anyone can make them almost anywhere — even on a permission farm.

Poor-man's plots are a simple way to turn a good hunting area into a great one. Almost all the best stand sites on the farm I hunted for 18 seasons were on the edges of small openings — mostly tiny poor-man's food plots. When located inside cover, these small plots offer excellent hunting during mornings and evenings.

Dry conditions are the biggest cause of failure with poor-man's plots, so plant as early in spring as possible to catch at least a few weeks of decent rains before the summer sun bakes the plot.

By changing to a fall seed blend, you can also plant them in mid- to late summer, before early fall rains, with excellent success.

### WHERE TO CREATE IT

Entry and exit routes are the most important factor to consider when deciding where to make a poor-man's plot. The spot you choose must be one you can sneak into and out of without deer knowing you are — or were — there. That means you must find a potential site that has an access route that avoids nearby feeding and bedding areas.

You might need one route to enter and another to leave. That's common with poor-man's plots because of where they're located — ideally right between bedding and feeding areas. The extra work you expend to get in and out clean is critical to long-term success.

Because the wind usually swirls in low valleys, the best spots for poor-man's plots are on a ridge, or at least flat land where the wind is stable.

Any natural opening is a great starting point. I like to place my small plots just inside cover from larger fields whenever I can. This often works well because farmers cannot turn big equipment at the back end of ridges, where they narrow. These areas often grow up in brush you can hollow out to form your ideal plot.

### HOW TO BUILD A POOR MAN'S PLOT

My method relies on almost zero power tools — just a chainsaw or powered pole saw — to build. You will, however, need a creative way to mow the plot later if

you plant it with clover. I've even seen guys using old push mowers and riding lawn mowers.

**MAKING THE OPENING:** Cut off any small trees and large brush as close to the ground as possible so you can plant and mow over them. If there aren't too many trees, consider actually digging down to make your cut below ground level.

The perfect size for a poor-man's plot is roughly ¼ to ½ acre — 50 to 75 yards long by 30 to 40 yards wide. Small plots create the best shots with a bow. If possible, orient narrow plots east and west, with the path of the sun, to give your small plot more hours of sunlight.

**KILLING THE FOLIAGE:** At a typical site, cutting down everything woody with a chainsaw or powered pole saw will still leave lots of thin undergrowth, weeds and grass. A backpack sprayer (about \$90) filled with a glyphosate solution will kill all that stuff. Spray everything, but use proper safety measures, especially wearing gloves, long sleeves, pants and a respiratory mask to prevent contact and inhalation.

**PLANT NOW. OR WAIT AND BURN:** If the brush and grass is thick, or there are lots of leaves on the ground, you will need to remove the residue so you can get your seeds all the way to dirt for good seed-to-soil contact. That's the key to making these plots produce well. The seeds must get to — or ideally slightly into — the dirt.

If the weeds and grass are light, with very little leaf cover, you can spread the seed, fertilizer, and pelletized or liquid lime right after you spray the herbicide. Then you can let subsequent rains drive the seed down to the ground as the weeds die over the top.

