

PLANT A
MICRO PLOT



Don't own hundreds of acres? No sweat. Some handiwork and several Whitetail Institute products can yield great bowhunting on small properties.

■ by *Darron McDougal*

What working-class deer hunter hasn't dreamt of owning hundreds of acres for hunting? You know, the type of property no one else hunts and that has all the necessities plus multiple openings ideal for planting large food plots.

We long to ride that big green tractor and let fancy implements do the work behind us, and then watch the seeds become luscious deer forage and hunt for a 180-inch buck nicknamed "Skyscraper," whose sheds we found the previous spring.

Wake up. Most average bowhunters, regardless of how hard we work, aren't fortunate enough to get keys to the gate of our own whitetail hunting paradises. That's reality. Conversely, many bowhunters who live in the country have a home on just a few acres. And although many experts who manage large properties would suggest that you're wasting your time trying to hunt deer on your small property, don't be fooled. You don't need hundreds of acres or expensive equipment to make productive food plots where you can hunt deer.

During the past several years, many world-class bucks have been taken on small suburban acreages, and it's because forward-thinking folks see big potential in small places. And if you live at a small acreage where bowhunting is legal, it's time to roll up your sleeves and consider the possibilities outside your back door.

PROPERTY SIZE

Many people view small acreages negatively because most small properties don't hold deer.

"Are you going to hold deer on your small acreage?" said deer nutrition expert Matt Harper. "No. But you'll be able to attract deer to your property and hunt them."

How small is too small? That depends. At least 10 acres is ideal, but your prop-

erty could be just an acre. Regardless, you must understand that even a fatally shot deer might hop onto another property. Connect with neighboring landowners, and discuss your plans. If you obtain permission and their blessing to trail a deer if one leaves your property, you can plant a plot on a 1/2-acre parcel without concern of losing a deer. The smaller the property, the more important it becomes to have trailing permission from surrounding neighbors.

PLOT SIZE, SHAPE AND LOCATION

Many might ask, "How big should I make the plot?" First, consider possible planting sites. Existing openings are ideal, especially if you have little equipment.

"The plot size doesn't really matter other than consumption rate," Harper said. "Overbrowsing is the concern. The reality is that, in this context, you have only a small amount of acreage to work with. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's like a small but reputable barbecue joint. It's the best barbecue joint in town, and they only have four tables in there. Still, everyone flocks to it because it has really good food. The same concept applies to your small food plots. If you provide a food source that's very attractive to the deer, they'll come to it."

"To temper the overbrowsing concern, make the plot as big as you can manage with the equipment you have. Also, make sure that your soil is in good condition. I also like to choose a seed that grows vigorously and that has good regrowth after foraging. We'll talk more about that later."

Harper also noted that shape and design is important.

"When folks ask me how long to make a plot, I ask them how far they're able to shoot their bow," he said. "I try to incorporate some feature that will pinch deer through an area and then place my stand there. An example is a bend in the plot

PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

that the deer have to walk around to get to the other end. If 30 yards is your maximum range, make that bend no wider than 30 yards across.”

Whitetail Institute’s Brandon Self suggested that if you have any latitude on plot location, you should place it relative to a destination farm field and an adjacent bedding area. This can be difficult to navigate, as most small-property owners don’t have access to neighboring properties. Basically, you can’t tromp around in spring to determine where deer are bedding and where their destination food source is located. That’s where the onX Hunt app is highly beneficial. It will help you predict where bedding areas and food sources are via satellite view. Again, though, if you have only several acres, your locations are likely limited, and you’ll have to do the best you can with what’s available.

TOOLS AND SITE PREP

Most small-property owners have minimal tools for soil preparation and planting. This isn’t your cue to start pic-

OPTIMIZING YOUR MICRO PLOT

Improvements to deer habitat naturally improve hunting potential, so although a small micro plot is attractive to deer, why not make it more attractive? There are many ways to do this, but we’ll discuss three inexpensive and fairly simple ones.

