

A photograph of a lush green field of radishes in the foreground. In the background, there is a camouflaged deer stand or blind, partially covered with a dark tarp, situated among trees. The scene is set in a wooded area with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

*This member of the mustard family is good for the soil and environment,
and highly praised by agronomists. And it attracts loads of deer.*

■ by Gerald Almy

THE MANY BENEFITS OF RADISHES



I've long been a fan of brassica forages for deer, such as Winter Greens and Tall Tine Tubers, so I was particularly excited when Whitetail Institute introduced its exclusive radish variety — WINA 412 — a few years ago. It's a critical component in the new annual blend Ravish Radish. I had tried a few generic radishes and found that deer were attracted to them, but I was anxious to plant this new variety, the only radish created to appeal to and nourish white-tailed deer.

The results were impressive, as they have been with every Whitetail Institute product I've tested. Even before bow season opened, deer were flocking to my three test sites. After passing several bucks early in the archery season, I eased into a stand near one of the plots during midafternoon on the opening day of muzzleloader season. By sunset, I'd seen four bucks and squeezed the trigger on a heavy 9-pointer. The buck hunched and ran at the conical bullet's impact, and I heard him fall down a small embankment into a creek bottom. I was definitely a believer in Ravish Radish.

When you first plant some types of brassicas, whitetails might ignore them until a frost or several cold nights convert the starches in the plants into sugars. But after deer learn about those plants, they often begin eating them before freezing temperatures arrive. In fact, they'll start munching on them almost as soon as they emerge from the soil in late summer and early fall.

That learning curve for deer to eat new food doesn't seem to hold true for radishes, or at least the special radishes in Whitetail Institute's Ravish Radish blend. All of my test sites were hammered from the time the plants were just a few weeks old and measured only a few inches tall. There was not any waiting period for frosts to sweeten the plants and make them more attractive.

Most food plot offerings have an optimum time for planting. For Ravish Radish and the company's other brassica blends, such as Winter Greens and Tall Tine Tubers, that's mainly July through September, depending on your location. You can plant them in July in far Northern states and Canada. In middle and Southern states, it's best to wait until August or even September. The planting dates for each geographic location are included on the bag and whitetailinstitute.com. Within a week after seeding, you'll see plants emerging, and days after that, deer will start feeding on the tender green foliage.

Radishes are part of the mustard family. They are exceptionally popular among wildlife managers because they are simple to grow and offer high protein levels, and deer feed on them eagerly. But those plants also have other benefits. They are good for the soil, good for the environment and are highly praised by agronomists.

RADISH BENEFITS

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, "Radishes have a number of beneficial attributes, including rapid fall growth, high biomass production, a well-developed taproot, excellent nutrient scavenging ability, competitiveness with other plants and special pest resistance capabilities."

They offer deer forage high in vitamin C, digestible fiber and selenium. Protein levels can exceed 30 to 35 percent. Each acre of Ravish Radish grown can produce more than 4 tons of succulent green forage that's highly digestible, so animals use more of it, and it has more benefits than many other annuals.

LONG SEASON OF PRODUCTIVITY

Although the radishes in Ravish Radish will attract deer immediately, they are even more attractive

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“RADISHES ALSO PROVIDE OTHER BENEFITS FOR THE LAND AND ENVIRONMENT.”

when cold weather and frosts increase the sugar content of the plants. Later in winter, after deer have eaten down most of the green tops, they will continue to feed in radish plots, switching to the large tubers.

How hard deer hit a Ravish Radish plot will depend to some extent on what other foods are available and their stage of palatability or attractiveness. If your Imperial Whitetail Clover or Fusion plots are holding up well, deer might continue to focus on that forage instead of the radishes when they first emerge. Perhaps deer sense that those big-leafed annuals will be taller and sweeter later in fall. But if your clover is struggling a bit from drought or you don't have enough other summer crops, such as Power Plant, available, deer will turn readily to the young radish plants in August and September, well before the first frosts.

When the radish leaves have been eaten down, deer will feast on the large root in the ground. Digging them up with their hoofs, they'll dine on tubers during winter, when other foods are scarce, providing crucial energy during a difficult time.

To a point, radish leaves will also grow back after deer munch them down. The best strategy, however, is to plant enough acreage so deer can't mow down the entire plot. The goal is to have them eat some plants to the ground but have enough others available that they don't obliterate the plot.

BUY THE BEST

You can buy generic radishes. But why would you want to save a few dollars on seed and sacrifice the chance to grow the best forage possible to attract deer?

Ravish Radish contains the Whitetail Institute's proprietary WINA 412 Radish, and it's only found in their product. These radishes were developed through years of painstaking experimentation and are only marginally more expensive than the cheapest bargain-basement seeds. The plants were developed to fit the nutritional needs and taste buds of deer and grow taller, with more tender leaves than cheap generic varieties. They were also tested on wild deer throughout all regions.