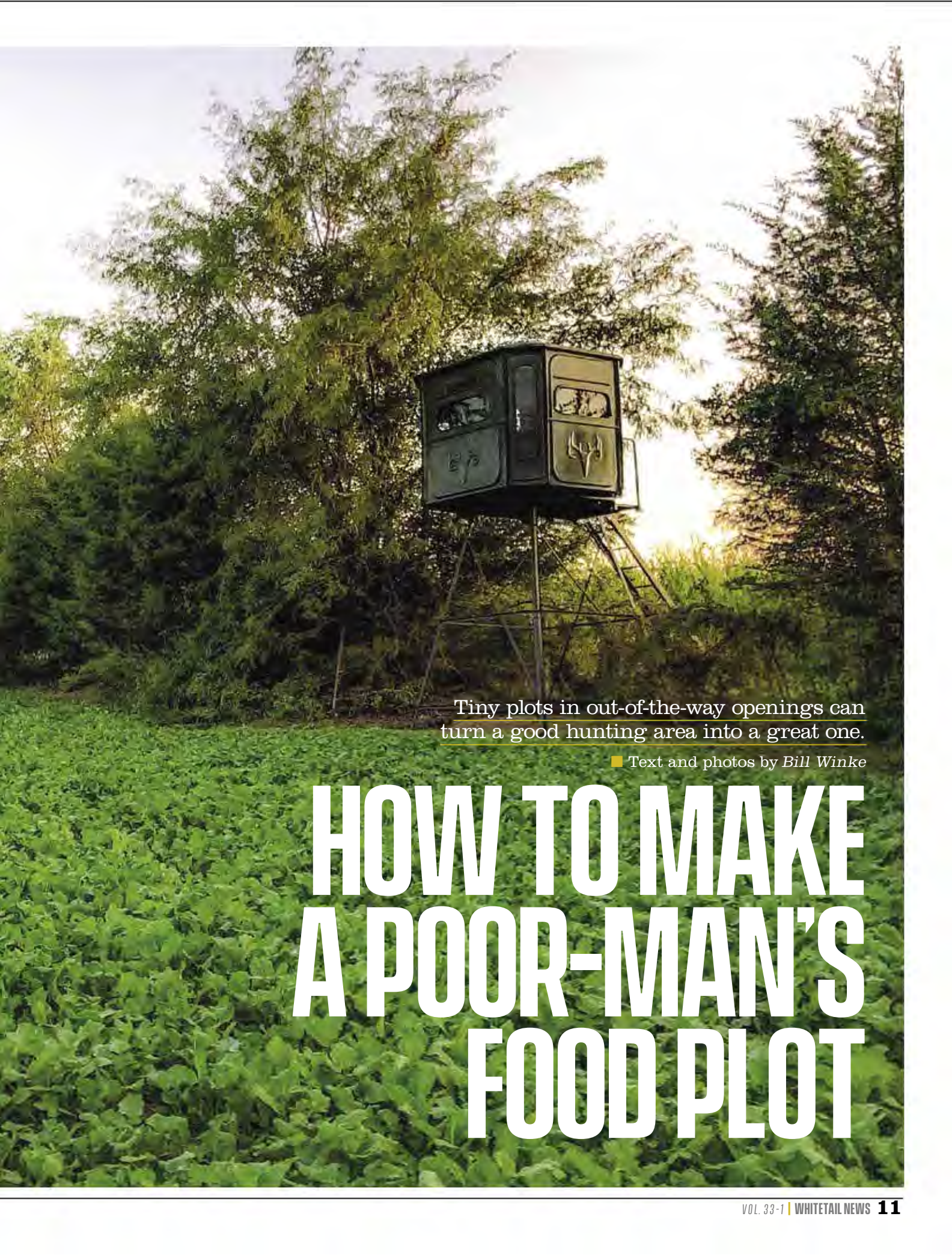
I've planted a few poor-man's plots this way, and I know many other folks who have, too. It works, but again, only if there aren't too many leaves. Seed-to-soil contact is the key.

**WAIT UNTIL EVERYTHING DIES AND BURN:** If the ground is covered with leaves, you need to burn them off. Wait two weeks after spraying, until everything is dead and dry, before you burn. In some areas, this small fire might require a permit. At the least, notify nearby residents to avoid undue panic.

Burn the plot into the wind. If this goes too slowly, you can always move a short distance into the plot and burn small stretches with the wind. If you fear that the fire might spread into the woods, rake or blow dry leaves away from the edge of the plot.

I've never had a poor-man's plot fire get away. More often, I've had a hard time just keeping them going. But discretion is the better part of valor when dealing





Tiny plots in out-of-the-way openings can turn a good hunting area into a great one.

■ Text and photos by *Bill Winke*

# HOW TO MAKE A POOR-MAN'S FOOD PLOT



with fire, so have someone there to help, and be careful.

**FERTILIZING AND LIMING:** A soil test is an important first step when planting any food plot. (You can buy prepaid soil test pouches online from Whitetail Institute). If you don't want to mess with a test, you can take the safe route and assume the soil needs help. You're probably right.

Generally, plots in or near timber are acidic from the decay of leaves that have fallen on the ground through the years. Acidic soil and most food plot seeds are not compatible. You will need to raise the pH before anything will grow well there.

If you're a real farmer, you know about spreading bulk lime on your fields to maintain proper pH (normally to get them into the 6.5 to 7.0 range). However, it can be inconvenient or perhaps impossible to find a good way to spread bulk lime on a small food plot in the woods.

Most of the plots I've made in the timber had a pH of roughly 5.5. That's too low for clover and brassica blends. Instead of trying to get a bulk spreader to those locations, buy 300 pounds of pel-

letized lime (per ¼ acre) at a farm store, lawn and garden store, or farm co-op. A walk-behind lime spreader provides a good way to spread it and is a good investment, but you can also use an over-the-shoulder spreader — if your budget requires — or an ATV spreader if you want to move past the poor-man's plot definition.

A liquid calcium remedy, such as Whitetail Institute's Impact, is another good option. This is a portable concentrated formulation that will improve pH immediately. Though rated for ½ acre, I would put two jugs per ¼ acre when planting areas that have been covered by leaves in the past. Again, these areas tend to be very acidic.