1. WATER Besides food, deer also need water. If you don’t have water on or near your property, you can inexpensively add water to your plot with a hard-plastic kiddie pool. You could also get a watering trough at a feed-supply store. If your food plot is right out your back door, you could even fill it from your home’s outdoor water faucet.

2. EDGE COVER Obviously, stepping into an opening to feed makes deer feel vulnerable. That’s why they’re constantly scanning as they eat. Building or cultivating edge cover around the plot can add vital security. It’s also good cover during spring and summer when fawns are young. You can achieve edge cover by stacking treetops and brush around the edge, but don’t block entry and escape routes.

3. MINERALS (WHEN AND WHERE LEGAL) “A food plot usually covers the nutritional aspects of protein and energy, but deer can also benefit greatly from minerals and supplements,” Harper said. “In other words, it gives deer another reason to visit your small plot. For early spring, summer and early fall, Whitetail Institute’s 30-06 Mineral/Vitamin Supplement complements any food plot. As fall turns to winter, 30-06 Thrive or 30-06 Tall Tine are the ideal choice.”

Self agreed that minerals and supplements are a good add-on to a micro plot.

“Definitely add a mineral site if you can,” he said. “It will be very helpful to deer, especially if deer in your area are deficient in minerals.”



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ing a consumer-sized tractor or even a four-wheeler and tow-behind attachments. You might already have what you need in your garage or garden shed. A few of Whitetail Institute's seed offerings make planting as easy as seed-to-soil contact, and often, that can be achieved with a rake.

Depending on your property and plot location, other tools that might prove valuable include a chainsaw and weed-whacker, which will help you clear impediments. Also, a round of herbicide applied from a garden-sized pump sprayer can effectively kill weeds and other plant life. Work diligently to clear the ground as much as possible, and then let an appropriate Whitetail Institute product take root.

IDEAL PLANTINGS

As Harper mentioned, regrowth after foraging is a great seed attribute when planting a micro plot.

"Soybeans would be a poor choice," he said. "Good choices are Imperial White-tail Clover or Alfa-Rack Plus. These are actually stimulated and will thicken af-

ter browsing or mowing. But for the best results with these two products, you'll need a disk or tiller and drag implement."

If you don't own these items, Self suggested one of three annual plantings that require far less soil prep. And they also have great regrowth rates.

"The first two are Secret Spot and BowStand," he said. "Both are similar and will work in limited sunlight and with minimal ground preparation. They're ideal for tough-access spots or for folks with limited equipment or even just hand tools. Then we have No-Plow. It will grow nearly anywhere, but Secret Spot and Bow Stand are really tailored for small plots."

