

Deer Food Plot System

Central Texas (20 – 28 inch rainfall zone)

A successful and year round system of food plots should include a combination of these three types of forage production:

- Perennial Food Plot
- Cool Season Annual Food Plot
- Warm Season Annual Food Plot

In most situations, managers should plan to have about **40 acres of food plots per 100 deer**. Size of individual plots is not as critical as total acreage of plots. In general, plot size of 10 – 50 acres is advisable. Small acreage plantings may provide enough green forage to attract deer for hunting, but will probably not provide a significant amount of additional forage or nutrition. Pay attention to soil types. Choose the very best soils available. For annual plots that will be plowed and planted each year, avoid steep, rocky or very shallow soils. For perennial food plots, moderately steep, rocky, or shallow soils are OK. Old worn out cropland fields are not the best candidate for food plots. If old cropland fields are converted to food plots, fertility may need to be added for adequate production. Do not double crop food plots – i.e. do not try to grow a cool season crop and a warm season crop on the same field in the same year. There is not enough rainfall in this region for double cropping.

Perennial Food Plot

The beauty of the perennial forb mix is the dependability of these native forbs, once they are established. They are deep rooted, drought hardy and provide lots of forage. Establishment may be slow depending on rainfall and deer grazing. Some of these seeds are expensive to purchase initially, but the plants are long lived and will spread from their own seed production. Plant this mixture in the winter from December – February. It is preferable to plant when there is good subsurface moisture for a better likelihood of establishment. If there is no deep moisture, you are taking a greater risk of failure or slow establishment. Plant these seeds shallow, ¼ to ½ inch deep. Seed can be broadcast on to fresh seedbed and rolled or dragged to firm the seedbed. These plants can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions. A range of seeding rates are shown for price accommodation, but higher rates recommended if possible. This mix, when established will provide year round, 12 month quality forage for deer. Engelmann daisy is the critical component of providing winter and early spring grazing.

Engelmann daisy *	1 – 3 lb per acre	(cool season forage)
Bush sunflower *	.5 – 1 lb per acre	
Maximilian sunflower *	.25 - .75 lb per acre	
Illinois bundleflower *	1 – 3 lb per acre	
Bee wild bundleflower **	.5 – 1 lb per acre	(promising but unproven in region)
Alfalfa **	1 – 2 lb per acre	(3 – 5 year longevity)
Yellow sweet clover **	.25 lb per acre	(quick cover, short lived)
White sweet clover **	.25 lb per acre	(quick cover, short lived)
Armadillo bur clover **	.25 lb per acre	(quick cover, short lived, re-seeding)
Chicory **	.25 lb per acre	(unproven in region)

* Native perennial forbs. Most critical components of mix.

** These species are not native. They may or may not persist but will provide quick cover and good quality grazing for several years

Cool Season Annual Food Plot

Small grains (wheat and oats) are the most reliable and least expensive form of cool season deer forage. Small grains will generally provide good forage during late fall, winter and early spring but forage quality declines quickly after March. The addition of legumes and/or turnips will add another 45 to 60 days of quality forage into late spring. Plant the cool season mix in early September if possible, but not later than early October. Plant the larger seeds about 1 inch deep with drill if possible. Plant the smaller seeds shallow ($\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep) usually broadcast/drag.

Wheat	15 lb per acre	(large seed, plant deep)
Oats	15 lb per acre	(large seed, plant deep)
White sweet clover	.5 lb per acre	(small seed, plant shallow)
Yellow sweet clover	.5 lb per acre	(small seed, plant shallow)
Armadillo bur clover	.5 lb per acre	(small seed, plant shallow)
Hairy vetch	3 lb per acre	(large seed, plant deep)
Austrian winterpea	3 lb per acre	(large seed, plant deep)
Turnips	.5 lb per acre	(small seed, plant shallow)

After forages have died in summer, do not let fields get excessively weedy. Use tillage or herbicides to prevent excessive weed infestations. This will help preserve moisture for next years crop.

Warm Season Annual Food Plot

Summer legumes such as lablab or cowpeas are the best choice for summer nutrition. Summer is the time of greatest forage demand for deer. Bucks are growing antlers; does are producing milk; and fawns are growing rapidly. The best forage to provide high production and good quality is lablab, a tropical legume. It will generally live through the hot dry part of mid summer and begin to produce a second crop of forage in September and October. Cowpeas also have good forage quality, but will often die in midsummer. For best success with lablab, or cowpeas, plant in row and cultivate for weeds between the rows. Keep field free of weeds during winter and early spring fallow period to bank moisture.

Lablab	10 – 15 lb per acre
or	
Cowpeas	20 – 25 lb per acre

If lots of deer congregate on food plots when the plants are young, they will likely overgraze the plots and prevent establishment. The best way to prevent this is to install fencing to deter or prevent deer grazing until the plants are well established.