



# START SMALL, GROW BIG

The author began with a tiny plot but has increased his efforts to a far grander scale.

Using his lessons, you can achieve similar success.

■ by *Gerald Almy*







**W**hen I started food plotting, the industry was just getting revved up with Ray Scott's introduction of Imperial Whitetail Clover — the first forage designed to attract and nourish deer. I was a fanatical deer hunter. I liked to do habitat projects for wildlife, especially whitetails. And I made my living as an outdoor writer.

Getting into food plots seemed a natural development that would blend those. However, as a free-lancer in the early stage of my career, I had little spare cash and, more important, little land to plant in food plots. In fact, I owned just a little more than an acre.

Never mind that. I was going to give food plotting a try.

The acre-sized plot where I lived in a small cedar cabin was tucked at the end of a private dirt road, in good deer territory in western Virginia. In fact, Shenandoah County had produced a previous state-record 188 net typical. Genetics like that and the isolation of my land were pluses I hoped might compensate for the tract's small size.

Using a garden tiller and hand-crank seed spreader, I got started. Like many first-time food plotters with modest income, I skimped on seed at first, trying generic wheat, rye and



**IMPERIAL WHITETAIL  
TALL TINE TUBERS**

- Substantial tonnage for late-season plots.
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- Selected for its attractiveness to whitetails, this exclusive turnip variety is only available in Imperial Whitetail products. Extremely cold tolerant. Establishes early, and when the foliage is eaten, the larger tubers will provide an additional food source for late winter.



clovers. Those efforts attracted a few does and an occasional spike or fork-horn.

Eventually, though, I tuned in to what Whitetail Institute was doing and began planting Imperial Whitetail Clover. In fact, I wrote Scott as a mostly unknown outdoor writer and still cherish the friendly, encouraging letter he wrote back.

My tilling wasn't deep, my weed control was poor, and the acre of ground was just a place deer passed through in their travels to larger farms nearby, but that Imperial Whitetail Clover patch eventually attracted several 2-year-old bucks that stopped to munch on the tender, high-protein plants. Even one 3-year-old visited the plot — a deer I proudly took as my biggest whitetail ever at the time.

**FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS**

That wasn't bad for a 1-acre plot and a budding food-plotter. But just as I hoped my career would grow and expand from local newspapers and regional magazines to bigger markets such as Field & Stream and Sports Afield, I knew my life as a food plotter would grow and expand, too. I was determined that I would own more land, plant more and larger plots, experiment with diverse forages,

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and create the cover, water sources and bedding sites to make deer feel at home.

That initial site expanded when the elderly man who owned the adjoining 3 acres sold it to me for a bargain. Four acres offered a better opportunity to grow and experiment with new forages from Whitetail Institute. As more article sales and checks permitted, I soon bought an even larger property. Later in my career, I purchased another larger tract in another state to feed my desire to grow food plots.

Through the years, I've owned more than 250 total acres in several states at various times. And every plot planted on those tillable acres was a rewarding learning experience. Now, as I've settled down on the opposite side of the Shenandoah Valley across from where I started almost 40 years ago, I have deer feeding in three food plots visible from my office and living room windows every evening. Other areas are monitored with trail cameras.

That progression and my growth as a food plotter and writer gave me the idea for this article: Start small, grow big.

You don't need a large property to get started and learn about food plotting. Even on



### IMPERIAL WHITETAIL WINTER-GREENS

- Valuable nutrient source for winter.
- Available in 3 pounds (plants .5 acre) and 12 pounds (plants 2 acres).
- An annual brassica mix designed as a late-season hunting food source. Contains the extremely palatable proprietary WINA 210k Kale and Tall Tine Tubers. Stands tall through cold winter temperatures and snow.
- A lush, highly attractive, tall-growing brassica.



small tracts, such as the acre with which I started, you will improve the health of deer. In fact, you don't even have to own land if you have a relative or friend who will let you improve their property with plots or can lease a tract where you can plant wildlife forage.

Whether leased or owned, you don't need an expansive acreage. Start small. Then gradually, as time and money allow, grow big.

That's what I did, and it's been a formula that has worked, producing bucks into the 140 class at times. As your finances improve with raises and better jobs, you can expand your property or purchase a larger tract. Heck, I've been in the low-income level all my life but have owned and grown plots at the aforementioned acreages without sacrificing my family's needs.

### SMART SELECTIONS

It's important to choose the right forages when you start on a small piece of land. Some blends from Whitetail Institute are particularly good for smaller acreages or situations in which tractors and top-of-the-line implements aren't available. Focus on those. Then, as you grow into larger properties and more fertile soils, you can expand into more



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■ Wait until you've developed your skills a bit and have larger fields before turning to products such as PowerPlant, which the author is shown with here.

challenging forages, such as PowerPlant. Here is a look at some of the earliest Whitetail

Institute offerings I used and more recent offerings that can help newcomers or folks with small tracts. These choices will also depend on factors such as soil quality, the amount of sunlight a plot receives and whether you can get a tractor to the site.

