

## Wildlife Food Plots

The first most important step when preparing a food plot is to check:

**Soil Fertility** – You must know what the available nutrients are for your food plot. You can use commercial lab or contact county UF soils lab. When filling out your soil sample mark appropriate crop code.

Take composite sample- several representative sub samples taken throughout the plot with a non metal container to make a 2 cup composite sample.

Approximately 10 to 20 sub samples taken from the upper 6-8 inches to create a composite sample. Most Extension agents have soil probes you can borrow and also forms to send with sample to the University of Florida soils lab. Let sample air dry before packaging it for delivery.

pH- sampling needs to be taken every 3 years. Apply lime if pH is below 6. The rule of thumb is 1 ton per acre will raise pH 1 degree. However UF soil analysis will tell you how many pounds per acre to apply.

Must apply several months prior to planting your food plot. This gives lime time to neutralize the soils acidity. It is best to incorporate lime into soil with disking .

Pelleted lime is comprised of finely ground lime, therefore providing effective liming in a relatively short time.

Nitrogen may be needed depending on the type of forage you choose. Legumes do not need Nitrogen however other cool season grasses in your mixture will need the Nitrogen. Phosphorus and Potassium can be applied as recommended.

Follow Best Management Practices by putting two applications of fertilizer will help plants capture more fertilizer. It will also lessen the economic loss from leached fertilizer and reduce the potential for surface and groundwater nutrient loading

Organic Fertilizers may be used as well they will improve the soil quality by improving water holding capacity and nutrient retention. However concentration of nutrient's in organic fertilizers are often low. Therefore you may need up to 20 tons/acre to meet nutrient needs.

Wildlife (deer in particular) may have an aversion to the material until it degrades and becomes incorporated into the soil. These may protect against browsing pressure for a time allowing for better establishment. Maybe best to use on a small scale prior to using on a large acreage.

**Variety selection**

Use forages adapted to Florida's environment is the most important step in selecting forages. Don't be fooled by the magical mixtures that are sold. Most varieties you need can be bought from local seed dealers.

Use of forage blends, such as small grains and legumes will increase the longevity and stability of the plot. The mixture will also supply variety to suit multiple wildlife components.

Winter legumes do best on clay soils rather than deep upland sands or sandy flatwoods. White clover and ryegrass can be overseeded successfully on certain flatwood areas in northeast Florida. Make sure you have inoculation for legumes. You can buy it pre inoculated or buy and apply inoculants that are specific to each legume variety.

### **Legumes**

Alfalfa- buy low dormancy variety that is suited for Florida not a commercial blend that is mid to high dormancy. pH must be 6.5 to 7.0 Varieties: Florida 99 and Amerigraze 702

Arrowleaf Clover- Yuchi and Apache

Red Clover- Cherokee and Southern Belle developed in Florida

Crimson Clover- Least sensitive to soil pH

Vetch

White Clover

Winter Peas

### **Cool Season Grasses**

Oats- planted earlier than rye not as cold hardy as rye. Choose Florida recommended variety.

Rye- produces more forage than either oats or wheat. Wait until cool weather to plant because it is susceptible to disease during early fall.

Wheat- Excellent for wildlife.

Ryegrass- best suited for use on flatwoods soils or the heavier sandy loam soils in North West Florida.

Triticale- is a cross of wheat and rye it is very high quality and robust small grain. Seed may be scarce but suited very well to North Florida.

### **Brassica and Forage Chicory Crops**

Annual crops that are highly productive and digestible and can provide forage as soon as 40 days after seeding, depending on the species. Crude protein levels are high, varying

from 15 to 25 percent in the herbage and 8 to 15 percent in the roots depending on the level of nitrogen fertilization and weather conditions.

Kale

Rape

Turnip

Swede

Forage chicory

#### Sources

1. Mackowiak, C.L. Soil Fertility Management for Wildlife Food Plots.
2. Blount, A.R, Francis, D.L, Olson, S.M., Quesenberry, K.H., Mackowiak, C.L., Newman, Y.C., and Barnett, R.D. 2007 Wildlife Forages for North Florida- Part 1: Cool Season Food Plots.

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