

# PLANNING and planting

Courtesy of Steve Long of the Quality Deer Management Association

This is what a healthy food plot should look like. Deer were feeding on the plot when the picture was taken.

## *Prepare now for a better deer season in the fall*

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

After deer season ends, many people focus on fishing, turkey hunting or other activities. However, the best deer hunters usually prepare all year long for the next opening day.

Most sportsmen who hunt deer on private land in Alabama prepare food plots to keep whitetails in their area healthy. By the time deer season ends, deer as well as rabbits, turkeys and other animals thoroughly worked over those plots. The effort to bag that big-racked buck next fall begins now.

“Spring is the time to start thinking about the next deer season,” admonished Steve Long, the Quality Deer Management Association regional director over Alabama and Mississippi with his office in Tuskegee, Ala. “In much of Alabama, we did not have a very good acorn crop in 2018 so the food plots were hit really hard and stressed by February. As far as food goes, the most stressful months for deer in Alabama are January, February and March.”

Old food plots need reconditioning and replanting. Reconditioning usually begins with preparing the ground. First, disk it to break up the soil. Because of

the acidic soils common in Alabama pine forests, land managers might need to add lime and fertilizer. Fertilizer could also encourage native vegetation to grow this spring. That could also help sportsmen who hunt turkeys on their property.

“To perk up a food plot, I would add some ammonia nitrate in late February,” Long recommended. “In south Alabama, I’d add about 100 pounds per acre. That’s very strong fertilizer. People need to make sure it’s going to rain soon before putting out any ammonia nitrate. Hopefully, some clover will come up in the plot. Deer love clover. That also helps turkeys. Deer also like natural browse so it’s not a bad idea to add some fertilizer around the plot to encourage the growth of fescue, honeysuckle and other green plants.”

In the thick pine forests of southern Alabama, landowners might also consider selectively thinning some trees and conducting a prescribed burn between the end of deer season and the beginning of turkey season. Many landowners burn a third of their properties each year to enhance wildlife habitat. Across the South, some seeds can only sprout after a fire.



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