I was fortunate when I began food plotting on my small acreage, as the land was mostly open, and I could get my “power equipment” (a garden tiller) there to work the ground. The soil was also of decent quality and received more than six hours of sunlight daily. That made Imperial Whitetail Clover a good, natural choice. If you have a similar setup, it's difficult to beat the No. 1 food plot seed in the country. You might not get the best clover plot if your equipment is minimal for tilling and weed control, but the plot will still attract and benefit deer. Then, when you get better tools for working the ground and maintaining the plot, and more income lets buy more land and build larger plots, you will find out how miraculous this forage is.

For areas where soil is significantly drier, Fusion is a great alternative to Imperial Whitetail Clover. It features the same proprietary clovers but also includes a special chicory developed by Whitetail Institute to withstand drought and summer heat and be particularly tender and palatable to deer. This plant comes on strong when clover might not thrive because of a lack of rain. The clover won't die. It will come back stronger in fall when rains and cool-

er temps arrive. Meanwhile, the chicory will keep the deer coming to the plot and take

pressure off the clover.

If your land is more shaded and perhaps just a clearing in the woods that only receives a modest amount of sunlight, Whitetail Institute offers No-Plow, Bow Stand and Secret Spot, which are blends of various forages deer find attractive. Further, they don't require you to work the soil extensively beyond perhaps raking it up to loosen the first inch or two of dirt. These plots will also thrive with minimal sunlight (three hours or more).

If you're fortunate to have land that's a bit higher in quality than a typical woods plot, and it receives six or more hours of sunlight per day, Ravish Radish, Tall Tine Tubers and Winter-Greens are top choices to accompany an Imperial Whitetail Clover or Fusion plot. Ravish is more recent introduction, but Tall Tine Tubers and Winter-Greens were important forages during some of my earliest years of planting.

I will never forget the first time I planted Tall Tine Tubers. The deer didn't care for it much right away. That's common in some regions but not in others. But within weeks, the deer on my land changed their minds, as they typically do after they taste this new forage. When I came home from a brief out-of-state hunt, the plot — which deer had barely nibbled on before I left — was almost obliterated. It looked like a bomb had exploded. Leaves were chewed to the ground.

Later, I incorporated Winter-Greens, a

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mixture of turnips, kale and other brassicas, and almost all exclusive Whitetail Institute products, into my small-scale food plotting. Planted in late summer to early fall, these forages emerge quickly. And when the deer get a taste for them, they'll flock to your plots within days after the first seedlings emerge. These forages are attractive, high in protein and highly palatable to deer. They also help the soil by reducing weeds and breaking up compacted dirt with their long taproots.

For locations with ample sunlight but low-quality soil or minimal rainfall, Whitetail Extreme and Edge are great products. Extreme contains the proprietary forb Persist and WINA 100 chicory and offers protein levels up to 44 percent. Edge includes a sainfoin deer love, as well as Persist, chicory and a grazing alfalfa. The mixtures can last up to five years.

Destination is a newer product that's perfect for an all-in-one fall offering on better-quality soils. It includes a blend of five plants, four of which are exclusive to the Whitetail Institute, to attract deer from early fall through winter. Early attraction comes from WINA 204 Pea,

Alex Berseem Clover and Whitetail Oats. WINA 210 Kale and WINA 412 Radish yield tons of forage during the late season and protrude above snow, attracting and nourishing deer in the heart of winter.

When your land increases to the point you have one or more fields of 2-plus acres that you can devote to one plot, it's time to incorporate PowerPlant into your forage program. This is the stage where you have grown big as a food plotter. Several years after I began growing plots, I took the plunge into growing this blend of warm-season annuals, which is planted in spring. I tried it earlier than I should have, when I had a little less than an acre to devote to it. And the deer taught me a good lesson. Warm-season annuals are highly palatable, and PowerPlant's ingredients are so attractive that hungry white-tails can quickly demolish them on small parcels.

PowerPlant's design reduces that possibility. Sunflowers and sunn hemp act as nurse crops and protect the forage soybeans and peas to some extent by absorbing early feeding pressure. But you still need at least 2 or more acres for a really

successful planting of this forage mix.

After I owned enough land to devote 4 or 5 acres to PowerPlant at one site, it was amazing how much forage grew and how much deer loved it. They liked it so much many actually bedded down in it because it grows so thick and offers security cover as well as food during a period when many native plants have declined from their spring peaks.

### A LIFETIME OF LESSONS

As a devoted food plotter and outdoor writer, I try every new product Whitetail Institute introduces. I even experiment with products from a few of their competitors, just to see what's available in the field. But the products highlighted here have been my favorite go-to forages. That's true for the early years when I was eking out a tiny plot on a few acres to the 100-acre-plus tracts I've been fortunate to own at various times in Virginia and Texas.

Start small, grow big.



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