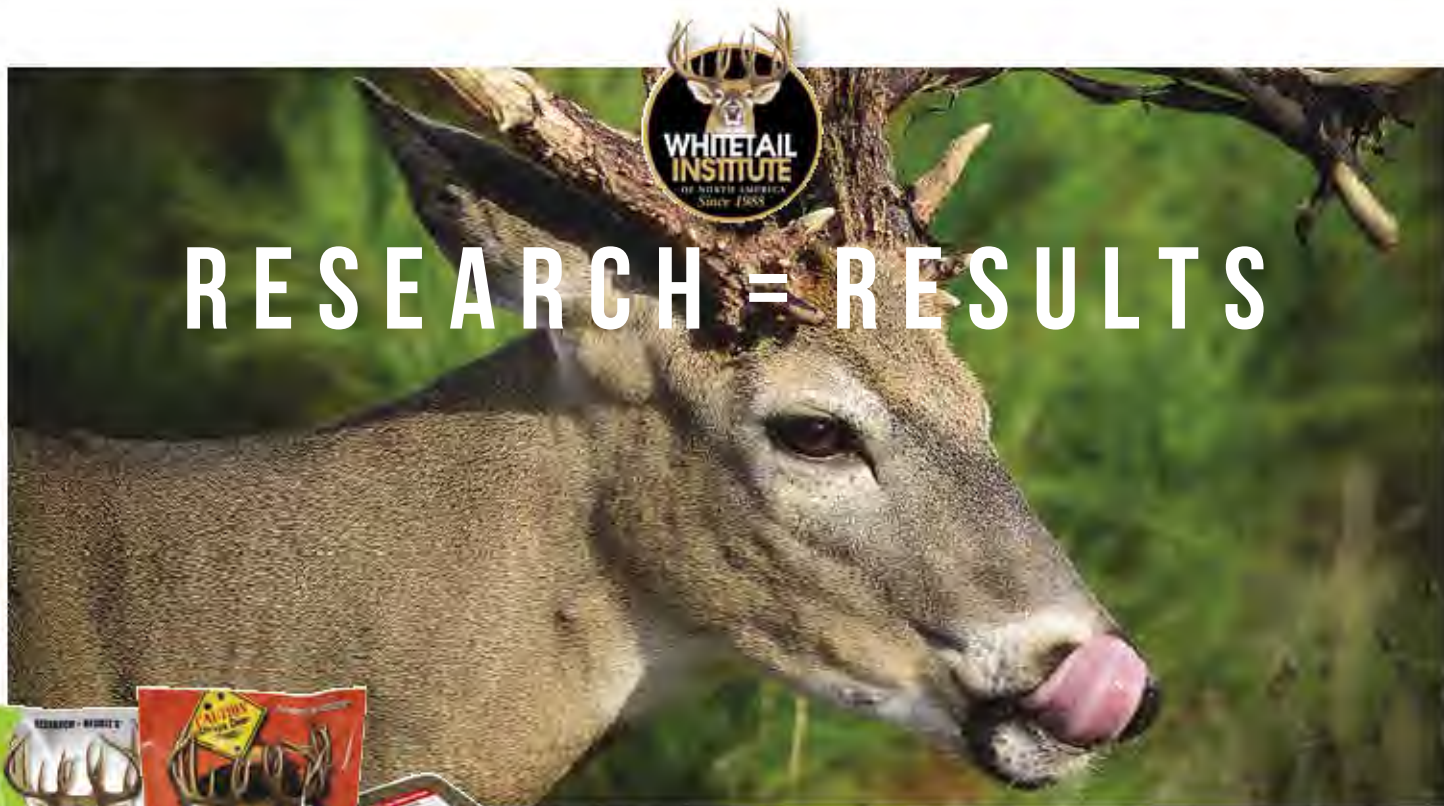
Although BowStand and Secret Spot will grow where other seeds struggle or fail, Self said some planning is involved to ensure a productive plot.

"We always recommend doing a soil test," he suggested. "These annuals are easier to grow than some perennial blends, but if you're able to soil test, do it. As far as ground preparation, the better seed-to-soil contact you achieve, the

greater your germination rate will be. You'll also need to fertilize and lime it. Our Secret Spot has a lime coating in the bag, which helps with pH. Fundamentally, though, the better you prepare the ground, the more productive your plot will be."

READY. SET. PLANT

You can daydream about owning hundreds of acres, which might not become reality in your lifetime, or you can consider more realistic options. If you own a small acreage where bowhunting is legal, look at the potential out your back door. You can make excuses not to improve your small property with a micro plot, or you can roll up your sleeves and plant one. Who knows? Maybe that 180-inch buck you've dreamt of hunting isn't as far away as you think.



WHITETAIL INSTITUTE ATTRACTANTS

Attractants contain multiple scent and flavor enhancers, including an ingredient that appeals to the sugar craving of deer delivering an unequaled attraction that can pull deer from surrounding properties and help hold them on your property. These attractants have been researched for unrivaled attraction their flavor enhancers and nose stimulating capabilities are what sets them a part.