TIMING

Timing is an important topic when planting radishes. Perhaps more than any other type of food plot forage, radishes and other brassicas need to be planted during a specific time frame. This window of opportunity for the best results ranges from July to Sep-

tember, depending on your geographic location.

Plant radishes too early and they will look good for a while, but the summer heat and long hours of daylight will often make the crops mature and flower or simply wilt and dry out from the heat and lack of rain. Take it from someone who tried this experiment and paid the price; I basically wasted a crop that withered before deer became seriously interested in it, because they had plenty of clover, chicory and Power Plant available. Don't make my mistake.

On the other hand, don't wait too long. If you plant too late, the plants won't have sufficient time to become large and offer the tremendous amount of forage they can produce. This is the lesser mistake, as the plants will still grow and attract deer. But do you want 4-inch leaves or leaves longer than a foot? I know which I prefer.

The researchers at Whitetail Institute carefully test various planting dates and recommend specific ones for each state. In some cases, they even break that down further depending on where you live, as climate can vary from region to region.

Follow the guidelines, and plant inside the window of dates. You won't regret it.

PLANTING AND MANAGING RADISHES

The first step, as with any food plot planting, is to do a soil test and apply fertilizer as needed. Also add lime if required to bring the pH up to at least 6.0. Kill existing vegetation with glyphosate, and then till or disk the ground repeatedly until you get a firm, smooth seedbed. Cultipack or use a weighted fence-type drag to smooth the seedbed.

Broadcast the seeds, and cultipack again, or simply spread the seeds and leave them alone if you used a drag to smooth the plot. The seeds are tiny, so barely cover them with 1/8 to 1/4 inch of soil. They'll sprout within days. If rain is predicted, you can simply spread them on top and get good germination. After the plants have reached 4 to 8 inches tall, add about 80 to 100 pounds of nitrogen fertilizer, such as 34-0-0, 43-0-0 or a similar mix per acre to enhance growth and tonnage of forage production.

MIXTURES

You can also mix Ravish Radish with other types of plants, such as oats, peas or annual clovers, and get a terrific food plot. Ravish Radish can also be used as a topper to increase the appeal of an existing plot by adding variety and more additional tonnage of forage.



IMPERIAL WHITETAIL

RAVISH RADISH

- Outstanding early-fall through late-winter attraction.
- Available in 2.5 pounds (plants .25 acre).
- Contains WINA 412 radish.
- Fast germination and emergence, and quick development.
- Improves overall soil structure.



ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Besides providing high-quality nutrition for deer, radishes have other benefits for the land and environment. One is the ability to aerate the ground and improve the soil, making it better for future plantings. Many plots suffer from hard, compacted soil. Plant roots can't penetrate deeply enough to obtain sufficient moisture and nutrients to thrive. They are basically living off the first few inches of ground and struggling to spread their roots through the extremely hard dirt below that.

Planting Ravish Radish can dramatically improve that. These plants grow a large, deep taproot that will break up or drill through that hardpan and aerate the soil when the root decays. This allows moisture to penetrate and the roots of future crops to use nutrients farther down in the soil. It also decreases rain runoff and improves soil drainage.

Another feature of radishes is the ability to scavenge nutrients from deep in the soil and leave them at higher, more accessible levels for future crops, reducing fertilizer costs. When the tap root decays in spring, it also adds valuable organic matter to the soil.

According to the USDA, "Radishes provide excellent nitrogen scavenging potential, and the tap roots are excellent at penetrating tillage pans and dense soil layers. An acre of radishes can scavenge 40 pounds or more of residual nitrogen from the soil. The roots help to penetrate and sustain healthy organisms to restore soil structure."

Ravish Radish offers another benefit for food plotters: weed control. These plants grow so fast with such a large leaf canopy and deep roots that they choke out most unwanted weeds and grasses in a plot, preparing it for a future planting of a different crop the next year. A Michigan study showed that growing radishes reduced weeds by 4,000 pounds per acre compared to fields left fallow.

The USDA also points to another biological benefit of radishes. "An additional special feature of radishes and other brassicas is that they produce compounds called glucosinolates, which are toxic to soil-borne pests and pathogens. Bio-toxins produced by brassicas when they decompose are toxic against many pests including insects, nematodes and weeds."

Radishes are a great high-protein food source, a terrific soil enhancer, a valuable tool for combating weeds and controlling harmful pests. Those qualities make radishes one of the best plants you can turn to for attracting deer and nourishing them through fall and winter.

I know I'll be putting in several plots of Ravish Radish this year, and hopefully a buck that will top that heavy 9-pointer will decide to pay those plots a visit.

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