



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PENDLEY

# A LIFETIME OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Get young and beginning hunters involved in the process of food plotting. They'll enjoy helping out and will likely learn uncountable lessons along the way.

■ by Michael Pendley

**S**tarting young hunters with an understanding of land management and how it benefits the animals we hunt gives them a deeper appreciation of our role in the ecosystem and a greater knowledge of the game they chase.

I'm all for hunter recruitment. Teaching a new hunter about the sport we love might be the most important thing we can do to

keep the tradition alive for future generations. But too often, new hunter introductions start with a quick trip to the range followed by a morning or evening in a stand, blind or shooting house. Sure, a young or beginning hunter will have fun if the game animal steps out. They will get excited and have a hard time catching their breath, and will maybe make a successful shot and go home with a trophy

and meals for their family. But they won't understand what went into making that shot happen.

There's a better way. If you're reading this magazine, odds are good that you put a lot of time, energy and resources into managing and improving your hunting land for wildlife. You understand how food plots benefit deer year-round, how adequate cover protects turkey nests and poults, and how thick

secondary growth from selectively harvesting timber provides does with a safe spot to hide fawns from predators. Allowing young or beginning hunters to be a part of the land management process teaches them about the day-to-day lives of the animals that use the property and will give them a much greater understanding of what it takes for those animals to thrive. Consider these tips to get started.

## **SAFETY FIRST**

Young children and heavy equipment don't mix. While tractors, saws or other equipment are in use, keep children at a safe distance. Don't let them walk near moving equipment or working mowers. Make sure they use hearing, eye and skin protection during applicable situations.

If your new hunter is close to driving age, some time on a tractor seat is great training. Start on flat, open areas, and avoid steep hills and narrow turns. Start with simple tasks such as dragging a disk or drag until the driver is comfortable with the mechanics of operating the tractor.

Supply your help with gloves, protective eyewear, hearing protection if loud equipment is being used and anything else they need to be safe and productive.

## **PREP WORK**

A productive food plot always starts with good soil preparation. Even the youngest hunters can help with tasks such as rock and limb removal. If you have more than one youngster helping, make it a contest to see who can pick up and remove the most debris from the field.

Although heavy equipment might be off limits, hand tools such as rakes and leaf blowers are safe and easy to use. Use them to remove leaf clutter and expose bare ground for planting. If you're taking soil samples, let your young help collect the soil and explain what the test will reveal. Those are good lessons for a lifetime of planting.

## **SPREAD SOME SEED AND FERTILIZER**

Give youngsters a brief lesson on why you're using specific fertilizer blends

and how the soil test they helped with earlier guides the fertilizer choice.

After the soil prep is finished, your plot is ready for seed. Push-type, hand-held or bag-style spreaders are perfect for young food plotters. Even if you do the bulk of the plot with a tractor- or ATV-mounted spreader or no-till drill, there always seem to be small corners or narrow strips that are easier to do by hand.

## **PUT IN A NO-PLOW PLOT**

One of the best ways to get a young hunter involved in food plotting is to teach them how to put in a no-plow plot with a seed blend such as Imperial Whitetail No-Plow or small-seeded brassicas such as Tall Tine Tubers or Imperial Winter-Greens.

Perfect spots for No-Plow plots include logging roads or timber openings that allow sunlight to reach the ground. Find a spot near a thick bedding area or between bedding areas and larger food plots that can serve as a staging area for deer as they make their way to and from the bedding and feeding areas. These little spots can be perfect setups for young hunters, because they are often small, limiting shot distance, and deer use them during daylight more regularly than large plots or crop fields.

To make the perfect food plot, remove existing vegetation by hand or through two or three sprayings of glyphosate. Next, rake or use a leaf blower to expose bare soil. One of the best things about seed blends such as No Plow is you don't have to work the soil deeply. A few young hunters with rakes can scratch out a nice-sized food plot in no time.

After the soil is roughed up, spread the seed blend with a small hand or bag spreader, which is easy for even the youngest food plotters. Follow up with the fertilizer blend. Timing your seed just ahead of a good rain will help ensure good seed-to-soil contact.

## **MAKE IT A YEAR-ROUND EXPERIENCE**

We know that land management isn't just food plots, and new hunters can stay involved with many other aspects throughout the year.

Starting in early spring, shed hunting is a fun way to take inventory of bucks that made it through winter on your hunting land. Bedding areas, fence crossings and the edges of food plots and fields are perfect areas to search for sheds. Spending time in thick bedding areas that might have been off limits during the hunting season can teach new hunters even more about deer behavior. Trails and bedding areas are usually easy to find and see that time of year.

Early spring is also a good time to install and maintain mineral licks with products such as Imperial Whitetail 30-06 Mineral or 30-06 Plus Protein. To create a new mineral lick, use a rake or a shovel to expose bare ground near a well-used trail. Dig a shallow depression and add the correct amount of mineral blend. Use a rake to stir the mineral into the soil.

Running trail cameras is a year-round experience that young hunters love. Watching deer from early-spring food plots and mineral licks is a great way for new hunters to get familiar with the bucks in an area and also helps them recognize immature versus mature bucks while they're hunting.

As the season nears, get new hunters to help with projects such as hanging stands, building shooting houses, cutting shooting lanes and clearing paths to allow quiet entry and exit from stand locations. Make sure everyone sprays down with tick repellant to prevent bites and possible illness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Deer hunting is more than pulling the trigger. Getting young and new hunters involved early with the work and preparation that goes into a quality deer herd will teach them more about the game they pursue than countless hours in a deer stand. Knowing how much work goes into land management will make it even more special when that mature buck finally steps into the food plot they helped build and maintain.

