

FOOD PLOT CLIFF NOTES

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As they say, spring has sprung. Snows and freezing temperatures are gone (at least for now), but good habitat managers are already thinking about providing resident wildlife with secure food and cover for the next harsh winter.

Great food plots start with good soil. Soil condition can easily be evaluated with an inexpensive home soil test to determine if acidity (pH) is a concern or if fertilizer (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) is needed. Hint: Food plots, like their commodity counterparts, typically need fertilizer to reach their full potential in growth and forage production as well as nutritional value for wildlife.

A good seed bed is essential, too. Generally, use a broad-spectrum herbicide to kill early weeds, remove the dead

vegetation (mow, burn), work/disk the ground, then pack to create a relatively firm seed bed. If weed pressure is high, wait for a second flush of growth, reapply herbicide then drill (for a single seed size) or broadcast (multiple species, followed by a drag) your seed mix. Some mixes would allow for some pre-emergent herbicides at this point too.

Weeds can be managed using a variety of herbicides as long as you know both your crop and your problem weeds. Remember, some annual weeds in your food plot are not a problem. Ragweed seed, for example, has a high protein content (25 percent) and is sought after by birds.

With the cliff notes on the "how to" questions completed, it's time to consider what a good food plot really should be.

HOW BIG? Four to five-acre blocks per 100 acres for big game,

½ to 1-acre blocks for small game every 15-20 acres.

WHAT TO PLANT? Diversity is good, whether within a single mix or between mixes. Have multiple high quality palatable foods throughout the year to reduce periods when food is limited and wildlife need is high. Diversity also ensures game will hang out on your property longer, and food won't be wiped out by one species early and unavailable to others later in winter. Don't forget perennial food plots (clovers) which can provide browse for big game and brood cover for upland birds. For true upland enthusiasts, consider high diversity annual brood cover like PF's Chick Magnet mix, which is equally focused on attracting insects for chicks as it is providing a seed source for food.

With fewer acres available for wildlife, be sure to make every acre count this season. 🦋