Imperial Whitetail Clover is a good first seeding for reasons I will cover in a bit. Clover likes phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) fertilizer. These are central ingredients of the normal fertilizer blends. The third ingredient is nitrogen (N), which clover doesn't require to grow well. Fertilizers are listed by those three ingredients: N-P-K. For example, 19-19-19 contains 19 percent by weight of active

ingredients in each of these categories.

To keep it simple, tell the person you buy the fertilizer from that you want roughly 75 to 100 pounds per acre of actual P and K for your plot. If they don't know what that means or give you a blank stare, don't trust them to get it right. Just buy 150 pounds of Triple 13 for the per-quarter-acre of plot size, or 100 pounds of Triple 19 per quarter-acre — if they have that blend. The nitrogen in those blends is not needed for clover and is basically wasted money, but it might be difficult to buy bagged fertilizer that doesn't contain nitrogen.


The best option is to go to a farm co-op, where the staff can likely give you exactly what you need for your plot. Again, you want roughly 75 to 100 pounds actual P and K per acre but measured for just ¼ or ½ acre, depending on your plot size.

A bag-style over-the-shoulder spreader will do the job, but the same walk-behind spreader or ATV spreader you used for the lime would make the job a lot easier.

It might be too wet to get your poor-man's plots planted in spring, or perhaps you cannot get to it in time. No worries.


## Set Your Sights on Brillion Farm Equipment

Brillion Farm Equipment offers a full-line of equipment suited for food plot enthusiasts. The Food Plot Seeder is an all-in-one solution for food plots handling seedbed preparation, seed metering and placement, as well as seedbed finishing. Brillion's ground driven Till 'N Seed' shreds existing food plots and plants numerous food plot seed mixtures. All products are backed by Brillion's years as an industry leader in the Seeder and Pulverizer industry!



**Till 'N Seed'  
Model BPSBA-8**

The Till 'N Seed is now available in 8' working widths in pull-type or three-point hitch configurations.



**Food Plot Seeder  
Model FPSB-6**



A LANDOLL PRODUCT





You can plant a brassica blend such as Winter-Greens or Imperial No Plow in late summer. As with clover, seed-to-soil contact is the key to good germination with brassicas, so if there's anything on top of the ground that would prevent the seeds from getting to the dirt, you need to rake, till or burn it off before you broadcast the seed.

**PLANTING:** I already recommended planting clover if you are planting in spring and a brassica blend if planting in summer.

Imperial Whitetail Clover is easy to establish, easy to maintain and will stand up to deer browsing pressure for several years. Moreover, deer like the white clover blend, and it's very good for them. The seeding will be a little thin during the establishment year, but it will be thick during the next two to three years. After the clover starts to thin out, it's generally wise to kill it, ideally till it under, and plant something else in its place for fall. Winter-Greens planted in late summer are a good choice.

An over-the-shoulder seed spreader is the best way to broadcast seeds. There are several good ones, including some that are very affordable. I recently started spending a bit more for better quality. It's worth it. I've been using the Hooyman model, and it has proven to be durable and accurate.

Set the spreader opening small so you don't overseed from the beginning. It's better to make two trips over the small plot than seed it too heavily and run out short of completing the job. With experience, you can figure out the settings you need to cover your plots in one pass and write that down for reference.

**IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER**  
**UP TO 35 PERCENT PROTEIN**

- Perennial; three- to five-year longevity.
- Available in 2 pounds (plants .25 acre), 4 pounds (plants .5 acre) and 18 pounds (plants 2.25 acres).
- Genetically selected specifically for deer. For soils that hold moisture.



**PRAY FOR RAIN:** All that remains is a few good rain showers to get the seeds embedded into the soil and germinated, and then at least one more rain to feed the young seedlings for the first critical month or two of growth.

**MAINTAINING THE PLOT:** Three steps will keep your Whitetail Clover plots growing well for years. You need to mow it each summer (early June is a good target time), and you need to keep fertilizing it each winter. The third maintenance requirement depends on the outcome of the planting. Sometimes, you must spray the

plot with a grass-selective herbicide, which kills just the grass and not the clover, such as Arrest Max from Whitetail Institute. If the plot is grassy, this is an important step.

In most cases, you can mow clover to remove broadleaf weeds, but in the worst cases, you can also spray for them. This is especially useful if you can't get a mower to the plot. In that case, use Slay herbicide from Whitetail Institute to clean up the broadleaf — not grass — weeds.

## CONCLUSION

You're done. If you add the cost of herbicide, fertilizer and seed, you will see that a small poor-man's plot is very reasonable. When established, these little plots will quickly become your favorite hunting locations. Making at least one poor-man's plot at your hunting area is well worth the investment.

